

Chapter 7: Building a Foundation

After Harry had passed the Pathfinder's mural test, the ancient Tauren led Sylina and Harry deeper into the mountain vastness.

Harry felt it could be called that, even if this particular pillar of stone was tiny in comparison to the mountains that encompassed the valley within which it stood. It was almost certain that this stone was originally solid granite throughout, and then had been hollowed out either magically or by hand. Yet from what Harry was seeing of the walls so far the outer shell of it was still granite, barely covered by a thin veneer of dirt, and would probably withstand any kind of purely physical assault.

Really, Harry was wondering how that had been done, and if it had anything to do with the fact that he might meet another demigod here. *I wasn't warned about that, but then again, perhaps Tyrande and Tyre didn't know? It would certainly make sense if the Unseen Path had such a powerful backer considering their mission.*

He shuddered a bit, glancing over his shoulder towards the mural he had been sucked into just as they rounded the corner, putting it out of sight. While Harry hadn't gotten much in the way of information about the overall war, the sheer aura of terror and raw hatred the enemy almost imprinted onto the world certainly came through, and if he was a local demigod, Harry would certainly have a vested interest in making certain that such things could find no purchase in his world.

For a time they walked through the stone tunnels in silence, and it took Harry a moment to realize the corridor had subtly shifted. Instead of going straight, it had curved so that they were moving around the outer edge of the stone shell of the lodge. They soon started to go upwards a little as well, although Harry wasn't the one to notice that. It fell to Quetzal to point it out, "I seem to be exerting myself overmuch for what should be a flat tunnel. Is this some kind of defensive measure? Rabbits and other prey utilize that sort of trick."

It was uncertain by his tone if the snake approved of that, but Vurg answered all the same, having had time during the intarcions around the mural to get used to the fact the snake could talk. "It is not the only one we use. Trueshot Lodge is a fortress as much as a place of organization and learning."

Then, like all good teachers, Pathfinder Farstride decided to make it a learning experience. "Tell me, what have you all notice beyond the rise in the tunnel?"

Harry thought about it, then shrugged. "I haven't noticed any magical traps or indeed any arcana usage beyond the murals in the entryway. I noticed the change in our direction, but that's about it."

The old Tauren hummed at that, and Harry sighed. "What did I miss? That's the tone that someone uses when they are disappointed with what they are hearing."

Sylina spoke up, her ears twitching in amusement. “I noticed at least three blinds, two hidden kill zones and ten traps that we bypassed by following in your footsteps, Master. This place is a fortress even if you can get past the outer defenses.”

“And the outer defenses are far more formidable than the lookout posts that you can make out from outside,” the Pathfinder said, nodding in approval at the young elves abilities to notice things. “Although there were twelve traps actually.” Then Vurg shook his head, a his feet shifting and his eyes moving away from them in a subtle gesture of a Tauren feeling guilt. “But please, Pathfinder. Not Master. We are not in a apprentice-master relationship.”

Sylina almost pouted at hearing she had missed several trap, looking behind her, cocking her head thoughtfully and wondering where she'd the last two traps, while Harry castigated himself for missing all of them. *Let that be a reminder to you, Harry. The rest of this world won't be as peaceful as Highmountain or Ashenvale, and while they might not use magic, that doesn't mean they can't come up with traps and tricks. A spear thrust to the side out of a hole you don't see can kill you just as easily as a Lightning Bolt you don't block.*

The Tauren gently pushed at Harry's shoulder with one large hand. “Do not take the fact you missed so much to heart, Harry the Human. This place was designed by a group of Tauren and Kaldorei, using principles of both, and they were all extremely paranoid. They might be different than those of your people. You will learn to spot such and more here. The Legion, and even many servants of the Fel, the Old Gods, use similar tricks in their fortifications.”

“That sounds like an excuse to me, elder,” Harry grumbled. “I could also say that I hadn't ever been in or fought through a place built as a fortress like this one. But that's no reason to not be observant of my surroundings.”

“And that attitude will propel you forward to learn more. Just as young Sylina's desire to see the world will do the same.” With that, Vurg turned and continued to lead the way forward.

Soon the tunnel turned once more, where a helpful Quetzal commented they were probably halfway around again from where they had entered the lodge. And here, the power of wind-based nature magic grew, stronger than ever. There was no obvious source for it, but Harry could feel it against his skin, causing him to breathe in deeply, humming in pleasure. Sylina, not having any talent for magic, didn't seem to notice, while the old Tauren, who could be a shaman or druid, Harry couldn't tell just by being around him, seemed to feel it. He stood a bit straighter, his grip on his staff tightened, and he led them forward, now moving deeper into the mountain.

Vurg seemed to take this as a cue to begin speaking, explaining, “The Unseen Path was not always as it is today, as I mentioned briefly earlier. Back during the time of the Kaldorei Empire, we were called the Watchful Eyes. We were investigators, trackers, scouts, serving both among the civilians and among the small, professional military the Kaldorei had at the height of their power under General Ravencrest. Although to call it such is a bit of a misnomer, as it was more a survey and wilderness control force. But I digress. By the time Azshara reached out to the Burning Legion in her hubris and desire for power, we had begun to investigate even members of her court, but too late to stop the fall.”

“There are few survivors among us from that time of peace, but there are many like Narvae who served in the war of the Ancients, and could tell you more about the shift from a peacetime force to what amounted to a branch of the quickly growing insurgency as they served with those who

were from that part. But those Kaldorei who survived the initial days of the war and joined Malfurion and Tyrande's rebellion and war against the Burning Legion abandoned that name in shame. We were remade during the war and we were under the auspices of Ohn'ara at the time. It was also at that point that we expanded, bringing in non-elves into our ranks for the first time. Many Tauren, Furbolgs, and even some of the sons of Cenarius joined."

"Huln Highmountain became our leader during the war, legends say that it was he who named us the Unseen Path, for that was what we were to our enemies. We still specialized in scouting, but we added infiltration to our skills, as well as field skills: hunting, silent killing, discovering the signs both visible and not of demonic presence or corruption, as well as more defensive skills such as misdirecting the enemy into traps or ambushes. Especially we learned the art of wards during this time, of using nature magic to combat demonic energy from Tortolla, Cenarius, and our ancient patron, Ohn'hara."

Harry might have imagined his eyes lighting up in delight at that, but the way both Quetzal and Sylina took one look at his face and backed away told him that while there might not be literal fire in his eyes, his face had certainly become somewhat scary in his version of Hermione's knowledge lust. "Tell me more..." he purred.

"Even if you use your people's equivalent of bedroom eyes, that would be a no," Vurg answered dryly, causing Harry to balk, and his companions to both snicker in their own languages. The Kaldorei snicker was pretty much the equivalent of a human's but their ears swayed as they did, while Quetzal's was just more hissing, which did not make it any less annoying to hear at your expense, Harry realized.

Shaking his head, Vurg did not expand further on that, instead turning back to what he was saying a moment before. "We did not specialize in large-scale engagements, but without our guidance, many of the battles against the Burning Legion and its followers could never have been won. It is we who discovered the plans the demons were using; it is we who discovered the depths of Azshara's depravity and first came up with wards to battle the influence of the demons by studying their methods and hierarchy. Information is power, and although this brought us into conflict with both Malfurion and Illidan at times, it is a concept that we honor to this day by having one of our ranks being called Seeker. We search for the enemy, we see what is real, not what our enemies wish us to perceive, or what our desires might try to fool us into believing is there."

Vurg turned back, staring at both Sylina and Harry, reciting the next line in what was obviously a rote delivery but one that was heartfelt for all that. "We deal in truth, for the strongest weapon of demon-kind is the lie."

"The lie of power." Harry nodded grimly. "I've known a lot of people who fall for that kind of thing. Being offered power by someone, never understanding that the person who gives you the power is the one who truly is controlling it, and through it can either control you, because you'll keep coming back for more, or by simply corrupting you. Thinking about it, I suppose the difference there is the difference between the demons and the old gods."

"Precisely," Vurg answered approvingly. "We helped to achieve many victories during the war, including the final one. But afterward, as demon-kind began to fade from the world leaving but remnants behind, so too did the impetus behind which the Unseen Path had been forged. Further, there was the damage to the world to deal with, the Shattering, and even after that, new

social discord began to rise between the surviving highborn and the rest of the elves. Our members were dealing with the trouble of split loyalties, and many personal tragedy. The Unseen Path then was... dying. But the Order was saved from that fate.”

The Pathfinder stopped speaking, and a few moments later, they stood in front of a pair of large heavy looking doors, doors made of stone rather than wood. Harry could also tell at a glance they were heavily filled with nature magic. What the nature magic within them was doing he couldn't tell, but he felt it was something defensive in nature, which made sense. *Probably something to let them act almost like a stone wall, or maybe an illusion to simply look like a stone wall?* Harry wasn't certain which.

But on those two doors were two carvings of young looking Tauren women. Harry had seen hundreds of such women over his time with the Highmountain Clan, but the images were so well carved, so detailed that they could have been to two women simply frozen into the stone somehow despite the lack of color.

One of the two was obviously a woman warrior, who brought to Harry's mind the Highmountain woman, Lyra when he looked at her. She was even wielding a spear like Lyra did, although this spear was different, more like a short-shafted glaive, given the size and shape of the spearhead.

Her hair was different though, chopped shorter than any Tauren woman Harry had previously seen, a close cropped fuzz on top of her head, almost as if the woman had wanted to look the part of a man, or well, as close as a Tauren woman could come to looking like a male anyway. There were certain features that made that impossible. She was powerfully muscled, scarred by years of battle, but had a twist to the lips that spoke of sardonic humor and good nature which Lyra certainly did not have. Deep-set eyes seemed to gleam with intelligence in the carving as well as intensity. On one arm she held a shield, a small buckler in comparison to her frame, the hand of that arm was held out to the woman on the other doorway, who clasped it, the clasp acting as a lock in the center of the door, the moving parts cunningly wrought to look like bracelets around their wrists.

The second woman was as long-haired as her companion was short. Her hair came down almost to her rear, which made it longer indeed than any Tauren woman Harry had seen. It was also filled with feathers and what looked like metal bits and spikes. The garment she wore was that of a warrior like the first's, but it was subtly feminine in a way which the spear wielders had not been, hugging her hips more, hugging her top more rather than trying to hang loose enough to hide what was within. The second woman's clothing also seemed to have far more in the way of stitching and design on it. Her arms were also festooned with what looked like beads above the bracelets the two women wore. But those arms were powerfully built too, and in the hand that wasn't clasping the first woman's hand she held the hammer of Khaz'goroth, the sacred weapon of the Highmountain tribe Harry had seen several times, although had never convinced Tyre to let him examine.

Finishing the carving was a headdress that Harry recognized as being the one that Tyre wore for special formal occasions, marked out with many feathers and loops of precious metals. *Tyre always said it was heavy with the weight of responsibility and time. I have to wonder how many chieftains have worn that thing.*

“Here you see the two reasons why the Unseen Path did not fade into obscurity, the twin daughters of Huln. They were young when they joined our order during the War of the Ancients, but grew up during it, and eventually became our leaders, taking over from Huln. While their father dealt with the social upheaval going on among Tauren clans after the war was over and they, like our elven brethren began to split apart, it was Arien and Gardrel who forced our members to realize that just because the war ended, did not mean that the threat was gone. It was they who, in consultation with the Aspects of Life, Alexstrasza, and the Aspect of the Dream, Ysera, realized that fighting against that threat would be a quest of many lifetimes. Of all lifetimes, for protecting this world against demonic threat is not such a task that will ever fade.”

Vurg gestured to each carving in turn. “With a gift for diplomacy and leadership, Gardrel was a magnificent chieftess in training. She convinced nearly all of the members of the Unseen Path to stay within the Order, to join the journey into the Broken Isles with the Highmountain clans. Arien was a warrior through and through. With the spear Talonclaw in hand, used by her father and blessed by Ohn’ahra and Omen, Arien was the one who really led us from the shattered lands of the Kaldorei up into these mountains.”

“At first, it seemed as if they would simply lead us into the Highmountain valley, to become a full part of their father’s people. Something which the Kaldorei, Furbolgs and fey harpies among us would not have enjoyed.”

Sylina started at that, but Harry knew that the harpies had indeed fought with Tyrande and Malfurion’s alliance against the Burning Legion. But when Aviana, the demigod who had given them form and speech died, it had broken the harpies. Many quickly turned to the Fel powers offered by the satyrs after that, or even worse, influenced and thoroughly tainted by the limited power of the Old Gods which boiled up to the surface from their prisons. *A part of me still feels sorry for them.*

“But instead, in their wisdom, or perhaps guided by the spirit of Ohn’ahra, Gardrel led us to this tiny offshoot,” Vurg continued. “Arien led those like Narvae into battle to claim this little valley from a group of Necrodark that had inhabited it and the order took part in defeating them and their master, the Old God’s creature Uul’gyneth.”

While Harry had heard of that lesser war before in his time with the Highmountain Clans, Sylina started at the name of the Old Gods, her ears flattening against her skull in a Kaldorei sign of distress and worry, before slowly rising back into their normal position.

That was simply good sense in Harry’s mind. The Old Gods were the very definition of serious business. Beyond the limited tales that remained among the Tauren from the war against the Necrodark, Harry could still remember learning of them from Cenarius along with the demons, and how he and Tyrande had fought a campaign against the strange stone giants in the mountains that marked the southern border of Ashenvale. Those giants had seemingly been created by a portion of the blood of one of the old gods rising to the surface through the wards and defenses that contained it. The giants had been created by the very stone of the mountains being Tainted.

So Harry knew point-blank that the bland, almost dry way that the Pathfinder spoke of battle and war that, while not on the scale of the War of the Ancients in scope or the power of the combatants, the war against Uul’gyneth probably matched it for sheer brutality and the raw evil

of the enemy. *And if I remember correctly, it wasn't a war the Highmountain Clan could actually win, they simply lacked the power to kill Uul'gyneth.*

"After that, this place was cleansed by the spirit of Ohn'ahra of the Old God's Taint, the spirit of wind having become the patron of our order. Gardrel would eventually return to the Highmountain clan to lead it and the other tribes of the valley in her father's place after his passing, but Arien would lead us for many decades after, helping to create the Order's organization," he smiled then, a wide toothy smile gesturing to the paired hands in front of them. "Apparently with her twins' notes to help things along, the various ranks and the organization of the order."

"I take it that it was Gardrel's work which kept several of the highborn working with your Order?"

"Yes. It was Gardrel who commissioned the murals that you saw upon entry, as well as various other bits of arcane around this fortress. She also convinced the Kaldorei among us at the time to let them go to join their brethren, but to also never outlaw more Highborne from coming forward to join us once more. It was Gardrel who helped her father devised a plan to seal away Uul'gyneth and enlisted the aid of the red Dragon Krasus to devise wards to do so, linking them to the Hammer of Khaz'goroth. And it was Arien who led our forces to implant the wards, while Huln and the Highmountain clan warred openly against the Necrodark."

As he spoke of each twin in turn, Vurg gestured to the carvings, pride clear in his voice. "It was Arien who spoke with Ohn'ahra, and who convinced him to bless this spot in a very singular manner. Such is the way of it, that the nature magic of this place hides all arcana within. But it was thanks to Gardrel's words that we currently have three highborn among our members, and two of them are stationed with the highborn, but one is here currently, a young Oathkeeper who has been here in Trueshot Lodge for a few weeks now. It was Gardrel who forced us to keep communications open with both the Highborne and the Kaldorei. From the history texts we know that she was a firm friend of Tyrande, looking up to her as something of a mentor."

Harry smiled at that, nodding. "I can imagine that easily enough." Sylina also snorted, nodding her head as she did, the respect that she had felt for Tyrande years ago having in no way diminished since Tyrande had returned to her position as leader after her sabbatical.

"This set up the means to recruit members into our order while not allowing us to be tied to the Kaldorei government or society before we came to the Broken Isles. And it was Arien who apparently designed Trueshot Lodge from the inside out, and worked with all of her followers to actually create it."

Now, the older Vurgs smile faded, and he looked at the two of them sternly. "What I have told you, what you have seen so far, is but the first layer of secrets. To learn more than this, you both will Vow to keep soon along with what you see within. Be prepared to give that oath." He waited a second, but neither newcomer made any move to back away. "The Unseen Path does its best work when it is entirely unknown to outsiders, hence why only a scarce handful of individuals among my folk and that of the Kaldorei know of our existence at all."

Sylina looked confused at that, but Harry nodded. He wasn't certain he agreed with the heights with which they took it, but he understood why the Unseen Path wished to remain both separate from the various governments of the various races that they were composed of, but also secret.

“Because the greatest weapon of the Old Gods is corruption. And of the demons is betrayal,” he said softly.

The Pathfinder smirked, nodding in respect to Harry’s words. “You say it correctly, although corruption was also a part of the demon’s tools. It is only there that their corruption begins in the spirit rather than body. Despite that, I have often reflected that both ancient Old God and demon alike tend to use the same tools as one another, so much so that I wonder why we call one of the Burning Legion, and the other the Old Gods.”

“Their magic feels different, I can tell you that much,” Harry said clinically, frowning thoughtfully. “Both are horrible to feel out, but they are different. One is evil, it feels like fire, like hate and anger. But the other feels... vile, like it is simply wrong on some fundamental level. Tyrande Whisperwind and I met when we ran across Taint-created stone giants.

“Yes, you have had run-ins with both of you not? I personally have only fought satyrs and fel corrupted beasts. But many of my brethren have run into creatures tainted by the Old God’s touch. And we have several among us who can still remember the war against the Necrodark. You might meet such during your stay with us, but for now...” With that, Vurg pushed at the clasped hands of the two Highmountain sisters, and with barely a whisper of air, the doors opened.

On the other side, lay what was pretty obviously the central cavern of the Lodge. It was truly a cavern for one thing, one left in its raw state in places, while in others stalagmites and stalactites had been carved to look like pieces of sculpture, creating an amazing and varied scene of beauty and Harry’s mind. Although it was somewhat marred that around the edges Harry could see other murals, paintings depicting battles and wars long ago. Including one against creatures that looked like the drogbar, who Harry took to be the Necrodark. Interspersed with those murals were other tunnels leading off. The two that Harry could see as they entered were leading upward, immediately becoming staircases.

Yet he had no appreciation for that or even the murals, because in the direct center of the cavern was a pair of larger stalactites and stalagmites growing from the ceiling and floor to the point where they nearly met in the middle. A glass container was set there, the glass shaped and molded in such a way that it seemed to almost grow out of the stone above and below to encompass a single feather within. A feather that gleamed with so much light it reminded Harry of his Patronus, but the feeling it gave off was far more profound.

Serenity, watchfulness, power, the feeling of being judged and watched by a creature far more ancient and powerful than yourself, all of that was bundled up in the feelings that feather evoked upon entering the cavern. The power of a demigod of nature came through that single feather, muted perhaps in comparison to the whole, but immense all the same.

Even meeting Cenarius had not prepared Harry for the impact of being in the presence of a portion of a demigod like this, and as Sylina nearly sank to her knees beside him, Harry struggled not to do the same, simply staring at the feather, wondering if this was a difference in power, before shaking that thought off. *No, that makes no sense. All nature demigods must be pretty much equal in power I think, at least I think I can remember Cenarius mentioning something like that. His divinity though is spread throughout the forest, whoever is the owner of that feather hasn’t distilled its presence at all.*

“The feather of Ohn’ahra. A gift from the demigod to the Unseen Path. It is upon this feather you will give your first Vow. As you progress within the order, more vows will be added, further secrets opened up to you, further responsibilities expected. All three will be made upon this feather, the Oath enforced by the very power of nature as you swear to its owner to keep our secrets till your dying breath and, eventually, beyond. Each oath will be visible upon your skin, the meaning obvious to any other member of the Unseen Path.”

The ancient Tauren held out his forearm, showing a series of brands on his forearm. One was right at the wrist, the other one equidistant from wrist to elbow, where another brand stood out from Vurg’s furry arm. Harry didn’t doubt there were others elsewhere on Vurg’s body, hidden under his clothing, and wondered if where the visible sign of the Oaths appeared was random, or connected to the specific oath in question.

He was also feeling a little chagrined and when he spoke, he was more formal than was his wont these days. “Pathfinder Vurg, there might be an issue with this. I regret to say I am uncertain of how well this binding will take with me in the long term. They may bind me, but unfortunately, the term ‘until your dying breath’ doesn’t quite mean as much to me as it would to Sylina or someone else. And I am not talking about necromancy or any kind of Death magic, either.”

Sylina blinked as the ancient Tauren furrowed his brows, but it was Sylina who spoke first, using the conversation to get over the impact of the feather with some relief. “Your weird rebirth technique, right? You mentioned it to us at one point on the ship. How your version of longevity would return your body to a certain point in your life?”

Harry nodded, and began to explain, hearing the closing doors behind him settled into place with a certain amount of finality, causing Sylina to start a bit. But Sylina could not look away from the feather for long, it’s shining form drawing her eyes like a lodestone.

Once a basic explanation had been given, he finished with, “I’ve begun to be able to visualize my current self, but I haven’t exactly been in any rush to try out whether or not that will equate to being able to control my body’s age when I die. But if these oath’s are tied to your physical body, they might not survive if I die and am reborn. I have no intention of ever failing your trust or the trust of those who told me of the Unseen Path in any way, but I would be remiss in not mentioning the possibility.”

For a moment, Vurg scratched at his long flowing white beard and thought, then shrugged his shoulders. “You passed the test of the murals, something you should not have had to do until you chose to be tested as a Seeker. Before that, you were recommended to our order not just by Tyre Fleetfoot, but also Lady Tyrande. I also know something of your unique magic Harry Potter, and I understand why you were not in any rush to test anything to do with your personal version of immortality. Even more than that, however I am interested to see what you yourself can bring to the order, not just what knowledge we can impart to you.”

Harry could detect a certain amount of avariciousness there, coupled with a bit of frustration, but Vurg went on smoothly. “I am willing to take the chance that your... your inherent magic would be sufficient to keep the Oath in place, even if the physical sign of the Oath fades upon your rebirth. Further, the first oath is a simple enough one to keep. Many a young Kaldorei or Tauren turns back eventually at that stage before fully joining our order as a Seeker. We can see how

this first Oath goes for you, and we have many years, maybe even a decade or more to make a decision for you to take the next one, if you so wish.”

Harry thought about it for a few moments, then decided it didn't matter on his side of things. The Unseen Path represented too much of a goldmine of information about the world in general and the demons in particular for him to want to step aside. *Even if I had to take the Oath of Seeker right now I wouldn't step back.* “No elder. If you're willing to take a chance on me, I'm willing to take your oaths.

The Pathfinder nodded, and turned to the young Kaldorei. “And you Sylina Sungaze? You were recommended as well. The short report I have of you told of a certain sense of adventure, a longing to explore the world. Are you ready to take the first step to doing that as an Oathkeeper of the Unseen Path?”

Since Sylina hadn't passed the test of the paintings yet, there was no mention of the later Oaths that Sylina would need to give if she decided to remain and ascend higher within the Unseen Path, but the question did still hold some weight. Because it wasn't just about the Vow itself. Rather Vurg had asked her if Sylina was willing to stay with the Order as a whole. If not, Sylina could take that oath, and then be shown the door, not learning anything more about the Unseen Path, and not becoming a part of it at all.

Harry wondered idly how many people really made that decision right off the bat. *The recommendation concept of recruitment was probably extremely good at winnowing those who would not make the cut so to speak.*

As he thought, Sylina pushed through the impact of the feather on her senses and shook her head. “I also was looking for a cause worth fighting for, honored elder. And with the lands of my people peaceful for now, becoming a member of the Unseen Path seems like a good way of both seeing the world and doing good in it.”

For a moment, the Pathfinder looked into Sylina's eyes, but after a few moments it was clear that he saw what he wanted to there. He nodded, and turned away, leading the way deeper into the cavern towards the feather in its glass and stone container. As they neared, Harry could see that one side of it had a small opening, where even a fully grown Tauren could reach into the cage and touch the feather. This close, Harry could see that the feather was large, larger even than the feathers of the giant eagles of the Skyhorn Tribe by at least a handspan, and thicker across. The light of it shifted as well, the edges of the feather now marked off with the colors of a rainbow on a clear day, each tip along the pinion a different color.

Seeing Sylina almost lose to the awe of the feather again, Harry spoke up once more as they walked forward. “By the way, what actually happens to someone who tries to break their oath? I gather it is not as simple as simply not being able to speak.”

That was what happened with magical Oaths. Back in Harry's old world, if you tried to break an Oath made via the Ergo Fides spell, your magic itself would bind your mouth shut. A person under an Oath to keep a secret would keep it regardless of any attempt to tell other people about it through physical means or mental. Even a spell like the Imperious Curse would not force someone under an Oath to give up the secret. You could use Legilimency to steal the secret, but doing so would shatter the mind of the individual attacked.

But here, given the sheer violence of this world in comparison to his own, Harry doubted it would be that simple. *Nor with Necromancy being a thing. That's a little disturbing to contemplate.*

“The moment you try to draw in breath to speak the secrets of the Unseen Path, those winds will become a flensing force in your throat, killing you instantly. The Nature magic of the world around us, which Ohn’ahra is one of many guiding spirits, will keep you from saying anything,” the Pathfinder answered simply. “But that is only if you are intent on sharing the secrets. If you do so accidentally. Like if you are drunk for example?” he chuckled, “Such a thing has been known to happen occasionally, then you will simply not be able to say anything. The words will stick in your mouth, the air in your mouth becoming as thick as tar, letting no sound escape. It is not subtle, but it is effective.”

Sylina whistled, but showed no concern, while Harry just nodded judiciously, thinking that was pretty much what he expected. *But to learn what they can teach me of fighting demons and spotting their corruption, that kind of threat is small change, really.* “That makes sense. And what is the wording of these oaths?”

“As you seemingly have apparently guessed, each oath is different as you progress through the Unseen Path from Oathkeepers on. This first oath is the most comprehensive and yet loose, covering what you have learned and will learn up to the moment you take your next oath of the Unseen Path. This will be quite a bit of physical training, knowledge of the Unseen Path organizes itself, and a few mental skills. It will allow you to obviously use the knowledge you have gained, the training we give in combat for example, if you leave us. But you will not be able to share any of it with others. It does not cover any specific area of knowledge or dangerous bits of esoteric information we have gathered here.”

“I can’t even pass on the physical training? I couldn’t, say for example, train someone else after I leave you with a technique you showed me?” Sylina asked, surprised.

“Physical skills can be taught, so long as you do not use verbal methods to do so. I am afraid at this level that the oath needs to be that all-encompassing.” When Sylina nodded in understanding, the Pathfinder gestured, and a young Furbolg that Harry hadn’t seen came out from behind the central pillar, reaching up delicately to open the glass case. “Now, stand forth, place your hand on the feather, and prepare to be judged. Give your oath freely, and without reservation, or you will be struck down instantly by the power of Ohn’ahra.”

Harry twitched at that, but understood, and since he had already given his reservations about the effect of the Oath, stepped forward as Sylina did. *And if I die, well, it's going to be a learning experience in a lot of ways.* “What about Quetzal or Sylina’s panther companion?”

“You would be astonished to know how rare the idea of questioning animals is in this world. Why it’s almost as if most people don’t realize animals each have their own languages,” Vurg answered dryly.

While Sylina laughed a bit at that, Quetzal hissed in humor. “It is not my fault that most two legged creatures think that those legs and their opposable thumbs set them so far above those of us who have not gone down that particular evolutionary path. Indeed, I often pity all of you. There seems to be far too much that takes your minds away from the only important things in life: sleeping and eating.”

The Furbolg started, his bearlike features twitching in a way that Harry decided denoted interest, while Vurg seemed to think about his earlier words for a moment, then shook his head. "How often do you have to renew the spell on Quetzal to allow us to understand him?"

"Around once a day. I tend to do so in the morning. And before you ask, it doesn't really matter. Quetzal's general intelligence is raised by talking to me, a Parseltongue. Away from me, his intelligence returns to that of his species: high for a snake, but unable to communicate with anyone but myself..." Harry paused, thinking. "And maybe demigods like Cenarius."

"Hmmm... well, I do not think I have read anything about the Burning Legion or the creatures of the Old Gods speaking to animals," Vurg mused. "I will consult with the most senior of my fellows here in the Lodge, but I think it will be an acceptable risk. Now, if you would step forward?"

Sylina was waved back a bit, and Harry thrust his hand into the glass container. He let his fingers gently touch the feather, amazed at how soft the pinion felt, while also feeling the power of wind moving around his hand. It wasn't wild and destructive like it had been when he had last tried to call forth an Air Elemental, but it was there all the same. *I would wager that if someone gave their oath in ill faith, those winds would probably tear their hand apart before they could remove it from the case.*

Harry couldn't see any sign of anything like that occurring in the case which he thought was good, but he understood that it was a possibility.

"Repeat after me," Vurg began. "I, Harry Potter..."

Harry did so, although he added a few caveats of his own to make certain that it would only be released upon his final death rather than his being reborn, no matter the circumstances of said rebirth. "I, Harry Potter, swear to keep faith with the Unseen Path, to walk the trails placed in front of me both of knowledge and duty. I pledge to keep all secrets I learn on this journey from now until final death takes me. So I do swear on my own name and magic, and on Ohn'ahra, the Earth Mother {Tauren Name}, and Elune, Goddess of the Moon. Let my words bind me to Ohn'ahra's power, and let his power judge my actions in keeping mine Oath."

A circle of magic wound its way out from the feather, slowly creeping up his hand and then around his wrist glowing white so brightly that Harry had to look away while a loud, sharp bird cry, like that of a hunting hawk, wound around the cavern, sending a few tiny bells Harry hadn't noticed to jingling.

While Sylina stared around them towards the sound of the bells and Vurg and the Furbolg watched impassively, Harry felt something he hadn't expected: a pull on his magical core at the same time as whatever magic the demigod spirit within the feather began its work. *Did, did I just make it an Unbreakable Vow with the demigod? Does that count as a kind of religious oath? I hope not, I don't exactly wish to worship Ohn'ahra, no matter how much I wish to work beside him,* Harry thought drolly.

The brightness faded quickly though, and when he looked back, Harry saw he had a new addition on his body, a tattoo on his wrist going right around it. It looked like a simple tattoo, a bracelet almost rather than a brand. It was made of what looked like a chain of very tiny, well made ringlets. Each different ringlet was made of feathers of different birds, but worked into it

was a series of glyphs that Harry somehow understood was the true name of the spirit Ohn'ahra in runic form.

Humming thoughtfully, Vurg leaned forward, nodding pensively. "Fascinating. On you it seems to have created a tattoo, just as it would on a dragon. I imagine because your inherent magic will sustain the oath as it does in their case, rather than the nature magic of the world as it would for those of us without magic."

Harry started at that, and asked quickly, "Wait, you have a Dragon that is part of the Unseen Path?"

"There are four dragons who have taken the oath to the Unseen Path at this stage, but only one has gone on to be more than an Oathkeeper. She is a Cartographer, a rank within the Unseen Path you will learn about in the future," the Pathfinder answered simply. "I did mention that Gardrel helped Huln enlist the aid of Krasus the red Dragon to help drive out Uul'gyneth did I not? Is it any wonder that he at least took the Vow of an Oathkeeper? As for the others, two green dragons joined us at the same time, but quickly distanced themselves after the war against the Necrodark was completed. The dragons believe in the reasoning behind our order, but prefer to not involve themselves in the affairs of others."

Harry nodded at that, wondering idly if Tyrande knew about that war at all, or if she had been involved. *Probably not given the timing. I am getting the impression that war occurred almost on the heels of the war of the ancients, or at least within the next fifteen years or so, and I know the night of society was in turmoil for at least fifty or more before they even began to set up their new government, let alone began to work through the changes in the status of magic users and so forth.*

"Damn. I don't suppose there's a way I could get a tattoo rather than a brand?" Sylina asked, looking a little annoyed. The tattoo on Harry looked quite good on him, while the brands, for all that the three Vurg had shown them shared the same appearance, were still brands. The same sort of thing that livestock owners used on their animals.

"I am afraid not," Vurg said shaking his head. "Do not worry. The first brand always goes around your wrist like Harry's and mine."

"I wasn't worried about where it would go, just the whole branding in general," Sylina grumbled.

Harry winked at her, wagging his eyebrows at her outrageously. "I don't think it matters, something so small certainly won't do anything to mar your beauty, Sylina."

She smiled at that, her ears twitching in amusement. Harry had taken to complimenting her occasionally like that over the days they traveled together since meeting after the battle against the harpies, and she had not rejected his advances.

Indeed, Sylina had occasionally teased him, and Harry was wondering where that was going to go as she stepped forward to take the oath. Afterward, the light from the feather was noticeably dimmer, and the feather itself seemed almost a little tired, floating downwards towards the bottom of the glass container for a few seconds before righting itself, the brightness coming back quickly. That was certainly a sign that magic within the feather had needed to supply the magic to enforce the oath.

But like Vurg said, the physical sign of the oath was the same as on the ancient Tauren: a series of feathers of various different birds conjoined around her wrist along with the secret name of Ohn'ahra written out in some ancient language that probably only the demigods of this world had ever spoken.

"Excellent," the Pathfinder said, as the young Furbolg moved forward to gently take Sylina's hand, leading her away from the feather, before turning back and closing the door into the great glass container. Sylina, for her part, looked a little out of it, shaking her head from side to side and looking down at her new brand.

"Now, Sylina. As the majority of us here are not Kaldorei presently, we keep to a daytime cycle rather than a nighttime one. Will you have trouble adjusting?"

Sylina shook her head, coming back to the here and now as she answered, getting over the rush of feeling magic thrumming through her for a few seconds. It had been highly disconcerting, and Sylina didn't consider herself one to let social baggage bother her. *I can't imagine how Nightshade would have reacted to something like that. Well, I can, I just don't like the image.* "I shouldn't have a problem. I traveled with master Narvae for a few weeks before we took ship for the Broken Isles, and he tended to switch off randomly. To test my endurance, he said."

"That is a typical method to do so, yes. Good. In that case, as we still have a few hours of daytime left to us let us get you both settled in your cubicles, and then we can see what manner of warriors you are before the evening meal. After that, Sylina, you will work with Master Narvae more on your silent movement skills, while Harry and I speak about his magic. While I was told something about his magic, and that it was highly unusual and comes from an internal source, I was not told anything else, and I find myself intrigued."

Harry nodded acquiescence to that, and the ancient turned away, thanking the Furbolg... attendant? Guard? Harry wasn't certain yet what role he served, but the young bear-like man (or woman, again Harry had no idea how to tell one from another) remained behind with the feather as the Pathfinder led them off, heading towards one of the tunnels leading off this main cavern.

As they moved past the center of the cavern, Harry was startled to realize there were a few other members of the Unseen Path around, and stumbled to a halt as he saw them, with Quetzal hissing in surprise as well. "Goodness, these two legs know how to hide their presence far better than any I have met before this."

One was a Kaldorei man, much like master Narvae, only younger, without any scars bar one that seemingly had almost taken an ear off running down the side of his face. He was sitting on the ground of the cavern, leaning against one of the natural stalactites, his eyes closed in meditation before he seemed to feel Harry's eyes on him. He opened them, frowned at Harry, then nodded with seemingly quite a bit of reservation, before going back to whatever he was meditating on. *I... don't think he was tracking anything that just happened. I suppose if not that's fair enough given the general Kaldorei reaction to Arcane users.*

Two others, both older looking Tauren, had stood silently, hidden to one side of the cavern from where Harry and Sylina had entered, but they nodded equably to Harry as he looked at them, turning and heading towards another tunnel. Three more Furbolgs were also in attendance, possibly to simply witness the new oath takers like the two Tauren? Harry wasn't certain.

Regardless, all three bear-like beings nodded towards Harry, and also headed away down another tunnel, not even waiting for Harry to acknowledge them.

Harry looked around quickly, wondering how many others there had been that he'd missed earlier, before realizing that there weren't any others around, bar the one - he was going to call him middle-aged for now - Kaldorei man who was seemingly meditating. Shaking his head, Harry turned back in the direction Sylina and the ancient had gone as she called over her shoulder "Are you coming, Harry?"

"I definitely need to work on my situational awareness! How could I not have seen them?" Harry muttered to Quetzal.

"Bah, more importantly they were hiding their presence even from **me**, Harry," Quetzal reported, still sounding somewhat subdued, twitching his head so he could keep one eye on the last group of Furbolgs. "Whatever they teach here, it is clear that they have no need of your spells to remain unseen. A most disturbing thought."

Snorting at that, Harry hurried to catch up with the others, noticing as he did that Sylina had looked behind her shoulder again, her ears twitching in a way he had yet to see during his interactions with her or other Kaldorei. When she turned back, Harry blinked, and wondered if it was his imagination, or if she was somehow swishing her hips just a little more than before. Whatever the case, it was almost hypnotic. Sylina had an amazingly pert bubble butt and the thin but powerful thighs and hips of a sprinter and seeing that butt swing side to side just brought more attention to those other features.

Harry could not turn his eyes away from it until he was close enough for the ancient Tauren to begin to speak again as they started to ascend up a short flight of steps.

"You will each be given a small room. We do not believe in luxury here among the Unseen Path, but you are welcome to make yourself as at home within that space as possible. That room will be yours for the duration of your stay with us no matter how long or how deep into the Unseen Path you delve. We do not believe in segregating between the various ranks."

"You mentioned ranks before, but I don't think you're using the term to describe a military structure like Sylina's Sentinels, even if you have mentioned titles as well before," Harry mused. "Or at least not precisely. And how many of you are here currently?"

There, the Pathfinder hesitated, frowning, before answering, "There are currently twelve members of the Unseen Path within Trueshot Lodge. Five are due back soon."

Harry frowned, sensing something about the way Vurg had answered. He had gotten used to how Tauren spoke during his time living with the various tribes of the valley. Vurg sounded almost evasive, as if he hadn't wanted to answer. *Or is he ashamed of the answer? Why? And doesn't that mean that half of the people here were witnesses to our Vows?*

Before Harry could ponder that further, Sylina asked a question about the ranks, bringing up Harry's previous point. The ancient answered quickly, gesturing to Sylina and Harry. "You two are now considered Oathkeepers among us, as I said before. It is the introductory rank within the order, similar to acolytes in the priesthood of Elune or students who have first come forward to express a desire to learn the ways of Shamanism or Nature magic among my people. It is a

rank given to those who have yet to decide whether to devote their lives to the Unseen Path and become Seekers.”

“Are we to be taught by one Seeker then until they deem us ready to make that change, or we decide to leave? You’ve mentioned a few times that this is the period where we can do so with no onus placed on us for that decision, but I am wondering about the actual training,” Harry interjected. *I am also wondering what kind of master would be assigned to an apprentice like me.*”

“You are not assigned a single teacher as Oathkeepers, rather your education becomes a group effort from those Seekers and above here. You will find the training varied and harsh. Even with you having been sent here via our recommendation and recruitment system, we still need to make certain of your mettle. Our life is not an easy one, and often times the knowledge gained within the Unseen Path is not such that a person can truly come to grips with. It is best that both we and you realize that now, before you try to push forward blindly,” Vurg answered.

Sylina and Harry nodded in understanding, although they gave no verbal response to that. Harry was pretty certain he would eventually rise in the ranks of the order. They simply represented too good a source of support and knowledge of the world for him not to. *And to be blunt, I’m here on Azeroth in the service of Lady Death to deal with those who have abused her powers. It would be immensely stupid for me to not be on the lookout for demons and servants of the Old Gods at the same time. I fully understand what I learn will not be pleasant, but it wouldn’t be the first time I’ve dealt with that.*

Whereas Sylina didn’t quite know if she would remain in the Order for the rest of her life, and simply did not speak up lest she seem weak-willed. After all, for a Night Elf, a lifetime was an incredibly long amount of time to be devoted to any one thing, and she had to admit to some trepidation given Master Narvae’s words during their travels together before they met with Harry. “And after an Oathkeeper, what comes next? You’ve mentioned Seekers several times.”

“After you have decided to devote your life to the Unseen Path, to the battle of demonic and corrupting forces wherever they appear in Azeroth, you become a Seeker. As the name implies, as a Seeker you would seek out such forces. Our folk go on long journeys, gathering intelligence, discovering and interacting with other peoples, other societies, both observing without being discovered and interacting openly if possible... although for the most part it is not. For example, you could be sent to interact with the Tauren clans in southern Kalimdor, those clans that returned south into the plains on the other side of Winterspring mountains on Kalimdor after fighting in the War of the Ancients. You could also be sent to our lodge among the highborn, to serve there as they expand onto the new continent where they have created their new realm. In both cases you could operate openly as outsiders, though not as members of the Unseen Path.”

“Because those groups are at least willing to allow outsiders among them. But specific knowledge of our goals, and the Unseen Path in general, is guarded,” Harry mused, nodding. “Tyrande knows about you among the Kaldorei, and I imagine someone similar does the same in... come to think of it, you haven’t mentioned what the Highborne call their country. But what about the Tauren? I understand the Kalimdor tribes are even, well, more tribal than those of the Highmountain tribes, having no overall clan structure. If some trouble erupts there, who would you work with in order to convince the Tauren there of the dangers?”

Several Tauren Harry had spoken to had taken their Rite of the Winds by traveling to Kalimdor to go among their people there. Harry was surprised though the opposite wasn't true. It seemed as if the Kalimdor Tauren were both nomadic in nature, and were very much not at home when it came to the ocean and boats.

"It is often tricky among our folk in the south, yes. There, we actually operate more openly than we do among the elven societies, or even among Furbolgs. The Furbolgs do not have any overarching government either. In both, if necessary, we can come out into the open to declare ourselves and our goals if need be with the tribes being impacted by whatever is going on, but it will not carry over to other tribes. Luckily, we have never needed to worry about such yet," Vurg replied.

"And in areas where we are dealing with locals who aren't open to outsiders?" Sylina questioned. "What are some examples of that?"

"Investigating the various troll clans that share the new landmass to the east with the Highborne, or elsewhere within the Broken Isles or further south from here," Vurg answered instantly, a wince of remembered pain coming to him as his free hand shifted down as if to touch his leg. "There you would need to move unseen lest you be attacked for simply being there. The trolls hate all outsiders, even those troll tribes who were not part of the troll empire that fought the Kaldorei for control of northern Kalimdor during the early days of the empire. Days so long past that even those who fought in the War of the Ancients have long forgotten them."

Sylina nodded at that, while Harry had to wrack his brain to remember what he had been told of trolls before this in general, let alone the shared history. Which he didn't know much about. All he could remember is that the Kaldorei became an empire as they fought an existing troll one for control of the then monster continent named Kalimdor at the time. That was long before the Well of the Ancients was discovered, and recorded histories of that time had been lost.

The news there were trolls in the Broken Isles, presumably on one of the other tiny islands was interesting. But even more interesting to Harry, this was the first he had heard of lands to the south of the Broken Isles, and he had to hold back from asking questions just yet, sensing that Vurg would not answer anything specific. *Still, that sounds amazingly interesting. And the way Vurg spoke, it sounds almost like there are groups of trolls out there who remember the wars against the Kaldorei...*

Shaking his head, Harry focused once more on the Pathfinder's words as he spoke. "The Seekers are the most numerous of the order, the primary rank you might say. They are also our most combat oriented sect. Not because the other ranks run into less combat, but because the Seekers rarely travel alone, and interacting with even peaceful groups like the Furbolgs often bring us into conflict with any local troubles in the form of beasts or monsters that they are having issues with."

Both newly inducted Oathkeepers nodded at that, and Vurg went on. "Beside them is the Cartographer rank, and I say beside rather than above because they are equal in rank within the order, in that they could give orders to Oathkeepers, or request help from those of equal rank. But they are different in how they go about serving the Unseen Path, hence the different label. Whereas secrets interact with people mainly, and are trained to do that or to travel unseen through them, Cartographers, similarly trained to travel unseen, are just as trained to discover the ways of the land itself."

“Oooh...” Harry hummed as they came out of the spiral staircase they had been in into a long corridor, one with dozens of what looked like flaps hiding doorways. “Knowledge is power indeed.” *And if these are all living quarters, it’s evident the Unseen Path doesn’t believe in much privacy. Odd.*

“Indeed. Here among the Unseen Path you will find maps of the Broken Isles, of Kalimdor and Northrend. There are even a few of the Maelstrom and the currents around it, and we have a few small ones of areas to the south of us. All of them are exceptionally detailed, with as much information as a Cartographer can glean, accompanied by scrolls on the type of animal and plant life you can run into if applicable. The ones in the Broken Isles and Kalimdor are routinely updated every few years, and are easily the best of both you will find, even better than the ones the Kaldorei use of Ashenvale.”

While Sylina looked a tiny bit affronted by that if the furrowed brow was anything to go by, Harry just nodded, rubbing his hands together gleefully at the idea of talking to a Cartographer. More knowledge of the world was really what he was most after, above and beyond defending this new world of his from Death magic, demons, and old gods alike. *When I put it like that, I certainly am not spoiled for choice when it comes to enemies. Still, at least they’re not united, and don’t seem active just yet.* He smirked then. *And no, I don’t think I will ever voice that kind of thought aloud, lest fate decide to do my dirty.*

However, there was one specific reason why Harry was interested in talking to a Cartographer. “I take it that Cartographers are the people I would need to talk to if I wanted to ask where I could find a specific scene? Say something from a dream, or a sending from an elemental?”

To his surprise, Vurg just nodded, asking no questions about where that specific question had come from, although Sylina had turned away from the ancient Tauren to look at Harry with one of her ears twitching to half mast and out to the side in the Kaldorei equivalent of cocking an eyebrow among humans. “Yes. So long as it is known, a Cartographer will either know the location personally, or will be able to point you to the correct maps given various important features such as the position of the sun, the shape of the land or any geographic feature.

“But only a Seeker or Cartographer or above is able to view those maps,” Vurg added warningly. “Knowledge is power, and knowledge of the world is contained in the second set of oaths you will take once you make the decision to either fully join or order or remain as Oathkeepers.”

“How long can we stay with the order if we remain as an Oathkeeper?” Sylina asked. “You never said.”

“As long as you wish,” Vurg was the bland reply. “Among Kaldorei in particular, many are willing to serve alongside the Unseen Path, treading our road together for a time, without devoting their lives entirely to it. Others do so, but ask for extended breaks from seeking, rejoining your society for a time, before once more taking up the mantle of our order. With the oaths binding our secrets, we are very willing to allow such to a certain degree.”

Harry and Sylina took this in for a few moments, then Harry asked politely, “And the other levels, the other ranks I mean?”

“There remain only two specific named ranks, although there are further levels among the classes among the Seekers and Cartographers. Junior, journeyman, and senior among the

Seekers. Among Cartographers; Learner, Copier, and Topographer. Each sect also elects a Master, to handle internal disputes and training issues. As for the actual ranks, they are called Voice and the Pathfinder.”

Harry noted there was no level among Oathkeepers, and felt that was a good idea, given how many races were involved in the Unseen Path and how quickly or slowly they would learn enough or choose to try and take the plunge and try to rise to Seeker.

“The Pathfinder, myself at present, is the master of Trueshot Lodge, and general organizer. My position allows me to deal with internal conflict, arguments between the sects or, and more often, simple personality conflicts, as well as give out specific directives or orders to members of the order, either singly or in groups. I choose those groups with aid from the Master of the two sects. When I send out a group to complete a mission, a Voice is elevated to lead. The Voice is an ephemeral title when given to the leaders of specific medium to large scale missions, or permanently to an individual who has risen to the role of leader of one of our few permanent lodges outside of Trueshot Lodge.”

At that, Vurg grimaced slightly, as if he had said something he should not have. Both Sylina and Harry noticed, but Sylina didn't say anything, leaving Harry to ask, “Does that mean you have a permanent lodge among the Kaldorei or highborne?”

“No to having one among the Kaldorei. We had one, but no longer. We decided that the understanding we had long since forged with Tyrande and a few other leaders among the Sentinels, like her adopted daughter, was enough. It has been many lifetimes since a druid joined us, alas. We have one among the largest Furbolg tribes in Ashenvale, and used to have a permanent presence that acted like its own tiny tribe among the southern Tauren, but do not at this point. We do still have one among the highborn, though as simple necessity. It takes months to travel from the Broken Isles to the new continent, and that is if you are very, very lucky and very skilled to get past the Maelstrom.”

Harry could tell that the ancient could say more if he had wanted to, or free too, but Harry figured that was something he would be getting used to as his time with the Unseen Path went along. So he didn't question it, instead asking questions about other specific missions of late, asking about if the Unseen Path had any Drogbars currently as Vurg continued to lead them along the hallway, until they came to two rooms set side to side their flaps pulled back and the interior showing signs they had been cleaned in the last hour or less.

They didn't. The Drogbars were extremely standoffish, and not at all interested in exploration beyond their tunnels. But the Unseen Path routinely watched the entrances into the underground kingdom, and there were wards set up to alert them to any Old God influence in the area.

This method of oversight did have some holes in it though, as evinced by Badrinath the black dragon taking over the drogbar by transforming into the likeness of their king. As the black dragon was not Fel-Tainted or Old God Corrupted (enough, at least to set off the wards against such) no one in the Unseen Path even knew that was happening, let alone the growing tensions with the Highmountain clans. This had been a major miss on the Unseen Path's part. While some might have argued that dragons did not fall under the Order's remit, Pathfinder Vurg did not, simply admitting how badly they had missed that problem, and vowing to do better in the future.

But looking at the dozens of similar rooms they had passed, all of a sudden Harry doubted that most were in use. Despite the number of people he had seen back in the main cavern, Harry suspected that Trueshot Lodge was far emptier than it should be. He kept that to himself though, as he was led into his own room, while Sylina was gestured to hers. The young Kaldorei sent him a wink as she went, a piece of body language that her people in his apparently had in common, although it was not one that Harry had seen much before this.

“I will leave the two of you to get settled in and explore if you wish. When you hear the bell, you will be able to follow the noise to our dining hall for the evening meal. After that, you will be tested by our current combat instructors. Tomorrow morning, you will start your day with that training, which will be personalized to your needs or abilities after tonight. After that, a late breakfast will be had, and then the lessons on the history of the Unseen Path, where you will begin to familiarize yourselves with the signs of corruption and Fel magic that we have run into over our history.”

Harry nodded agreeably at all that, and bowed from the waist, as did Sylina. He chuckled at that, waving them off before retracing his steps slowly, leaning as he had been from the start on his staff.

When the Pathfinder was gone, Harry turned to inspect his room. It was a simple six by five room, something like he had once seen in an abbey for monks. If the Unseen Path wanted to instill a sense of ascetic order, that made sense. But like Vurg had said, Harry didn't have to go along with it. He quickly began to pull out from his trunk what he needed, deciding on where to put the runic array to expand the room a little. Not a lot, Harry didn't really need all that much space with access to his trunk, but a little more, enough so that he could bring out his books, set up a bookcase and a place to work with his rune carving kit at the very least without having to put them away in his trunk every night.

A sand bed to work with would be nice, but that can wait, or maybe I should set up an entirely separate workroom? Regardless, that bed doesn't look all that comfortable. I might want to just replace it. Since the bedding question was just a slab of stone with a thin mattress on it, that made sense. Indeed, Harry decided to just remove the mattress, put his runic array stuff on top of the stone slab, and pull out his far better, far more comfortable sleeping bag and put that on the floor. Once the room was expanded, he would add a bookcase and give Quetzal enough room to be comfortable in his mid-size body. Quetzal preferred to sleep in that form or his full size form for some reason.

“You certainly have more stuff than I do,” Sylina said from behind Harry, causing him to look over his shoulder at her as he sat down the last of his chisels. “I keep forgetting that you had that kind of strange space expanding magic.”

“Do you want me to expand your room?” Harry asked, trying hard not to look at eye level currently, which would be with Sylina's belly button and crotch. Currently, Sylina was wearing skintight leggings and a leather jerkin, but for some reason, her jerkin didn't cover everything. Instead, it had openings along the sides and front, the one diamond shaped strip of leather being right over the navel, while the side segments went almost all the way up. Further, Sylina's leggings were so tight, from this close Harry had to question whether or not she was wearing underwear. *She took the time to change, I see.*

“No thanks. As I said, I don’t have a lot of stuff. My bedroll, a single small bag of clothing. There’s even enough room for me to let out Nog.” She gestured behind her with an ear, and Harry tilted his head to look around her thigh to where her giant panther companion was laid out on the floor of her room, with what looked like a largish blanket over it made of cotton and leather.

“Down comforter, made with down from goose feathers,” Sylina supplied Harry’s quizzical expression. “Nog likes being warm, and so do I. It can also be packed down small. Cost me several month’s salary, but it’s worth every silver piece even if I can’t use it out in the field. That thing’s big enough to cover both of us, and even feels nice on nights when I have to go to bed sweaty.”

Something about the way she said that made Harry blink, looking up at her face, wondering if that had been a double entendre or not. As he was pondering that, Sylina moved into his room, sitting down in one of the corners at the end of his sleeping bag, so close that their knees touched, and almost forcing Harry to turn around. “So, have you noticed anything unusual here?”

“You mean besides the arcana-infused objects? Or the feather of Ohn’ahra, a demigod?” Harry retorted, before sobering at Sylina’s deadpan gaze. *She really is much more expressive than Tyrande*, Harry thought, recalling then that Tyrande said that younger Kaldorei were often far more expressive than their elders. “You mean how few people are around?”

“That, and the general disused state of this place. I mean portions of it are still used. That first tunnel we were in, the main cavern. But I looked at some of the offshoots to that cavern, those the order members weren’t moving down. Some of them hadn’t been swept properly, and I could see dust on the floor. And on this floor, we’re practically the only people. I had time to go and explore a bit while you were still setting up, and I only saw one room that looked like it was being lived in currently.”

While a part of him wondered about the propriety of looking into people’s private spaces like that, Harry simply nodded. “The Unseen Path isn’t what it used to be. You heard Vurg, how few people are willing to make the jump from Oathkeeper to Seeker? That, and I assume there just isn’t much for the Unseen Path to do outside of watching the Highborne closely these days.”

“Which is a very good thing given this group’s remit is against dangers from other dimensions,” Quetzal added. Harry had introduced Quetzal to the idea of other dimensions and

“While I agree, I think it goes deeper than that,” Sylina disagreed. “I traveled with Narvae for weeks before we met you. I could tell there was a great deal of self loathing there. I thought at first it was simple survivor’s guilt...”

Harry interrupted her with a harsh laugh, shaking his head. “There is nothing **simple** about survivor’s guilt. Trust me. I know.”

Sylina paused, looking at Harry thoughtfully, then nodding in apology. “Sorry Harry, I sometimes forget your whole... backstory, if you know what I mean. That you’re not from Azeroth originally, and had lived a whole life before coming here.” She then smirked slightly, leaning forward to poke him in the chest, giving Harry a very good look down her shirt at her admittedly small chest. “I can still remember how short you were when we first met. Now you are what, your people’s equivalent of a young man?”

“Just on the cusp, in a very unusual set of years we call the teenage years. For my folk these years are defined by the mind and body not always being in agreement about anything as well as continued maturity in both areas that sometimes take us in odd places.” Harry replied, pulling his eyes up to her face with some difficulty. The days they’d spent since first meeting had not been long enough for Harry to get used to being around a woman who was what he could call legitimately attractive to him. Heck, Harry still had a few dreams of the two harpies he had seen making out before the ambush, it had been so long since he had female companionship whose features he could appreciate.

If Sylina noticed Harry’s wandering eyes, she didn’t comment, simply snickering at his words. “Yeah, we have that as well for the first hundred years or so. It varies, but a hundred years is the norm. After we hit a hundred and forty, we’re considered adults, and by that point, most of us have had enough general education to understand where we want to go with our lives.” She shook her head then returned to the previous topic, leaning back against the inner wall of Harry’s small room. “Anyway, like I said, at first, I thought it was survivor’s guilt. But it wasn’t. He’s not the only one who feels it. I could tell by Vurg’s body language he’s wrestling with some deep guilt as well, and while I’m no expert in Furbolg body language, the group that we saw earlier seemed subdued in the extreme to what I know.”

Harry thought about it for a moment, then shrugged. “It could be just like I said, not enough people signing up, knowing that the order is in decline. But you’re right, there might be something more there. I think I saw a flash of both appreciation and guilt when the ancient Furblog first gestured us towards the feather, and earlier when he spoke of Arien for some reason. But I’m not going to speculate on what’s going on without more data.”

“You’re no fun,” Sylina bemoaned, before shrugging her shoulders. “Still you have a point. That could be a minor mystery rather than anything important, and we’ve got other things we might need to be doing here.”

She stood, her movements lithe, almost catlike, and then stretched in place, her chest thrusting out in a way that in a human Harry would have thought was deliberate. As it was, despite the time he spent traveling with Tyrande, and then sailing with Sylina and the other sentinels, including her friend Berena, he didn’t have a handle on either Kaldorei body language or society to know if a Kaldorei woman would do such a thing.

I suspect the answer is yes in at least one case, right now, but I have to wonder why Sylina’s doing it. I don’t mind obviously, I love the view, but still...

“Come on, let’s see if we can explore a bit before the dinner bell. Unless you want to spend your time here doing whatever it is you, what did you call yourself, a wizard? Whatever it is wizards do in their rooms on their own,” Sylina taunted.

“He would not be on his own, I would be here with him,” Quetzal said, from where he had been shrunk down to take up one of the corners of the small room for now. “And besides, what could be more important than setting up our little den here?”

“Exploring an ancient fortress that was created by Taruen, Dragons, Kaldorei, Furbolgs and highborn,” Harry answered instantly, getting to his own feet and nodding. Expanding his room could come later after he saw everything else the Trueshot Lodge had to offer Oathkeepers.

The two of them spent the rest of that afternoon walking and talking in quiet tones throughout the Lodge. It was a warden, to be certain, but it was one that gave off a feeling as if you were within a library or an abbey. A place that demanded a certain quiet respect, if not solemnity. But as they walked, Sylina and Harry rapidly became aware that Sylina's initial thoughts on how few people there were here in comparison to how many there could be was spot on. They barely saw another person, as they explored, and there was a lot of dust around the place. Few of the (nonmagical, Harry checked) tapestries they passed looked well cared for, and in many areas the lamps had been allowed to go out.

Two floors down, they found what looked like a series of armories, each devoted to one type of weapon. One had blunt weapons like hammers, staffs or maces, another swords, daggers and so forth of various varieties, including one that Harry had to look at several times, having never seen a whip that had metal spikes sticking out of it in various places. Sylina took one look at it and shivered a bit, rapidly moving on. "That's not a weapon Harry, that's a trophy. Those kinds of whips were used by satyrs and lesser demons during the war of the ancients, I've seen them depicted in our history scrolls."

Harry grimaced at that, and they quickly headed into the next armory. This one was for ranged weaponry, and Sylina lost herself for a time testing out various bows, then finding a series of daggers weighted for throwing, a weapon she had never used, but which she said Narvae had apparently used several times while they were traveling together.

For his part, Harry looked at the throwing daggers with some interest. "What are you thinking?"

"I'm thinking about space, and the fact that an arrow is too thin and circular an object to write a rune on. Runes for the most part have to be on a solid flat surface. I tried to bend them on a cylinder, and they just didn't work. But I think if I tried hard enough, and could find a tool small enough, I could etch something on a dagger. It would still be limited, and metal's not nearly as good as stone when it comes to runes, but it could be possible. And throwing a dagger and having it hit with all the impact of a giant's fist would be an interesting trick."

He was going to say cannonball, but Sylina would not have gotten the reference. Kaldorei did not use gunpowder weaponry. No one on this world did yet.

"Or maybe controlling where it goes through gestures?"

Harry snorted that, and used a modified Accio to pick up one of the daggers that Sylina had been looking at, hovering it in the air, before gesturing it around himself in a circle of metal. "I can already do that. Launching it with enough force to actually sink into something is a different story."

"No one likes a show off, wizard," Sylina muttered, both a joke and a warning. Narvae would undoubtedly not have liked Harry using his magic like that so frivolously.

She then picked up another weapon, a flat metal disc, its edges visibly serrated. "At first I thought this was a shield, but it isn't. It's a throwing disc of some kind. This is sillier than even throwing daggers. You would have to have some kind of backup weapon, because you would be losing this one every time you threw it."

"True." He mused, staring at the weapon thoughtfully. "But that **would** give me a lot more space to play with."

Sylina's eyes widened at that, and she sidled up to him, smiling warmly, if covetously. "What would you take in exchange for a weapon like that?"

To her annoyance, Harry didn't even look at her, instead picking up a weapon Sylina recognized as another type of throwing disc, a chakram. His voice was almost analytical as he answered, only his eyes twitching to her body giving Sylina the hint he wasn't as unaffected as he wanted to appear. "Let me get situated here and talk with the Pathfinder about my abilities before I answer that. It wouldn't feel right to charge you for something that I might be doing for free for the rest of the Unseen Path."

"Don't offer that, they'll keep you here for years! And your kind ages too quickly for that to be a good idea." Sylina's teasing tone was back, and she even bumped hips with Harry as she walked past him, heading towards the next room.

Below the armory rooms were several training areas. Considering they both knew they'd spend some time there, neither were interested in much exploration on this floor, and quickly hurried along. Below them were two large communal bathing areas, each situated in different caverns, the water eternally warmed by the same volcanic activity that warmed all of the Highmountain valley. One was for their menfolk, and one for their womenfolk. There was no splitting between the races, although there was a sign outside both areas asking Furbolgs and Tauren politely to use a large strainer after they were done in the baths to remove hairs, which amused Harry. While Tauren did not have shedding issues like Furbolgs, the bearlike sentients more than made up that lack.

Elsewhere on that level there were six spiral ramps leading down into different farming caverns. One specialized in mushrooms, more mushrooms than Harry had yet seen anywhere in one place before, even more than in the Skyhorn tribe's cave farms. The others held a gaggle of chicken, pigs, and even sheep in three of their number. The final two were devoted to some kind of grain, while above, one of the arcana enchanted items of the Unseen Path glowed, giving off the same feeling as a summer day to the cavern.

They began to head upwards again, passing through both the kitchen and the commissary before being above the level of the fortress housing the living quarters. From there, there was a smaller armory, with mostly ranged weapons, and then a series of longer tunnels heading out to the surface of the hill. There they fed into the four guard posts that watched the area around the lodge. Discovering this and not wishing to bother the people on watch, the pair turned away quickly.

Retracing their steps, Sylvania and Harry found another set of stairs leading up to another floor. This one housed what Harry thought of as a library, kind of. It was more a mix of library, study room, and carefully edited museum.

There were numerous small alcoves and bookshelves. The bookshelves were all spread out, and there were numerous tables of various sizes. Among the bookshelves there were few actual books, and he recognized enough of the Kaldorei written language to know most of those had been written by them, but there were numerous scrolls, and several dozen large tapestries. Instead of simply being to add color or show landscape images like elsewhere, these were true murals showing off various battles, starting from the beginning of one to the next in a series almost like a documentary TV series. None were magical, or at least Harry didn't sense

anything arcane-related on them, but they were still amazing, as were the Necrodark and Satyr statues.

The little alcoves consisted of comfortable chairs, the first either had seen in the lodge so far, small hearths, and even blankets occasionally. In the center of the long ovoid-with bumps shaped area was a single large desk with dozens of glass inkwells, many of whom were empty, and sheaths of parchment. It was clear from that and the general upkeep of the area that the library was still heavily in use despite the few people within the entire Trueshot Lodge.

This area was also broken up into at least two parts by a heavy door separating access to the next cavern. Harry cautiously pushed on the door, only to find it would not give, and he gestured to it with a faint frown. "I would wager there are more books and more knowledge of the world past here. You'll note there is only one map in this area." It was of the specific island they were currently on, and it looked amazingly detailed, but only covered the one island. "But we can probably only get past once we've given the next round of Oaths."

"No amount of knowledge would make me jump into that kind of thing so quickly," Sylina said, her ears shifting into the upward then downward position of a negative emotion. "While I am all for fighting the good fight, I'm not about to devote myself to something without thinking things through. I don't think you should either."

"I still think I'll do it actually. But, for now, we seem to have reached the limits of our exploration. Overall, I'm really impressed. Yes, the place is a little rundown in areas, and yes, there should be a lot more people here. But still, this place is a tremendous repository of knowledge," Harry said enthusiastically.

Sylina smiled at that, then offered to help teach Harry how to read the Kaldorei language if he didn't have a spell for it in return for a weapon like he had been talking about. That had Harry thinking about it, but he still repeated his last words, that he would need to talk to the Pathfinder about what he brought to the table before agreeing to anything like that.

As they were working their way back down, the bell sounded, and the two of them hurried down to the commissary they had found earlier.

The commissary was the largest room that either of the two newcomers had seen in Trueshot Lodge outside of the main cavern, which Harry judged also serves as a kind of meditation and quiet contemplation area as well as the place where newcomers would have to give their vows to Ohn'ahra. The commissary itself was a simple stone cavern, with currently two long tables, but with room for at least six more. Given the number of rooms they had seen like their own, Sylina thought that made some sense and said so aloud. "Unless I'm messing up my figures, that means they could feed everyone within the Lodge at every meal time even if this place was full at present."

"Personally, I'm just seeing another clue to add to our supposition that the Unseen Path has fallen on hard times," he said, shaking his head slightly. Because for all the size of this place, there were only eight people visible at the tables, spread out across the tables.

The two of them fell silent as they moved forward, but a second later, Sylina stopped, staring ahead of them at one individual in particular who had come in from one of the other entrances into the dining room. Harry, too, paused and looked at a young elf who had to be the first

highborn he had seen. Or at least, he had to assume that, because while an elf, the youth was no Kaldorei.

The elf in question was young, almost baby-faced in Harry's opinion, it having a noticeable roundness to it, showing he was possibly younger than even Sylina, who by this point thought was the equivalent of a college-aged girl for her folk. In her early two hundreds or late one hundreds in other words. He was trim of frame, showing no muscles on his arms, which were visible given the short-sleeved tunic. His tunic and leggings matched the garb of those around them to a certain degree, being colored in muted greens and browns, with a little splash of color on the interior of his forearm, visible as he raised a hand to run his hand through his hair. Over this the elven man wore a cloak complete with a hood, the hood currently down.

But most surprising was his skin color, which looked white, a pale white, unlike Harry's own tanned skin. Instead of the normal green, dark blue or black hair a Kaldorei would have, long blonde hair fell down to his shoulders. The ends of it showed that the youth had recently gone through a haircut that more resembled a hack and slash job than anything Harry had seen yet on a Kaldorei, although Harry suspected that was a sign of expediency over style. The youth's ears, too, were not like that of a Kaldorei. They didn't look as if they could be as mobile out to the sides as Sylina's or Tyrande's.

As they came closer Harry could make out more detail in the youth's face and body language. Drooping shoulders denoted tiredness, but his eyes constantly shifted around showing some manic emotion. As Harry looked at him, the man seemed to twitch. The combination of his eyes and the overall exhaustion was kind of strange, Harry reflected, before turning aside to head towards the food, gently taking Sylina by the elbow and doing the same to her.

With so much room, all of the members of the Unseen Path that were currently in the Lodge had spread out, including the two Furbolgs apparently on cooking duty. They'd each set up a station on different unused tables, and Sylina and Harry quickly gathered their food. One Furbolg offered a kind of mushroom steak, the other a stew.

The stew was excellent, Harry decided after biting into it, made with some kind of meat that he had yet to try here in this strange world. Although the mushroom steak was interesting, the taste of it wasn't as fascinating as coming up with a mushroom large enough to slice steak portions out of to Harry. *Now, should I put that down to different recipes, or one excellent cook, and one just going through the motions? Regardless, I'm not going to volunteer for that duty anytime soon.*

While Harry did enjoy cooking, he preferred to do it for himself or a small group of friends. Cooking for complete strangers was not his idea of fun, even if in this case strangers just meant people he would hopefully be making friends with in the long term.

Despite having espoused some surprise at the steak and seemingly enjoying it more than Harry, Sylina had trouble taking her eyes off the young Highborne elf, but didn't seem to notice his body language or depressed features. "I know that Vurg said they had a high born here, I don't think I actually believed him until now. Or how pale their skin had become in the centuries since their exile. I had heard that, but..."

"Exactly how did you hear of that?" Harry asked in confusion. He honestly had assumed the only difference between Kaldorei and Highborne would be clothing and maybe things like hair

color. Things that could be impacted by social convention. He hadn't thought the Highborne would look almost like a different race.

"Narvae told me about it," Sylina replied. Her eyes kept on sliding over to the young elf, her face and ears denoting both wariness and interest.

For a moment, Harry had to fight down a surprising little bit of jealousy. Stupid teenage body! None of that, just because Sylina is the only girl around that is in any way attractive or that you can flirt with, is no reason to become so possessive after less than a week in her company. Instead, he said aloud, "I thought you wouldn't have any problems with the highborn. You were born after they left, right?"

"Trying to figure out a girl's age, Harry? But yes, I was, **well** after," Sylina snickered, shaking her head, proving once more to Harry that she really did show a lot more body language than Tyrande had at first. "I'm less than five hundred, and the Exile was near to three thousand years ago."

Harry hid a shudder carefully. *I don't think that I will ever get used to anyone talking about thousands of years so casually. And to think the Unseen Path has survived that long, to say nothing of Kaldorei culture.*

"I don't have any problems with him, or the highborn in general," Sylina continued, pulling Harry back from his musings. "But I do feel a certain amount of wariness, knowing that they re-created their own society and it's still based on arcana and access to it."

Something about the way she said that caused Harry to cock his head thoughtfully to one side, but he couldn't bring it to mind for a moment. The two of them continued to eat, having felt suddenly ravenous the moment the smell of the food hit them when they entered the commissary. Neither noticed the elf man startling, rousing himself as he stopped eating and began looking around, his previously manic eyes locking onto Harry after a few seconds.

Harry had barely taken a half a dozen bites of his stew before someone sat directly beside him, causing him to twitch. Looking over he twitched again as the elf man leaned in, staring at Harry. "You!"

"Yeeees, can I help you, and could you back off please?" Harry said, deciding within a millisecond that blasting this elf away from him with a spell or punching him in the jaw hard enough to break teeth was probably not a good idea, although he was **extremely** put off by how much the elf was invading his personal space. Harry had gotten better about that over the years, but he could still remember being that same young boy who had never had a positive physical interaction with anyone before his friend Hermione had given him his first hug, and neither his time with Tyrande or the Tauren had prepared him for this.

"You..." The young elf said, grabbing Harry's shoulders pulling him entirely around and away from his meal to stare at him face to face on the bench. "You have magic, a source of it. You must share it with me, you must! You must!!!"

"I'm not going to share anything with you besides the back of my hand unless you back off!" Harry growled, as the elf man pushed his face almost directly into Harry's, forcing him to bring a hand to push at the other man's face to get it away as the man looked almost like he was

sniffing or trying to kiss Harry. Harry couldn't tell which and didn't care. "I don't know what you're trying to do, but I'm not gay, so if this is some kind of weird way to try and flirt with me..."

Sylina was watching this with amused interest, making no effort to help from her place across the table, eating her steak and stew as if she was watching a play. "Wait, what does not being happy have to do with anything?"

Harry looked over at her blankly, allowing the man to push back into his personal space as sniffed Harry's hair, his eyes almost blazing for a moment. "Right, I forget, social convention and the usage of the word probably doesn't carry over. In my own language, that means I would be interested in men. I'm not, I hasten to say," he added, pushing the other man away from him, only to have his hand grabbed by the young elf man by both of his own.

"Magic, you have it, magic! Yes!" The elf man babbled, and for the first time, Harry realized that something strange was going on. Not with the young highborne, but inside his own body.

Every time he and the elf man's skin touched, Harry felt some of his magic leaving his body, as if it was being sucked out. It was barely enough room to notice, but it swiftly became clear that more was draining off him with continued contact. "Get off me!" *Damn it, I knew the elves of this world had evolved to absorb magic like with the Well of Eternity, but I didn't think it would be like this! It wasn't when Tyrande and I shook hands or anything else. Or did it and I just didn't notice for various reasons? Regardless, I refuse to be leeched on!*

"No! Please, no, please, magic!" The man babbled, pulling Harry's up hand up to his mouth as if he was going to either kiss it or bite it, Harry wasn't certain which.

Thankfully, he didn't have to find out, as one of the other members of the order moved over, grabbing the elf from behind. Two large hands on either shoulder hefted him to his feet off of the bench and away from Harry, his feet slamming into the table before he was hoisted into the air. "My apologies," the Tauren who had come to Harry's rescue said as he held the elf out to the side. "I did not realize that a High Elf would be able to sense the magic within you, let alone be able to feed off of it."

This Tauren was middle-aged for his people, a few streaks of lighter color slowly working their way into his hair. Currently beardless, he had the look of a Ranger rather than a warrior, being sparer of frame than Tyre or the pure warriors Harry had seen. He had what looked like the scars from some kind of cat running along his forearm, something which, Harry was interested to note, did not break the two brands there, the brands seemingly having just regrown itself out of the scar tissue. His clothing was similar to that of the elf and the other members of the order, brown and green for the most part, able to blend in. But he had a cloak of gray on top of that, and one bright blue feather tucked into his hair along one side of his face, matching his blue eyes, a strange color for a Tauren.

"High Elf? Is that what they call themselves now?" Sylina snorted. "A part of me thinks I should make fun of that. Do they really think they are still so high above the rest of us just because they can use magic?"

"In actuality, few among the highborn are able to manipulate magic," one of the other members of the order said, coming over and stuffing the elf's mouth with some of the stew. "This one is in fact a Ranger among their people, and was recruited by the Voice who heads our small lodge

among them. He cannot actually use magic, but as you can see, that and apparently being addicted to being near a source of magic, are two different things.”

“Which unfortunately is one of the things we wish to discover by hosting young Lathariel among us,” Vurg said, hobbling over himself. Indeed, many of the order members had moved closer to what was going on, some of them even forgetting their food as they did.

Sylina frowned a little frowning. “My people historically have gained our longevity from being close to the Well of Eternity. The original had affected us for generations and the new Well continues to affect us subtly, as does the Aspect’s blessings on Nordrassil, although I cannot recall how at present beyond our longer lives. None of us are addicted to it. Why? I mean, I traveled beyond Ashenvale away from any area affected by the Well of Eternity for several weeks with master Narvae, and I never felt anything like what you say Lathariel is. Nor do the Kaldorei living on this island show any sign of it.”

“Because you are not a magic user, nor have any of your ancestors been. The Unseen Path were greatly concerned about this,” Vurg stated, sighing faintly. “Yes, your folk were born in areas where the original Well of Eternity affected the area around it, but they did not connect to it consciously, they did not reach out to arcane energies within to manipulate them. You see, among the highborn, utilizing arcane energies was not just the reason they set themselves apart from your fellows. It became an addiction, a need for them to use it. I understand from reports that many of the highborn that have been born since their exile can no longer directly utilize arcane energies, but there is still a weakness in them that they must partake in the effects of living near their so-called Sunwell.”

Harry frowned, fitting all this information into what he had already been told, then asked hesitantly, to a background of Lathariel shouting, “So you wished to have one of their people who wished to join the Unseen Path come here to see if they truly were addicted? That sounds somewhat harsh.”

“The High Elves have not taken to sailing much as yet, and although they are a full, well grounded society now, they spread out but slowly. The distance the Sunwell can give aid to the High Elves is indeed still a question. Lathariel volunteered to transfer to Trueshot Lodge, knowing why we wished him to come here,” the Pathfinder answered, shaking his head. “And that decision was not a quick one, it was made over nearly a decade’s worth of correspondence between ourselves and the Voice in Quel’thalas, as well as the pair of people within the High Elf leadership who know of our order.”

That mollified both Harry and Sylina, who had realized what Harry was implying a moment after he finished speaking and the younger Tauren went on. “But we needed to know both if the Sunwell somehow was able to feed a High Elf even while they were far away, and if not, how long they could be away without succumbing to their addiction and beginning to lose all reason.”

“And how long has it been? Harry asked, still frowning. “And what is this Sunwell you speak of?”

“The Sunwell is a re-creation of the Well of Eternity, only shaped and molded by the magic of the high elves into something entirely new,” Vurg admitted, a faint frown on his face. “Voice Tetheri attempted to talk them out of creating it, but Prince Dath’remar Sunstrider refused, knowing his people needed a source of arcane energy. And from what Voice Tetheri wrote

about the journey to the new continents, as well as everything else, I have to say he might have been right on that score. Many hundreds committed suicide without a source of magic.”

Sylina blinked, but before she could ask, Vurg gestured to the elf, who was slowly calming down, but was still twitching his head towards Harry, his eyes locking onto him like a man offering a water bottle in a desert. “The high elves did not become as pale as they are today overnight. The original Highborne who were exiled from the Night Elf community almost instantly began to suffer withdrawal from the arcane energies of the Well of Eternity. As you correctly stated, it is well the Well of Eternity that gives your people the longevity that you possess. For the highborn, it also made them stronger and faster than your fellows, that along with their ability to use arcane consciously was what set them apart from you all for so long. But without a source of arcane, their bodies began to degrade. Today, most high elves are shorter, and physically weaker than Kaldorei are.”

Sylina frowned, opening her mouth to object to that. She had spent a few days among the Kaldorei on the Broken Isles, and knew for a fact they were just as physically strong as she was. Yes, they aged. That was a certainty, all of them admitted to it. Yet that was all.

But Vurg was already shaking his head. “No. As I stated, the original Well gave the highborn greater physical abilities while the highborne were using its magic. Your physical skills and those of your race have nothing to do with magic, only the skill you can accumulate over the length of your lives.”

Master Narvae spoke up now, causing Harry and Sylina both to twitch, the young Kaldorei whirling and cursing under her breath. *At least I'm not the only one who needs to work on my situational awareness.*

Narvae had ensconced himself in one of the corners of the cafeteria, speaking quietly to the other younger Kaldorei man that Harry had seen in the main cavern earlier that day and one of the Furbolgs, whose bulk had hidden both of the Kaldorei from view. “And do not worry yourself about feeling any kind of addiction. Personally, I am uncertain why such has passed on to those highborn children who are unable to use magic, but so long as you yourself have never used it, magical addiction is not something you will have to deal with. Recruiting you was the first time I have stepped into Ashenvale forest in eight hundred years, and yet stopping by once every few thousand years and staying there for a month was enough. I have not felt any kind of addiction nor have I felt the ravages of time.”

“The ravages of beasts and vile creatures, yes,” the other Kaldorei said, reaching up to touch his one scar while glancing at his companions’ far more prolific number of scars. “But the physical impact from being away from Ashenvale, no.”

Harry wondered about that, and thought that perhaps it had something to do with the new Well of Eternity or Nordrassil being blessed by Alexstrasza, the Aspect of Life. Whereas the original had simply been a source of overwhelming magical power, the second Well of Eternity would probably lend itself more to simply aiding the Kaldorei in living longer. *Or was it Nordrassil she blessed? Yes..*” Thanks to his Occlumency, Harry could remember the brief discussions he’d had with Cenarius about Nordrassil and the Well of Eternity. *Yes, it was the tree the Aspects blessed, to keep the Well from affecting the world around it. So would it be those blessings or does the Well still impact the Kaldorei? I didn't ask at the time what the various aspects' blessing did, drat it. Still, I think it wouldn't matter for the purpose of this supposition.*

Mind you, I haven't made any great study of either the Well or the Sunwell, whereas the Unseen Path probably has, at least in the case of the Sunwell. "And I take it the Sunwell is hidden somehow much the same way the Well of Eternity is?"

"No, it is not hidden by the life force of the great tree, Nordrassil. Rather, it is hidden by wards, wards which cover the entire nation, and can be moved as the nation grows," Pathfinder Vurg said, shaking his head. "We of the Unseen Path helped create those wards in conjunction with the mages of the highborn once it was clear our objections to the Sunwell would not sway them."

Harry nodded at that, pleased that even if they had been overruled or ignored, the members of the Unseen Path there had realized that the more important thing was to make certain that the demons could not sense the power of the Sunwell and try to find this planet again. It was good, as it spoke to a certain amount of pragmatism to go with their high lofty ideals. "And how long did it take?"

There both Vurg and the other members of the order winced. "Barely three years. That is... is not a good sign."

Sylina let loose a low hiss in surprise, her ears flicking outward from her head in surprise. "That sounds very bad. Is, is there any way to keep Lathariel away from Harry? Not that that wasn't hilarious to watch, but I wouldn't want Harry or Lathariel to be uncomfortable." The fact she was also obviously feeling sorry for the other young elf went unsaid.

"I believe that Lathariel will be sent back to his people as soon as we can possibly contrive it. That will be the work of nearly five months or more though, considering the distances involved, and how slowly our messages pass back and forth via messenger albatross can move."

"Messenger albatross?" Harry asked slowly, while Sylina blinked.

"It takes a ship months to get from the Broken Isles to the new continent, and that is if the ship is lucky enough to survive the journey. The Maelstrom is always waiting to take the unwary, even with the navigational charts we in the Unseen Path have created over the centuries. It is why even if the Kaldorei wanted to, they could not truly try to expand their influence over the ocean. Similarly, it keeps the raiding giants of the North in check."

The reminder of the giants that he seemed to be a stunted example of upon first meeting any of the locals caused Harry's frown to return redoubled. "I see," was the only thing he could say to that, although he was thinking about the magical devices he had created while among the Skyhorn tribe. *We've yet to find a limit to how far a messenger tube could send something to another messenger tube, but I think that's going to be the first thing I talk to Vurg about when we get down to speaking about my magic and what it might offer the Unseen Path.* "But you do have regular communication with the high elves?"

"Say rather that we have regular communication with two specific families among the ruling nobility among them on a bi-yearly basis along with Voice Tetheri," Narvae chuckled drolly in his corner. "It is not the thing of deep conversations."

"Really?" Sylina scoffed, shaking her head. "They really simply re-created the old 'nobility' idea? Let me guess, all of the noble houses are led by mages."

Vurg didn't reply to that, knowing that to do so would simply raise more friction between Sylina and Lathariel, should they meet again during Lathariel's stay within the Lodge. Instead, he simply kept on going as if she hadn't interrupted. "Those ruling families are aware of the Unseen Path, and that it was our knowledge of wards that allowed them to hide the Sunwell from any demonic detection across the dimensions. One of those members of such a family is a ship captain, and although unwilling to leave his people, or his position as captain, he is more than willing to travel back and forth from the broken Isles to the High Elve nation, mapping out his route and taking time to explore a bit whenever he is able." Vurg shook his head slightly. "I am afraid that desire is going to get him killed one day. The Maelstrom is horribly dangerous. But, that captain would be willing to take Lathariel back with him to his folk."

After that, Vurg abruptly changed the subject back to Lathariel rather than his people. "We will need to have the two of you move rooms, I think. I do not believe that having you and Lathariel living on the same floor of the Lodge is a good idea, Harry."

"For my part, I could probably put up a Notice Me Not array that would affect him, but it would probably affect everyone else too," Harry admitted, frowning thoughtfully. "Excluding a single person from my room would take more time, and a sample of his blood."

Harry thought he would get some odd looks at that, but beyond Sylina simply cocking an ear in surprise, none of the others reacted. That showed either a knowledge of blood magic in general, or a knowledge of wards and blood based wards in specific. Harry was eager to discover which it was.

So the rest of the meal passed uneventfully, and then, Sylina and Harry were escorted out of the cafeteria by the same Tauren who had helped with Lathariel, who introduced himself as Davo Bluefeather.

"Is that really your name, or did you just decide to call yourself that?" Sylina asked, gesturing up to the feather in Bluefeather's hair.

"What deed did you accomplish that allowed you to create your own last name?" Harry interjected, knowing much more about Tauren culture than Sylina did.

Davo laughed, slapping Harry on the shoulder. A slap like that would have sent Harry flying years back, but his time with the Tauren had toughened him up to the point he could take it with barely a grunt. "Yes, you have lived among my folk long enough to know some of our rites haven't you? As Harry knows, but you evidently do not, young Sylina, among my folk, a warrior is allowed to choose his own last name and leave his original family behind to start his if he so wishes. But only so long as he has accomplished something of great merit. And as for me, I did so on my Rite of Courage, coming back with the pelts of a pair of hydras."

Harry blinked at that, then nodded congratulations to the man, who smiled back, before gesturing the two of them to move forward into the training room, one of the many that Harry and Sylina had discovered earlier that day. "For today, we will spar first, to give us all a good idea of your general combat skills and experience. Harry, I understand from speaking with Pathfinder Vurg that you routinely use magic to fight with. I am afraid to ask, but could you refrain from doing so for now? With Lathariel still nearby, he might somehow be able to sense your use of the arcane and come running. We will send him out with Narvae tomorrow, and we can see what your magic is like tomorrow."

“Certainly.” And frankly, if the Unseen Path felt that one Seeker would be enough to fight me when I’m using his magic, they haven’t been told all that much about my abilities.

“Thank you. After sparring, we will work on endurance for the rest of the evening. Endurance, the ability to run or fight for longer than your enemies or to leave your enemies behind is paramount for any member of the Unseen Path, even those Copiers who are assigned work here in Trueshot Lodge. For the start of your time with us here in the Unseen Path, you will be trained as if you were both going to become like the rangers among my folk or among yours, Sylina. Endurance, recognizing the signs of animal and sentient creatures within various types of terrain, hiding yourself from such, and most importantly, leaving no trail behind. Weapons training will be in daggers and bow or the equivalent to start with, expanding later.”

Both Sylina and Harry nodded agreement, understanding that both of them still had a lot to learn in those things. Sylina used a bow and the traditional double-ended swords of her people, but she had to turn her own in, so would need to replace it from among the weapons of the Unseen Path.

The sparring sessions went about as well as Harry could expect. He had learned quite a bit about swordplay, and even when he wasn’t using the Sword of Gryffindor, was a decent hand at it. He was as fast as a snake in terms of his speed, stronger than his appearance belied to most, and even quicker on his feet. But without magic, he couldn’t beat Davo more than the first time, who, after being touched by Harry’s training sword the first few times they exchanged blows, fell back on a defensive style, waiting for Harry to make a mistake. When he did, Davo’s staff swung down, clipping Harry’s leg out from under him. “Excellent. Well done, for a beginner, Harry Potter. You have a good foundation there.”

Sylina in turn found her own strength and speed matched or exceeded by the taller Tauren. She had expected her strength to not really match up, but to see the giant Tauren move almost as lightly as she could on his feet was humbling. Worse, he was far more at home in facing her moon glaive style than Harry’s transfigured ‘European’ style sword, which wasn’t exactly like any of the blades in their armory.

From there, Davo tested them on various weapons. He came away impressed, “As I should be, considering how much of it is a part of your normal Sentinel training,” with Sylina’s ability with bow and arrow. She could also use a crossbow, a weapon favored by the southern Tauren, bolas, and even blow darts well. Throwing daggers was less impressive.

Harry’s wasn’t much. He hadn’t practiced at all with a bow among his time with the Tauren, believing that he would always have his magic as a long-range option. Which was indeed the case, something he quickly pointed out to Davo, who agreed, but added a caveat that made Harry think. “I would still ask you to add some kind of long-range weapon to your arsenal Harry, for the simple reason of if you ever find yourself fighting in an area where your magic is not working. After all, there are wards which completely negate arcane energy in a certain area. Or, if you, specifically, are simply trying to stay hidden.”

Harry frowned, then remembered the throwing daggers that he and Sylina had looked at before. He picked one up now, winking over at Sylina. “Well, in that case, you might have a point. But as for adding them to my regular repertoire, I would seriously have to rune these up if I wanted to use them normally.”

“... While I understand the meaning, that really should not be a term,” Davo muttered, shaking his head.

“Wait until you have your own set of expanded quivers, or just a regular expanded bag. And speaking of things I might introduce the order to, I haven’t noticed any bathrooms around the place, toilets I mean.”

“Outhouses? We have them. Indeed, they are a source of much of the arcana still in use here in TrueshotLodge. There is one on every floor which disintegrates the waste in them. I’ll show them to you later unless you need to go now?” Davo said, causing Harry’s mind to wander for a bit, but he shook his head and under Davos instructions, Harry and Sylina began to train once more in various endurance exercises.

By the time they were both done, both newcomers were so tired they barely registered how they were being escorted back to the rooms. This was somewhat galling to Harry, who thought he was easily in the best shape he had ever been regardless of age thanks to the various exercises he had taken to doing while living among the Tauren. Sylina similarly thought she had been in excellent shape. The Sentinel had trained every night for decades after all.

But their feelings were somewhat mitigated by how Davo performed all of the exercises right alongside them, and then said as they finished that he was impressed.

That did not make the trip back up to their living quarters, which had indeed been moved to the next floor up, any easier though. And although he could not speak for Sylina, Harry was certain afterward he was asleep by the time he fell down onto his sleeping bag on the floor.

The next day, Harry found himself separated from Sylina after the morning meal and Vurg escorted him up to the Pathfinder’s quarters. This was the same five by four meditation cell that most of the others were, but it was very clear that Vurg had lived here for long enough to put his personal stamp on literally everything within. The stone bed was fluffed higher than normal with several mattresses, a carved totem had been placed in two of the corners across from the bed, the work on it intricate, but looked like something that Farstride had worked on himself, not one of the professional carvers Harry had met among the Tauren. It was more colorful, but also less well-carved than the totems Harry was used to.

Instead of having a simple open doorway with a bland brown blanket, the dull brown blanket had been replaced by a woven tapestry depicting a mountain as if viewed by an eagle from the side, an amazing piece of work that Harry had only rarely seen matched among the tribes. Similarly, on the floor near the bed a chair had been placed, a large comfy looking one, but which someone with a bad leg could get in and out of easily with the help of the hard armrests.

Gesturing Harry to sit on the bed, it was into this chair that the Pathfinder settled. “So, Harry, what do you think of the order so far, and what would you be willing to bring to the order? And what would you want and payment for it?”

“Knowledge for knowledge,” Harry answered instantly. “Most importantly, you hinted about knowledge of wards, wards against demons and against the Old Gods Taint. I want access to that. I want to know more about the Sunwell, about your research into it, and about arcana in general. I want knowledge of the world, well beyond what the Highmountain tribe or even the Kaldorei I’ve interacted with knew. I want to eventually travel the world, have enough knowledge to do it, and maybe companions for the road.”

“That is... straightforward enough on your end. But we cannot simply give you that knowledge, even if you do offer your second Oath to the order. Not unless you are willing to take the Oath of Seeker right away, and even then, there would still be secrets kept from you until you rise through the sects.”

Harry leaned forward, his tone firm. “I understand that, but, call it perhaps my merely human impetuous nature, but I would be willing to take that leap right now.”

“But I would not be willing to offer it. You might have passed the test of the murals with flying colors, but you haven’t even worked with us for very long yet. I cannot simply toss over several thousands years worth of tradition for you, Harry,” the ancient Tauren smirked, shaking his head. “No matter how much I want to, considering what I was told by Tyre in the message I received about you. It’s true you created a new type of magical potty?”

Harry laughed at that, wondering how much good that single runic array would garner him. He then looked up as there came a knock on the stone archway to either side of the entrance into Vurg’s room. The Pathfinder spoke word to enter, and the tapestry was shifted aside, revealing two people who had to be the last two members of the Unseen Path currently within Trueshot Lodge. One of them looked like a middle-aged Kaldorei woman, only the second example of that race Harry had seen so far that could be called out of shaper. She had an absent-minded look to her, her fingers splotched with ink, and she looked almost myopically at Harry and Vurg, although she still moved with the preternatural grace of her race despite her dumpy body.

The other was another member of the Kaldorei race, but he looked old, as old Narvae did and for much the same reason. Wounds covered his body, and far more serious ones than in Narvae’s case. He was missing a foot, which was replaced by a wooden stump, one eye was covered by an eyepatch, and there looked like a horrible burn began near his jaw, continuing down under his tunic.

At first looking at him Harry thought that perhaps like Narvae had simply not been able to get back to a healer in time to deal with the damage. Sylina had mentioned that Narvae had been on a long patrol deep into Burning Legion territory, and had needed to hide after being wounded, dealing with the wounds on his own.

As for this Kaldorei, while a druid could not regrow a limb, they could reattach it if it was found in time, and everything else Harry saw was within their ability to heal. But Harry knew from Tyrande that there hadn’t been enough Druids to go around during the War of the Ancients, druidic magic being a very minor, and very looked down on aspect of Kaldorei society before the war began, the members who had turned to its seeming odd reclusive creatures to the majority of their culture.

And yet, Harry could tell that at least a few of the wounds that he had were not wounds that had been caused during the battle. No, the missing fingers, they had been burned off, like someone tortured by a Death Eater. The missing tip to his ear, that looked far too... Surgical to have come from battle at any point.

“Harry, be known to Master Cartographer Milifiana Barchfoot, and Master Seeker Martuc Oakleaf.”

“I understand that you had an initial recommendation to us from Lady Tyrande?” Martuc said, staring down at Harry thoughtfully. “I am sorry I missed your Oath yesterday, my duties had me

working with this one late into the night updating our map of one of the nearby isles. Still, I also spoke to Narvae, and he said you have already passed the trial of the murals?”

“I did, and think nothing of missing my initiation,” Harry waved that off, uncaring of whether that was supposed to be important or not. “Are you acquainted with Tyrande?”

“Lady Tyrande,” Martuc emphasized the honorific, “and no. I did not meet her during the war, although I fought alongside her adopted daughter Shandris Feathermoon during the War of the Satyrs. But it was Malfurion, though, who rescued me from the prison of Kil’jaeden and healed my wounds after I was captured by the demons on a patrol.”

Harry nodded at that, having heard that name before from Cenarius. Kil’jaeden had been one of the chief generals of the Burning Legion. But Vurg pulled them back on topic before Harry could ask more questions about the War of the Ancients, a topic he had a lot of knowledge of, but not much specific knowledge about. He could describe the various campaigns that Tyrande and Cenarius had told him about, but neither had ever spoken deeply about the nature of the demons in particular, or their various types, saying those specific memories were too dark to wish to share. Considering that he had his own dark memories, Harry hadn’t pushed before this.

“Tell me, Harry, do you have any examples of your runic arrays on you?”

“I do, although I have more back in my room.” Harry gestured to his side where a small pouch rested. “This is an expanded pouch, it has far more room inside than it should.” A simple demonstration showed this to be fact, and all three of the old members of the Unseen Path stared at it.

“If he can create things like that he has my vote,” Milifiana said firmly. “I can’t sense anything from it, and I would wager that even were he using it outside of Trueshot Lodge I wouldn’t be able to.”

“I have been told that single runic arrays like this are utterly invisible since they use nature magic, the background magic ambience, of the world to power themselves, they simply disappear into it in most places,” Harry explained.

“That makes a great deal of sense,” Martuc said, frowning pensively, while Vurg tugged at his beard, nodding his head.

“It does, but Harry wants information in turn.”

Harry repeated his earlier words, and this time Milifiana shook her head just as firmly as before but in the negative. “No. Not until he takes the Seeker oath at least. I would be willing to share our simple maps with him, but not our warding knowledge. That is some of the most important knowledge we have, and considering how we developed the wards in the first place, who is to say that someone interested in bypassing them could not do so with that knowledge?”

“The maps would be a perfect place to start,” Harry spoke up before Martuc could add in any words. “Say, a few things to help the Order in general for access to maps of the Broken Isles for now, and I can work on individual rune enhanced weaponry for different individuals like Sylina or Bluefeather in return for items and trade from them rather than selling to the entire order.”

“What are you thinking about offering the order as a whole?”

“Communication tubes to start with, and as master Vurg already knows about, potties.” Harry’s use of that term caused Milifiana to wrinkle her brows, and Martuc to scoff, but both of their expressions lifted as Harry explained what they meant. “While neither of us might have as much trouble to get around as Pathfinder Vurg, that sounds like an amazingly good idea. And what is a communication tube?”

Once Harry explained that, all three of his listeners were amazed. This sounded like a far more prosaic, yet useful use of arcane than anything they’d heard of, even the two Kaldorei, who could remember the time of the Empire. Using magic like that in a way that would help **everyone** rather than simply themselves, was simply not something the highborn would do. Communicate with one another over long distances, yes. Design a magical mirror or something similar that could be used by other magic users? Possibly. Such items had been known to be used by the highborn. Create a runic device that **anyone** could use to do the same? No. That, and the compactness of the item, the small size of it was amazing.

“That’s not all I can offer the Order. Protection arrays that are far more useful on a day to day basis than your wards against the influence of the Old Gods or demonic senses, warming arrays, a few other ideas. Expanded pouches obviously, and rune enhanced weaponry. I haven’t really delved into that aspect of ruins much yet, I’ve kind of been set for weapons for a while, but it could be fascinating to experiment.” *Come to think of it, I didn’t tell Sylina I hadn’t worked on runic arrays for weapons. Oh well, it shouldn’t be too hard... and that is another phrase I will never say aloud.*

“And what would you like in return for a warming charm then?” Martuc asked, shaking his head.

Vurg also asked about that, gesturing to himself and Martuc saying that, “Old bones or old wounds, the cold bothers us both at night, despite the best comforters we can devise.”

“For something like that? Again, more knowledge. What did you do during the war, what kind of demons did you personally fight? What are their weaknesses?”

“War stories? Like those told around the fire?” Vurg chuckled, shaking his head. “That I think is another sign of the time you spent with my folk. And yet, it sounds like a grand idea. Put one of these runic arrays up here in my room now, and I will tell you some of my tales. If you tell us some of yours in turn.”

Knowing now that the debate about what he could offer the order was done, as well as haggling for the moment, Harry agreed readily enough, and for much of the rest of the morning, he, Martuc, and Vurg exchanged stories about their various pasts. It felt good in a way, not just to talk about his past life to someone who had seen war like Martuc had, but to hear similar tales in turn. By the time the second day was over, Harry felt he could call Martuc and Vurg at least friends.

Scene break

Later that day, Tricky returned at last. And of course, it had to live up to the name Harry had given the tiny firefly-like elemental in how it did so.

Harry looked up from where he had just been tossed onto his rear by Davo at a commotion near the entrance into the training area they were currently using. Sylina looked up from where she had been groaning in not at all exaggerated pain as Davo backed away, and Harry rolled to the

side, pushing himself around to face in the direction of the commotion, bringing up one hand to face towards the doorway like his hand was a loaded weapon only to watch as his tiny fire elemental zoomed through the room's entrance, followed by a Furbolg and Martuc.

"Get back here you!" the old dark elf bellowed, showing more emotion than nearly any Kaldorei had in Harry's presence before, matched only by the time Tyrande had collapsed to her knees laughing thanks to a joke he had told her. The sign of the still-smoking head of the young Furbolg beside him showed why.

"Oh, no... Tricksy, damn it..."

"Not well behaved, is it?" Davo asked with a chuckle.

"Say rather not behaved at all. I've tried to mitigate the little troublemaker's desires to cause issues, but he likes to perform little tricks all the time regardless," Harry answered, gesturing with the same hand he had been readying a spell with towards the Furbolg.

"Harry, is this the little fire elemental that you sent after the harpies?" Martuc asked, gasping, and leaning down to touch his lower leg where his fake foot began, wincing. The fact that he had been able to run at all with that was surprising in and of itself, and Harry marked another respect point on his tally for Martuc in his head.

"I'm afraid so. Tricksy, what have I told you about setting things on fire?" Harry demanded, crossing his arms and staring at the little elemental, feeling like he was apologizing for a pet who had just peed where it shouldn't.

The tiny fire elemental wasn't intelligent enough to communicate with words, but how it flitted from side to side then up-and-down and around in a circle certainly didn't look as if it was very apologetic. "I am sorry about this, if it helps, I have some burn salve that I bought from the Tauren," Harry apologized to the bearlike being.

When he spoke, the Furbolg's voice was with a surprisingly low timber, not the snarl, growl or deep bass voice that Harry had expected from a creature that looked so much like a bear. "We have such within our stores here anyway. An apology from the elemental would normally be what I demand, but as this one seems stupid, I suppose that is off the table."

Tricksy was about to take umbrage at that, zipping towards the Furbolg, but Harry immobilized it with a quick spell, and then pulled the little creature toward him with an Accio, noting again that despite the fact that they were so against large concentrations of magic, none of the Unseen Path looked askance at his use of his small spells. They had all been told by this point that Harry's magic was powered by an internal source and there was no chance of his magic attracting other dimensional attention, and unlike several of the Kaldorei, didn't hold his use of magic against him, nor did they look down on the overuse of magic in general as the Tauren did. "Enough Tricksy, you are in the wrong here. I am certain that..."

He looked expectantly over at the bear like sentient, who easily supplied his name. "Faar of clan Beestone."

"...Faar did anything that deserved you setting some of his fur on fire like you did. He's not wearing a coat, Tricksy, that's his actual fur, and you hurt him!" Harry admonished.

When he released the fire spirit from his immobilizing spell, the hummingbird-like elemental acted a little contrite, buzzing around far slower than before, and staying well away from the Furbolg. "That's about as far as you're going to get, I'm afraid. He's a fire elemental so there's only so apologetic they can be for setting something on fire."

"That little spirit came down from on high so fast that we barely saw it before he was in front of one of the guard posts, and then moved past Faar here straight into the lodge," Martuc grumbled. "If Trueshot Lodge was on a wartime footing that would have caused it to be torn asunder by some of the enchantments we can raise in times of war. But as it is... I think we overestimated how quickly fire and air elementals can move."

"Only the smallest ones can move that quickly," Davo reminded his elder. He was not a shaman himself, but he knew something about elementals. "Further, most elementals don't get very far from their summoner except on specific missions. For example, I know several of the Rivermane tribe have Water Elementals on constant duty inside the rivers near their home, keeping dangerous water predators away from the areas where the tribe bathes or swims."

Of all the tribes of the Highmountain clan, only the Rivermane tribe habitually swam. Considering how heavy a normal Tauren was, that simply made sense in Harry's mind. It would be all too easy to imagine someone, even divested of armor or weapons, of a normal adult Tauren's size sinking. He could still remember the shock he felt when seeing Tessa dive into the water with all the assurance of a born swimmer during his time with that tribe years back.

"Ah, but I did send Tricksy on a specific mission." In fact, now that he was looking at the little fire elemental more closely and not dealing with the aftereffects of its latest little trick, Harry could tell that Tricksy was wavering around the edges, almost as if the elemental stuff that made up the little creature was close to being burnt out entirely.

With a thought, Harry conjured a flame into his hand, holding it out to Tricksy, who dove into it, gleefully sucking up both Harry's magic and the power from the flames themselves. The feeling was somewhat like what Lathariel had created when he touched Harry, but Harry didn't object to it this time.

Harry knew that his magic and the fire wasn't really a one to one replacement for going back to the fire elemental plane, but it would sustain the little creature for now. "And since that mission was to discover where the harpies Narvae, myself and Sylina fought were hiding, and it's taken him so long, I suggest that we take a break to get to that."

"Certainly. I can go back to tossing you and Sylina around the training area later," Davo agreed easily, a twinkle in his blue eyes.

Harry grumbled a bit at that, but soon, most of the members of Unseen Path currently within Trueshot Lodge were gathered around a table in the library, one of the larger ones, with Milifiana rolling out a large map of the Broken Isles. The only ones missing were four on duty at the guard posts on the outer shell

Situating themselves so that all of them could see still took some doing despite the size of the table and the map. Harry found himself smiling at the good-natured grumbling and elbow jostling that was going on among the various species that made up the Unseen Path. For all that there seemed a kind of pallor on Trueshot Lodge, a hint of long simmering guilt and sadness perhaps, there was also a camaraderie here that transcended race, which Harry was happy to be part of.

Sylina's also seemed to enjoy it, cheerfully agreeing to climb up onto one of the Furbolg's backs and perch there to look over the larger sentient's shoulder at the map.

Milifiana carefully set down a quill, some paper, and a compass and sextant, both of which looked to have been created by master craftsmen. For a moment the needle shifted on the compass, then righted itself, pointing directly north, and Milifiana looked up from where she had been fiddling with the map, looking at Tricksy, who was riding in Harry's palm at the moment, sitting there for all the world like a normal hummingbird, rather than one that was made entirely of fire. She gestured down to the map, which clearly showed the small Valley where Trueshot Lodge was located in the massive mountains that made up the majority of this island.

"Now, Harry, if you could ask your spirit to show us the route it took and where it stopped?"

Trixy zoomed forward from Harry's hand, which was still gently on fire, moving over the map, until it hovered directly over true shot lodge, then shooting towards the side, north by northeast by the compass. Milifiana marked that down on her piece of parchment, looking at small notations on the map that Harry could barely see, then asked politely, "Did you go so far as to see the ocean? The big body of water?"

Actually, at that point, that was a bit of a misnomer. The map clearly showed that the next island in that direction might well be visible from the shore of this one, although again calling it a shore would not be accurate at all. Cliff face would be probably more appropriate going by the map, which showed that the mountain range stretched entirely to the edge of the island in that direction.

But to everyone's surprise, Tricksy then shifted direction, zooming down from where it had been hovering over the map as if tracing along the edge of the mountains downwards, and then seemed to circle an area of the map before going back to his original position in the mountain range, circling that area again. "Now, that could mean that they stopped along the route?" Harry murmured aloud.

To that obvious question, Tricksy bobbed in the air. For all that the little creature couldn't speak, and really wasn't all that intelligent in comparison to the more Elvish like (Harry would have used the term humanlike obviously, except his species was very much not the majority here) elementals, he was still bright enough to answer specific questions in at least a yes or no format that he and Harry had come up with early on. Up and down in the air meant yes, side-to-side no.

"So they stopped here and then headed down through the mountains to a lower area," Milifiana mused. She looked at the map, marked down the longitude and latitude, and then stood up, moving through the crowd, before coming back with two more maps, which showed the area where Tricksy had first stopped, and then the second area in far greater detail, proving what Pathfinder Vurg had told Harry and Sylina when he had mentioned about the various duties of the Cartographers: that they had maps of the Broken Isles that were both accurate and far more detailed than anyone else.

The first map showed a broken mountain face, with a few discerning features in the form of caves, large pillars of stone and rock whose shapes had stood out to the Cartographers who had made the map. Judging by the notations on the map, the height of various formations, the steepness shown in the gradient, and some other things of that nature, the Cartographer shook her head. "This place will be difficult in the extreme to attack. I remember going there myself

once, I was only a Copier at the time... around five hundred and twenty years ago, I think, but some of these formations, you don't forget shapes like that."

"We would be waiting for Feldrel to return in any event," Vurg stated, shaking his head. Harry and Sylina looked at him in confusion, but Martuc was the one who spoke up, explaining that Feldrel, another Tauren, was actually one of the Seekers who was most expert in traveling through the high ranges of the mountain. And routinely did so for fun.

Right now, Feldrel was on a mission with a Copier who was updating the maps of the island's southern shore which had apparently been hit a few weeks back by a major tsunami, something that routinely hammered the Broken Isles from every side. Open ocean weather on this planet was extreme thanks to the Maelstrom, and over the ages, whole islands had been drowned, or raised anew from out of the ocean.

Harry nodded, thoughtfully, thinking of any other questions to ask Tricksy, and curious about the second place that Tricksy had marked out on the map. "Tricksy, is the first place you stopped over the map the place where the harpies have built nests?"

Tricksy bobbed up and down in the yes motion, and Harry moved on, tapping the second map Milifiana had with a finger before her hiss of annoyance caused him to raise his hand hurriedly away. That map showed another segment of the island in greater detail than the larger map could, a valley that apparently led down into the jungles that composed the rest of the island, such as it was. Harry was astonished to see the scale of it, how much of the island was taken by the Highmountain mountain range, and somewhat amused by that as the fact that none of the other mountains in the range had any names. On a human map they certainly would, but here, the entire range was simply Highmountain. *Far too descriptive and far too accurate for me to want to quibble with.*

"Tricksy, is this another base?" This time, Tricksy zips from side to side indicating no and Harry went on. "Did you see large bands of harpies coming and going from the base to this place?" That elicited a yes response, and Harry asked if there was a sign that the harpies had set up any kind of stop over there. Again the answer was yes, and more than one of the order members grumbled, realizing that even if they were able to attack and wipe out the harpies in the main camp, there would still be possibly more in the valley. They would have to attack both, and make certain that no word of the first attack reached either the hunters or the main nest. If it did, they would scatter, or worse, dig in and be ready for a fight in terrain that distinctly favored the flying harpies.

"Our plans do not change. We still will wait for Feldrel to return. But we will instead split our attack. I will take counsel with master Martuc and Milifiana on this, and will determine who should go on which assault," Vurg announced. "Harry, can you ask your little friend how many harpies there were?"

"Numbers are a little tricky, pun intended," Harry admitted. "He doesn't really seem to understand the difference between one, two, many, lots." He looked at Tricksy, then questioned, "Are there a lot of them?"

The way that Tricksy flew up to the roof and then back down was obviously an answer, even though the question hadn't been exactly specific enough for anyone's peace of mind.

“We will send everyone we can within the Order to these attacks then,” Vurg announced firmly. “While that might be a bit overkill, it is better to be safe than to be sorry.”

Milifiana had a few specific questions, asking Tricksy and pointing out areas on the more detailed map, asking if Tricksy had seen harpies here or there at specific points on the map. Tricksy eagerly answered, and Milifiana smiled as she pulled out the other piece of paper she had been working on, having marked down the places. “Give myself and copier Burtol a few hours. Go about your business until then, gentle folk.”

The other members of the Unseen Path all nodded, although Harry and Sylina looked a little confused. Davo however did not educate them, simply hurrying them along back to the training areas, while the rest of the Unseen Path split up, with one of the Seekers taking word to the quartet who were still on duty at the guard posts about what it had been discussed.

Later that day, true to Milifiana’s words, she produced two copies of the detailed map of where the harpies had made their main nest and two for the small valley where they ostensibly went hunting most of the time. But unlike the previous ones, this one was marked out with possible places where nests could be, as well as where lookouts and a possible watchtower could have been built judging by the questions Milifiana had asked Tricksy. Similarly, the one on the valley had far more information about animals, where harpies could perch or hunt and so forth.

Staring at both maps in turn, Sylina shook her head slightly. “Knowledge is power, right. I’ve never been on a campaign, so I never really realized how important maps could be but... This is incredible.”

“Don’t get too complacent,” Davo warned. “While I have no doubt that the geographic features are accurate, the rest are simply guesswork. It’s good to use as a base, but you need to be aware that they could be wrong too. Complacency kills,” he emphasized.

Sylina nodded, looking a little worried. It was only then that Harry realized that, for all the decades she’d spent training as a Sentinel, Sylina hadn’t faced any large-scale battle. She seemed to realize this too, and quickly shook her head at him when he looked at her. “I know I’m new at this, but I’ll pull my own weight, don’t worry.”

Harry nodded, and asked Davo how long it would be before Feldral would return. Unfortunately for those worried about the harpies expanding, it turned out that it would be a full month before he would, and like Vurg, Davo was certain that it would be a very, very bad idea to try and travel through the mountain range without his assistance. “And remember, we have time. The harpies lost their entire party bar two, and they do not make up their numbers as quickly as some of the more unnatural beasts out there.”

So despite the bid of excitement that Tricksy’s arrival had garnered, Harry and Sylina were forced back into training quickly.

Yet despite that, the month they spent waiting for Feldral’s return passed quickly, each day filled with hard training and lessons about the world for both newcomers. On top of this Sylina had more combat training while Harry created several rune-based items for the order. This included three toilets that transported refuse down to the underground farms, two message tubes, three expanded pouches, and a series of enchanted items that Lathariel could drain to stave off his addiction. While Harry had thought it appallingly rude at the time, he wasn’t about to let the

young High Elf suffer if he could help. Just so long as Lathariel never tried to get that close to him ever again.

The training was nothing new to Harry, although the intensity of it, the emphasis on physical training certainly was. True to his word to Harry the day before, Davo, along with Martuc, tested Harry's combat skills when he could use his magic, and then questioned him very closely about his preferred methodology and style. Both felt Harry's sniping, hit and run style with an emphasis on golems and snakes, worked quite well with the style that the Unseen Path used when they were not working with a larger group of allies.

They were less complementary when he came to his physical combat abilities. Much, much less.

While Harry had kept in shape over the past few years, and had Nature magic to help him, he hadn't really fought anyone seriously during his time with them. And when in spars, Harry used his magic. He had trained then and in his previous life to use his physical abilities to back up his magical ones, his magic being his main mode of attack, defense and even movement. But like Davo, Martuc warned Harry that occasionally, he would need to work in areas where using magic might get him found far too quickly. "Troll shamans in particular seem to specialize in being able to discover foreign magic being used in their territories. It's an offshoot of shamanism that we haven't really been able to learn much about, but it exists. Further, there are places in the world where any magic not native to the area, even nature magic, can have unusual effects or simply not work, like within the Maelstrom. You need to be aware of that Harry and be prepared to fight without magic, or even without Quetzal to back you up."

Since this was simply a more pointed example of the phrase 'plan for the best, prepare for the worst', Harry reluctantly agreed.

Beyond his own projects and training, Harry spent his days with Sylina learning more about the Broken Isles from Milifiana, who was teaching him and Sylina about cartography in general. It turned out to be a **lot** of work, but also interesting. It turned out that the Broken Isles was truly a series of islands, an archipelago the density of which varied tremendously across its length. Harry estimated looking at a broad map of the archipelago that combined, it would've been about the size of Australia back in his old world, maybe a bit bigger.

The maps they had to the south showed the archipelago there slowly dying out, and then nothing, just empty ocean as far as these maps were concerned. Harry knew though that that was not in fact the case from conversations with Vurg, but that bit of knowledge was hidden from him for some reason at the moment. Harry got the impression it wasn't just because of the oaths, but because there was a real danger to the south, a sentient kind of danger rather than a bestial one.

To the southeast lay the Maelstrom, the site of the capital of the old Kaldorei empire, a fact that, when Harry first learned of it, begged the question of why the Highmountain tribe had stayed in the area. This segued into an utterly fascinating, if extremely broad, history lesson.

It turned out that historically speaking, the Highmountain tribes had been seen as friends from far before the War of the Ancients with the elven people, and had lived in the mountains there for generations without either race causing trouble for one another. The Highmountain tribes had seemingly stuck to their Valley, so it didn't really matter that they were near the center of

the Empire. Milifiana talked eloquently about that, having actually spoken to several light elves and Tauren who had lived during that time, being more than old enough to remember the war, but having not taken part in any direct conflict during it. She was no warrior, although she was apparently exceptionally adept at moving around unseen.

All this had Harry shaking his head, wondering how any human polity would've dealt with something like that. Poorly, he felt. But then again, humans had a far, far higher rate of growth in terms of numbers than either race. Kaldorei rarely had babies or married before they were two thousand years old or more, and very rarely had more than six or seven over their lifetimes. Whereas Tauren only had three or four over their much shorter lifetimes. It was why even now, thousands of years after the War of the Ancients, the Highmountain clans had yet to spread out over the entirety of their Valley.

They weren't close, frankly. But Harry knew that in that same timeframe, humans would probably have not only spread out throughout the Valley, but started to spill out down into the jungle.

After the war of the ancients, the Highmountain Tauren had simply returned home, only to fight still more wars to keep it, in particular against Deathwing and then, when he was banished by the use of the Hammer of Khaz'goroth, not a decade passed before the servant of the Old Gods, Uul'gyneth rose, attempting to lead corrupted Drogbar against the Highmountain tribe. Here, the history became more in depth, and both Sylina and Harry heard about that war from start to finish over a series of days, and for the first time Harry learned there were different types of servants of the Old gods: the C'Thrax and the lesser N'raqi, creatures brought into life back in the days when the Old Gods had roamed freely. The knowledge that such could be brought back to life was horrifying to Harry and Sylina both, and made Harry even more determined to learn the warding rituals or runes necessary to contain them.

Besides the history lessons, Harry and Sylina learned more about the maelstrom itself, and what it did to navigation. Specifically, it **fucked up** navigation royally.

The maelstrom wasn't just an internal storm or whirlpool. It was a whirlpool the size of a large island, easily larger than the Broken Isles themselves. If you entered it even a little bit beyond the outer edge of the area affected by it, the strongest of ships would be torn asunder by the force of the currents within. Further, arcane energies created extremely strange and unusual phenomena within the area of the Maelstrom, an eternal storm of arcane power that unraveled or remade any magic that anyone attempted within, while also impacting local conditions in a way that Harry had never heard of before.

To get from the Broken Isles or Kalimdor to Quel'Thalas or vice versa, you had to go very far south, adding a couple more months to a journey already several months long to get from one continent to another. Or you needed to successfully hug the edge of the Maelstrom, riding the currents there, bearing the edge of the madness within for weeks on end before you could come out the other side. There was a reason why there was no real communication between even the Unseen Path and their fellows among the High Elves beyond simple distance, although Harry's creation would hopefully mitigate that, if signals could pass through that area, which was something Harry had no idea or way to test.

To the north of the Broken Isles was the continent of Northrend, which Harry had thought before this sounded like a mix of Scandinavia, Norway, and the North Pole. The various maps that

Milifiana was willing to show the two oath keepers didn't show much of the north. She showed them only the southern edge, the shoreline closest to the broken islands. However, what was known was that the Vrykul dominated there, spread out in tribes like the trolls apparently were elsewhere, only even more warlike and aggressive... as well as simply larger in the dimensions of the individuals within the tribe.

There had been an attempt right before the exile to create a small colony of highborn there. But both Harry and Sylina were aware of what happened there. How they had foolishly attacked and then been wiped out by a group of blue dragons after messing with some kind of magic that created a crystal forest.

"No Cartographer has been back there since that disaster," Milifiana admitted, shaking her head. "The land up there is inhospitable at the best of times, but after that, and knowing that the blue dragons have made their home up there, well, we can at least trust them to be aware of the dangers of demonic magic, and be on the lookout for such among the Giants.

"Disappointed you won't get to see your giant cousins?" Sylina teased gently, putting an arm around Harry's shoulders and squeezing to make certain that he knew she was jesting.

"Not at all, actually. From what I've heard of them, I have about as much in common with them as the Danes would the English," Harry drawled, the comment going over both of his listeners' heads in a way that Harry knew what would happen. "Nevermind. Suffice it to say that I have no interest in trying to interact with the Vrykul."

The pair of Oathkeepers also learned a lot about the flora and fauna of the Broken Isles. Both of them. Harry had spent his time with the Highmountain tribes learning about the monsters and creatures of the valley, but nothing about plants. Sylina could move silently, stalk and hunt, yet she didn't know anything about plants that were not native to Ashenvale. She had studied a lot of the plants there, which gave her a leg up, but not as much of one as she had thought.

Over that month, Harry and Sylina also got closer. Offhand touches and hugs segued into outright flirting, both physically and verbally, and even gift giving. Harry gave Sylina a vase of flowers that would keep the water within clean. Sylina helped replace the blanket on his room with a door, even painting it. The flirting hadn't gone so far as kissing, but it came close.

This culminated one evening in a very surprising way for the alternate dimension traveler around three weeks into their time with the Unseen Path in the baths.

There were so few people within the Order at the moment, that Harry routinely had the male portion of the bathing area to himself unless Davo decided to join him after Harry had surprised him by getting a hit in. Because of this, he had taken to just soaking in the water for a while before the evening meal, enjoying the heat on his body and sore muscles. Quetzal sometimes joined him for this, also enjoying the hot water, but today he had left true shot Lodge to go hunting in his medium-sized form, and Harry didn't expect him to be back until nighttime.

It was thus with some surprise that Harry heard the door to the bathing area opening, and he looked up, surprise segueing into shock as Sylina stepped inside. Her body was draped in a long towel, concealing her clementine-sized chest and nether regions, but little else. The curve of her chest covered by the white towel set her light purple skin to amazing contrast, while below, her legs were perfect, without blemish, muscled like a sprinter, with thin but well muscled thighs. Her waist was slim as well, reminding Harry of Angelina, the most formidably fit woman

Harry had met in his past life. Her hair was loose falling down her back, and her ears set upright in what Harry knew to be an interested and amused angle, supplementing the smile on her face and the gleam in her light yellow eyes as she took in Harry, laying out in the baths.

“... I think you might have read the sign wrong, Sylina...” Harry said slowly, not wanting to presume. *But is there really any other way I can take her walking in like this?*

“Really? That’s the best you can come up with?” Sylina chortled, stepping forward into the baths, down the small stairs leading deeper, and then, as her towels soaked and stuck to her skin, paddling the few body lengths over to the corner where Harry sat on a small underhang. “I rather think that I am right where I want to be.”

“I rather think you’re almost to where I want you to be as well,” Harry said, keeping his eyes on Sylina’s rather than letting them trail down into the water, trying to control himself. But after years of being among the Tauren, the month spent with Sylina had eroded a lot of his already limited self-control, and a certain part of his body was standing at rigid attention right now at even the hint of what lay beneath that towel. “To ask, what does this make us if we cross the line here?”

“Does it have to ‘make us’ anything?” Sylina stopped, gently arranging her body so that she was sitting on Harry’s outstretched legs but far enough away from his crotch so that they weren’t actually touching just yet. “I’m not looking for any long-term commitment, Harry. If I were, I wouldn’t be here with the Order at all. Instead, I’m looking for fun. And I think the two of us could have that fun together.” Sylina let her own eyes travel down Harry’s chest, the muscles there very respectable for someone of his build and age, then further down, where she licked her lips at what was revealed underneath the water. “Lots and lots of fun. Nothing serious, just two friends taking their friendship to the next level, no deeper emotions involved. Okay?”

He wondered very, very briefly what Sylina would do if he said he wasn’t okay with that. Harry had never been one for flings in his life before coming to this world, but he had realized that such would probably be the best way to go about living going forward, unless, as Tyrande had once put it in his hearing, he found a nice, extremely understanding Kaldorei girl. *Well, I found the nice extremely understanding Kaldorei girl, but she’s got thoughts of her own how this ‘romance’ is going to go. And frankly, I’m fine with that.*

Perhaps it was a sign of his body’s immaturity getting to his mind once more. Despite his mastery of the mental arts, certain things still carried over. Perhaps it was because of all the flirting they had done. Or perhaps, his thinking towards relationships had changed in this world already. Regardless, when Sylina leaned in to kiss Harry and instantly opened her mouth, letting her tongue out to duel with his, Harry’s concerns and worries about where this was going faded quickly. By the time his arms were around her, pulling Sylina into him, they were practically nonexistent. And by the time the towel was pulled off and her dark blue nipples freed for his attention, such worries were dead and buried.

A week later, around midmorning, Feldral Rockreach finally returned.

End Chapter

No lemon here guys. I have ALWAYS said that lemons need to be important for character/relationship development and plot. This isn’t. Similarly, Harry and Sylina’s romance isn’t actually all that important in the great scheme of things.

The characters of the Unseen Path will be the main characters along with Harry for the next two arcs. One arc will be action and world building. I decided I needed to split up the segments of the chapter I had posted in the summary, even though I tried very hard not to be bogged down in lessons and so forth. I did really want to build up Trueshot Lodge and the order of the Unseen Path. I hope you all enjoyed this, despite that. As for the second arc, that will be a bit more on the educational side of things, and will let me start time skipping for much longer for the first time in this work. The Harry that comes out of that is going to be armed with a lot more in terms of knowledge and tricks against the Old Gods and Burning Legion. Which being Harry, he will turn on their heads.

I have also been aware that the chapter numbers for this fic are still messed up. I will correct this or commit seppuku. Despite this, I hope you all enjoyed this.