



# SEASON OF CHANGES

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A COLLECTION OF STORIES AND ART FROM THE  
PEOPLE OF AZEROTH





## FOREWORD

I want to thank everyone who participated in this first official Issue of the Fanzine Project! World of Warcraft has been a fantastic game for the last twenty years, bringing many people together. Whether for raiding, PvP, roleplay, or casual interactions, there's always been a community aspect to the game that has kept people coming back. Not only that, but the numerous quests, lore, events, expansions, books, comics, and more have stoked people's creativity, and there are so many people who attribute this franchise to helping them develop as artists and writers. Hopefully, this issue will show everyone a small sample of how creative the World of Warcraft fandom can be.

I also want to thank you, the reader, for downloading this issue to read—whether the Full Version, the Lite version, or the E-Reader version. It's people like you who make it all worthwhile and make creating things fun. Hopefully, reading through this will also help inspire you to submit something in the future or start creating things as well.

Lastly, I want to thank Blizzard for supporting and developing World of Warcraft. There aren't many games like it, and even fewer that still see active development. Here's hoping we can make it another five, ten, or even twenty years! Who knows what the following expansions will bring or what the future of this franchise will be.

Overall, I hope you enjoy reading this and discover a new artist or writer you enjoy. Feel free to reach out to me (Rease Stoneheart) or see about commissioning any artists and writers with open commissions. You can even join Discord, where we plan to organize future Fanzine Issues and have a place to hang out. Have fun, and see you in Azeroth!

- Rease Stoneheart

*Rease Stoneheart*



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Thunder pealed through the sky, and the ground shook violently beneath it.

Zaffresa ignored the raging storm above her as she stared ahead. In front of her, lines of her fellow Dracthyr stood as silent and solid as statues, each adorned in metal armor as their wings were ready to take flight. The weight of her helm pushed down on her brows, dragging her chin to her chest, but she stood as firm as ever before, armored in camaraderie.

In front of them, in the distance, the enemy would come. It was a war that had raged for as long as she was alive, and she only knew one thing: Await orders and fight. The cooling rain trickled against her bare scales, and the chill seeped down deeply into her bones, but she didn't let it end the fires of her and her Father's rage.

She gripped her spear in her hand as tightly as she could and felt the tips of her talons dig into her palm as every muscle in her body coiled like a spring, ready to strike. The adrenaline that rushed through her was intoxicating, and she imagined how beautiful her Weyrn would be when they took to flight to charge at the enemy. For a moment, she couldn't tell what the worst feeling was - the waiting, the battering rain, or the focused thunder and lightning above.

Suddenly, the sky opened up, and the clouds parted wide. A cry came out from the front of the line, and Zaffresa looked up towards the yawning sky and squinted, seeing something dark against the gray clouds. Suddenly, she raised her spear, unfurled wings, and then - she opened her eyes, and there she was, back in Stormwind just as the rain started to let up. With a shiver, she felt the goosebumps roll up along her shoulders and back, and tried her best to wipe the rain off her face. How long had she been sitting there, staring up at the sky? A few minutes? An hour? Longer? There was no way for her to tell, but she turned to look at her children around her and saw that they were still playing. It made her smile, knowing that she hadn't lost herself in her memories for too long after all.

Several of them - Naya and Tiamat - were busying themselves diving into the Cathedral Squares fountain, fishing for the coppers that people tossed

within. Galtharion stood on the side, yelling that they could get in trouble if one of the priests saw them. Zabik was by her side, taking a little nap before he woke up, and shook himself off like a cat before he took flight.

"Mama, are you alright?" He asked with concern as he flew with heavy flaps around her. "You had a scary look on your face."

Zaffresa smiled at his concern but reached out to offer her hands to her little whelp. "Oh, I'm alright, little one, don't worry. I was thinking for a little bit." "That's a relief," he said, perching in her hands for a second before he flew up to land atop her head instead, nestling between her horns. "We thought you were mad."

"Mad? Now why would I be mad?" she asked, balancing her head to let him sit. "It's a lovely day out. In fact, I was thinking about what we should get for supper tonight."

The moment she mentioned food, all the eyes turned back to her. The other three in the fountain instantly forgot about their game and jumped with a splash from the fountain to take flight around her. "Food! Food! Food!" they sang in excited unison as they trailed the water around them like raindrops,

*"How long had she been sitting there, staring up at the sky? A few minutes? An hour? Longer?"*

dropping their ill-gotten copper to the ground with a light clinking thud.

Zaffresa instantly realized her mistake but knew she couldn't take it back as she sighed and went to stand—carefully with Zabik atop her head. "Alright, alright. I know all of you are hungry. We've been out here for a while. What do you want to eat?"

"Tacos!" Naya called out as her white and blue form zipped around her wings. "With lots of meat!"

"I want... I want... I want..." Tiamat also chimed in, undecided, rambling off every snack that came to his mind.

However, Galtharion yelled the loudest with his

unusual choice of meal. “Beetle shells, worms, and a donut!”

It was a combination that Zaffresa boggled at, not knowing how she’d get what he wanted. But it was a blessing that she knew they’d eat anything she offered them. That was the one thing she loved about her little whelps the most; they were practically bottomless and ate almost anything if it fit in their little bellies. Some days, it made her worry, but she knew they’d be more selective of their meals and what they chose to eat once they got older. Something that did concern her was that big dragons had big appetites, and she doubted she’d be able to pay it all depending on their personal tastes. However, that was a future Zaffresa problem.

“Alright, alright. I know where we’ll go for some food that I know you’ll love,” she giggled and stretched her body until all the tendons in her arms and legs popped, and her broad, azure-scaled wings flapped out behind her with a flutter. Then we’ll go to our favorite spot and eat. How does that sound?”

They agreed almost in unison but continued to yell out random food combinations as they continually flew around her. Slowly and carefully, Zaffresa walked forward, not wanting to accidentally bump into them mid-flight, as she dug her talons into the cobblestone ground and walked towards the canals.

The Cathedral District was beautiful, though far from her absolute favorite. There was a charm here with its white stones and the people within it. It felt clean, pure, and well-kept, and there was something intriguing about watching the Priests and Paladins do their duties despite the horrors of the world.

Yet it was the mimicry of perfection that she didn’t feel close to. There was always something off about how everyone within acted so pure, despite how she knew that was not the case. She enjoyed her visage and changing her identity on a whim whenever it suited her, but it was by her choice, and she made no qualms as to which version of her she wanted to showcase. There was something deceitful about trying to hide the shadows among the faux perfection.

As she traveled with her chattering entourage of baby dragons in her wake, Zaffresa couldn’t help but think about the broad sense of Stormwind and how unlike it was to the Titan architecture she was born into - namely, that from the Black Dragonflight’s own Naltharion and the almost gaudy reach of spikes, black, and gold.

The closer she came to the watery canal, and the bridge that took her across it to another district of the city - the Trading District at its front - the more she stared at the tops of the building’s reflections in the rippling, rushing waters and thought about how Stormwind itself almost was so different in nearly every corner. None of it was perfect in any way. The Cathedral was, as she said. Old Town was marred in trash and vice. The Dwarven District was covered in oil and industry, the Harbor smelled like salt and fish, and the Mage District’s air made her scales tingle and her Whelps uneasy.

For her, it was apparent where she liked to go the most often: Lions Rest. She knew the history of the place and why it was called that. The former King Varian Wrynn had fought off an army of Demons and died, and the place itself was remade after her own Father - or rather the being he became, known as Deathwing - razed it to the sea and killed all those within it when he flew over as a show of force.

Yet, from its ashes, it had been rebuilt into something beautiful: A memorial for the fallen who came before. Yet it wasn’t a somber place full of sadness. In fact, it became the heart of Stormwind and a hub of activity for its citizens to gather and celebrate. The Gnews happened at the night’s start, and various festivals and shows went on. Bards sang songs, performers put on dances, theater, and fireworks shows, and the outpouring of the weekly markets filled the pathways with customers happy with their purchases.

This was the part of the city that, to Zaffresa, was her favorite. It took something that was full of pain—Deathwing’s destruction, their King’s death, and the loss of so many people to war—and repurposed it as a memorial for what made living life so well worth it. For her, it was a connection to a creator who threw her away and a potential future among people who had known only pain and loss but worked through it for a better future.

As she crossed the bridge with her children, Zaffresa’s mind wandered back to those pains that she had known in the past. Once again, losing herself to the memories she had.

Another flash suddenly came to her, and then she was once more in that old battle from so long ago. She and her fellow Dracthyr took flight, and she remembered the rush of the wind as it whistled past her ears. She tasted the sweetness of fear and rage on her tongue and felt the falling rain spackle across her body as she threw herself down and out of the air in a dive.

The wind continued to rush, and the form of a great Protodrake that crackled with lightning flew furiously beneath her. She pointed her spear, letting the shining tip guide her as all the others flung themselves down atop it.

With a stab, her spear broke through the thick, scaly hide. Her feet dug into its back as she rode atop it between its great wings, and it hellishly screamed as orders from her Commanders rang out in the sky amongst the din of that old war.

Another flash of lightning blinded her, and once again, she was back in the safety of Stormwind. She continued to walk, guided only by her recollections of the city.

Up ahead, a small group of Dracthyr from another Weyrn walked by, excitedly talking among themselves. She didn't recognize who they were, as she had never served beside them, but she nodded and smiled at them all the same. They, in turn, greeted her happily and wished her a good day before they continued on.

It was odd to see her people happy despite all that had happened in the past. Yet this was a welcomed oddity, as they were all initially bred for one thing: Battle. To stand as a vanguard against an impossible enemy that sought to scour Azeroth of the Titanic taint.

Another flash of memories came as she walked beneath the stone archway that led to the Trading District. The shadows fell around her as magical torches illuminated the path ahead. This time, she remembered herself in the testing cave where all the Dracthyr were found wanting. For them, it was do or die beneath the mountains of the world. The stench of failure and death clung thick and musty in the air, and hundreds if not thousands of bones scattered all around her while the ghosts of the damned pursued her.

She prevailed, but at what cost to her soul at the time? Zaffresa was honed to a razor's edge, and there was a time when her emotions and feelings were scrubbed away to be the only thing she thought she could be.

Yet another flash came, this time of another cave from another place far away from the Forgotten Reach.: This time of a young baby whelp forlorn and forgotten. It was scared and battered in the darkness as its body heaved with pain, shivering away the cold. Her emotions at the time cracked, and she remembered kneeling down as she cupped her hands and lifted the fearful child into her hands.

Then, another flash, and she was back in Stormwind again with her hands held out. That same whelp - now bigger with blue and white scales - stared up at her with wide, trusting eyes and a smile.

"Mama, mama! Can we get dessert, too?" Naya asked.

Zaffresa stared at her child and quickly put aside that painful memory of their first meeting. She smiled, rolled her eyes, and shook her scaly head. "Hmmm... Maybe, if all of you behave."

*"She tasted the sweetness of fear and rage on her tongue and felt the falling rain spackle across her body as she threw herself down and out of the air in a dive."*

"Awww," Galtharion quipped, landing on her shoulder. "You always say that when you mean no." "Not always," Zaff replied with a laugh. "It just means that you have to be good, and you might get your treat tonight."

"But we've been good," Tiamat replied above her, hovering above Zaffresa's horns. "We even put the coins back when we were told to,"

She knew that was a lie, but she didn't push it. Coppers were plentiful, and she doubted the Priests and Bishops would be too upset over a handful of loose change on the streets for the Orphans to find. Instead, her focus and attention was on the food she could smell in the air as various stalls opened for those looking to feed the late-night crowds coming out of their places of employment.

Many different food vendors lined up by the Bank and Auction House, calling out to the starving to spend their silver there instead of their competitors. A varied selection was on offer today, and even Zaffresa felt her stomach gurgle and tighten at the numerous aromas that wafted in the air. Meat, cooked vegetables, sweets, cheeses, wines, beers, and juices were handed out and swapped. Cold cuts and colder treats magically kept frozen for the discerning palate. It was all on offer, and the whelps grew more excited as they stared and argued over which stall to visit. In the end, she knew the perfect place to go. A Pandaren woman with a pretty face, a kindly smile, and a cart that occasionally shot off fireworks stood at the ready as she waved at Zaff and the children.

“Welcome to Om Nom Noodles! What can I get you?” she asked with a bow.

Chaos immediately erupted as the whelps stopped, stared at what was on offer, and eagerly turned from arguing among themselves to yelling out their orders to the poor laughing woman beneath them. Sheepishly, Zaffresa smiled back as she tried to calm the whelps down and put in the order for their meal. It consisted of nothing more than a large pile of variously cooked meats set aside in a large bowl for the children to enjoy and a large bowl of noodles and broth for her to eat.

However, an idea came to her as soon as she put in the order and watched the Noodle woman cook. “One last thing before you tell me the total?” Zaffresa asked, hoping it wasn’t too late to have an additional treat requested.

The Pandaren woman turned with a smile, sweat trickling her brow before she nodded and let the Dracthyr woman speak.

“One large order of sugar donuts,” Zaff replied with a bit of growing mischief curling on her draconic lips, pointing out the dessert on the menu. “Small enough for little kids. I think they’ve been perfectly well-



ART BY ZAFFRESA

behaved today.”

The Whelps cheered now, and their excitement blossomed even more as Zaff tried to keep them from flying around and knocking the poor woman’s utensils and decorations aside as they giddily giggled and raced each other in large circles above the stall. Zaffresa paid the silver owed, took several goodies in her hand, and stepped aside for the line behind her before she smiled at her children.

“Alright, kids. What do you say we go to our favorite spot and people-watch for a bit while we eat?” she called out to them.

She didn’t wait for their response. She knew the answer already. With a laugh, she walked with her circling brood and took the next tunnel to the canals that connected from the Trade District to the Magical one, but walked along the water’s edge past where the Stockades and the newly erected (At least new to her) Trading Post was.

*It was funny for her how it took thousands of years to get something that made her feel good and complete.*

Ignoring the goods offered there, she turned again to the water and the city as the sun started to dip on the horizon.

It was funny for her how it took thousands of years to get something that made her feel good and complete. One last flash of her memories jolted into her senses, taking her back to the gloam from where she was imprisoned. She and her Weyrn were gathered and forced to be frozen and imprisoned. Locked away and forgotten by a Father who deemed them a failure. Her last memory of that time was staring out at the others around her as they all tried in vain to escape the fate that was coming. Naltharions’s weapons were locked away, never to see the light of day again. And yet here she was, back in that light, no longer forlorn, forgotten, and caged in darkness. Her senses returned to the here and now in Stormwind once more, where she stood above the ledge leading down towards Lions Rest proper. The people of the city started to gather as the reporters for the Gnews made their way to their standing positions. The hustle and bustle of dozens of voices laughing, cursing, arguing, debating, and catching up rang out in a welcoming cacophony that still made her scales stand on end when she listened.

In the distance, she saw a flash of white fur and a

grinning face, and she couldn't help but smile as well. Dinner tonight would be exciting, at least between the reports and more that would come.

Her memories were still there. They defined her and made her the woman she was today. Zaffresa wouldn't trade any of it, but she knew the price she paid for it all. More than anything, she was just glad that now she could define her life and make it better for those who deserved it instead of just being a tool for another.

Once again, she smiled at her children, who happily followed after her. They weren't of her blood but of her soul now, found and no longer lost. She healed them as much as they healed her.

"What do you say I pick the spot today?" she asked, shouldering the food bag in her arms. She knew the company that would come and find her eventually. Without waiting for a response, she stepped towards Lions Rest to take the spot she favored most. Bound and determined to make better memories from here on out.

- END -





ART BY EMMA STUDIOS

## A Small Rusty Ranion

BY EMMA STUDIOS

*"--I wasn't really planning on doing another job, let alone a stealth job or having anything that didn't involve shooting a guy or any little jobs of that sort that wasn't related to the Argents.*

*Now that things were laying low in the Dragon Isles, it meant some Dragonscale Expedition members were comin' home or decided to keep exploring, which meant my kiddo was comin' home and needed his Ma.*

*I think Su-sung can tell I was gettin' tired; she was the one that suggested I go visit else for a bit but insisted I not pick up any jobs. Just slow down a bit, maybe somewhere I hadn't seen for a while...--"*

When Pazi decided to visit Rachet, the town felt small. Any familiar faces she might've remembered from childhood were not around, and any painful memories she might've felt were more like minor migraines or phantom pains that came and went. Rain clouds started rolling in by the time she had

settled down in the Broken Keel tavern with a pint beside her. In a way, she almost had the Tavern all to herself, with very few people here and the comforting pitter-patter of rain and faint thunder in the distance. A hooded goblin-sized figure staggered towards Pazi with his bloody palm on the wood for support to keep him up.

"Hey, think you can spare some coin? I just need something strong, and I'll be outta your hair." Alarms did raise in her mind at first when this goblin man interrupted her alone time. She didn't want to get roped into anything troublesome as he already looked like shit.

"Think you need more than just a drink buddy. Ya need medical attention," she said in annoyance. Who was this stranger, anyway?

Then, the figure lifted his hood to reveal a bruised, battered face with a few cuts and a nasty bump swelling over his left eye. Despite the roughness of his appearance, he looked familiar, and the gears in Pazi's mind started to turn. Once it all clicked in place,

she stared at him with a stunned expression and was met with one in return.

“...ohh my light- Genzi? Brother, is that you?” she stammered, first to break the ice.

“..Pazi?” He eyed her up and down “..you look like shit!”

“I can say the same about you, C'mon, let's get ya to the medical area,” she said, setting aside her drink. “But-”

“Ah bah bah, I don't care, don't pay me back, just move yer ass, c'mon.”

She almost had to drag his stubborn butt to the medical ward when he wasn't moving. It was strange, really. Pazi had rehearsed this idea - this very scenario - in her mind about what she would say and how she would act if she ever came across Genzi or any of her siblings on her travels. Considering their last meeting, she was confident he did the same, judging by his reaction to her and his constant gaping gaze.

*“Considering their last meeting, she was confident he did the same.”*

Once they had reached the ramshackle medical building that served as a hospital in Ratchet, Pazi continued to mend Genzi's cuts and bruises. He didn't talk much about what has he been doing with his life after the house burnt down and everyone was left to fend for themselves.

Instead, he talked about how he kept himself in the shadows away from any War conflicts and whatever business he had was his business alone and rest assured that this 'small crew' that did this to him was his business alone, and likely presumed Genzi was dead when he gave them the slip.

His information about his private life was vague, which gave Pazi some mixed feelings. Then he hit her with the same small string of questions she asked him as she tended to his injuries.

“So, what about ya? Where the hell have you been, especially since...y'know...” He gestured to himself in a circular motion. “Yah look cooked too well done.” Such a quirky choice of words made her chuff and shrug her shoulders. “It wasn't no invention gone wrong if that's what ya thinkin'. Nah, I got them from the Fourth War.”

Genzi grimaced and stared at her for a bit. “Gosh... hey, what bout that one?” he pointed to her cheek. Pazi caresses her scar for a moment with her fingers. “A scuffle with the biggest imp I've ever seen, big as I was, too.”

“Nooooo yah lyin',” Genzi gawped.

Pazi smirked, feeling like she couldn't keep it to herself anymore. She spilled a bit of beans, though still kept it low profile. “I'm serious! It was some illegal fel stuff we had to deal with.”

“With the Horde, I assume?”

Pazi was mid-swig of her drink and gulped quickly to correct him. “Nah, Argents this time, not knighted though,” she pauses for a moment to belch. “Just a contractor.”

It was like whiplash in Genzi's ears, but he didn't seem too surprised. The Rustygears were famous for their ability to adapt, after all, and were Steamweedle goblins at their core, even if Pazi and Genzi had leaned away from the cartel and were free to do as they pleased.

“Hey em, Genzi, have you been hearin' about the stuff Gazlowe has been doing lately?”

“For the cartel?”

“Yeah, and for all us goblins in general. Afta' alot has happened to me these past - I wanna say 3-4 years - it got me thinkin'...” She nervously took another drink and continued. “I thought about maybe wanting to catch up again with family.”

“You wanna Reconnect?” He asked with a puzzled look.

She wasn't sure how to voice her thoughts, only rolling her wrists and making strange gestures with her hands in the vain hope he'd understand. “Not with Ma' or Dad. They can go kick rocks for all I care. You an' I know we don't have to be bound by blood just cuz we're related. I found a family, and I'm sure you have too, or prefer to be alone.”

Then she looked back at him with exasperation burning on her cheeks as she eyed her brother. “Which I totally get.”

Then she leaned back in her chair, letting the words settle on Genzi's thoughts for a bit before she tilted her head and calmly finished. “It don't hurt to reach out, though, right?”

He looked at her with pinched brows and a calm look. Though his large fan-like ears told her he was mulling over what she said. "...Honestly, I thought our reunion was gonna play out differently in my head. Thought you'd be the same as before: a lil' rotten brat." She laughed. "We were in a tiny ass house and doin' work for Ma and Dad; of course, we're gonna bite each other's head off."

"Uh huh, I still have that scar from when you bit my arm." He said, pulling up his other sleeve to show teeth marks buried in his green flesh.

"That's because you were tryin' takin' my sloppy joes," she said, scrunching her nose.

"Was it even worth it?" He snickered.

She held that childish grudge for a moment but just shook her head with a chuckle. "No, they were shit." Then he chuckled alongside her. It felt right to Pazi.

"But, in all seriousness, what's the catch? Are ya in debt or something? Need somethin' from me?"

"There is no catch. I ain't asking for money or a favor, just a free offer to keep in touch sometime. I mean, we aren't tied to our parents anymore, or even act like them, unless I could be wrong about ya."

"Nah. I ain't nothin' like Ma or Dad. I may do side hustles like he used to to get by," He shrugged. "But, at least I'm not dumb about it."

Pazi nods slowly. "I will also say this: I live around Pandaria, so we will eat good next time you wanna hang out. Ain't no sloppy joes there."

"No kidding?" Genzi said, perking his ears. "Aight, that's impressive. Anythin' else I should be aware of?" "You have a nephew." She grinned

He perked up in shock. "Oh shit, really?"

Then she pulled out her wallet and showed him a recent S.E.L.F.I.E Cam picture she had of him, showing how he looked while participating in the Dragonscale Jr. Expedition in the Waking Shore.

"He's bout eight, I think. He's gonna be nine in Winter's Veil this year."

"Gods, he's got your eyes an' nose. Looks bright too," He quietly said as he handed the picture back.

"He's got both me an' his Dad's brains and hearts."

Nana Su and I are all he's got right now, but he's having the best life I can give him. Better than I ever had growin' up."

*"She let the silence settle between them for a moment, feeling that he was unraveling the fact that she had done and seen so much"*

Genzi quieted himself to a guilty silence at her last words and looked away. She let the silence settle between them for a moment, feeling that he was unraveling the fact that she had done and seen so much in the years they hadn't seen one another. It was apparent - or at least she hoped it was - that she cared for her kid and tried to be a better Mother than what she and Genzi had.

But then he looked back at her with a softer expression and watery eyes that he wiped with the side of his hand.

"Listen. I still got some stuff I gotta deal with. Means I might disappear for a while again. But I wanna take ya up on that offer when I pop back up. Just don't want anyone following me for a bit."

"Of course. What ya say we meet up somewhere in Pandaria where I actually live. Ya know, for safety reasons. I'm thinkin' Misty Taverns."

He agreed with a smile, and then they returned to the Tavern to chat into the night with another round of ale on his tab. There was a bit of uncertainty still in the air between them, unsure of how this would go. Though the location was vague, the future murky, and the threat of history repeating itself, it was still a chance at something better for the future. In the end, that's all that mattered to Pazi: A chance and a change.

- Eηθ -

# About the Author

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Emma Studios - Writer, Artist

*Emma has been an intermediate role player who started playing*

*World of Warcraft during the pre-launch of Legion and has been a part of the Moon Guard community ever since. She's enjoyed exploring different mediums, from drawing cartoons and art dolls to painting dinosaurs, puffles, comic strips, figure drawing, abstract painting, and finally, writing. Currently, she's still working on her first novel called Ghosts of Brightwater. You can find her artwork at <https://emmaschuler.com/> if you're curious!*



# One More Camping Trip

BY REASE  
STONEHEART

Vixelda continued to lead the way up along the hilly path. The tall grass surrounded her like a curtain, but every time she shuffled through and flattened it beneath her pawed feet, the smell of wild grass and flowers filled the air till it became sickly sweet.

This was a part of nature she enjoyed most whenever she foraged, path found, and went on alone. The feel of long silky grass between her clawed toes, the way it brushed up on her legs and hips as she walked, the kiss of warm wind, and the dazzling array of different flowers gave the world a vibrant beauty that she lacked in her childhood. Back then, all she had known were sands and dusty brown rocks, with the occasional shimmering view of the salty sea. Ever since the world had opened up and she discovered that there was a big world out there to see, she had delighted in going wherever her feet had taken her.

Now? It was the Dragon Isles and the myriad of different biomes that offered so much to sate her curiosity. Gargantuan trees that had been there for eons; ruins that reached into the bones of the earth; hills and mountains that kissed the sky; it all was so new and so interesting that often she wondered if she'd ever see it all in one little Vulperan lifetime! Hearing a gruff, wheezing huff behind her that sounded tired and ragged, she perked up her non-shorn ear and turned back to spy the man lagging behind. He was a large Worgen man with snow-white fur, a heavy fluffy tail behind, and bright blue eyes. His handsome face was haggard with fatigue, and his bright tongue lopped from between his wolfish muzzle as he struggled and walked with an awkward stilt.

A smirk formed along her little fox-like muzzle as she turned upon the tips of her digitigrade feet and faced him fully. Her eyes peered at him with amusement that danced along her face as she silhouetted him against the backdrop of the distant plains behind him and the miles of hilly terrain they had clambered up.

"Don't tell me you're getting tired now," she teasingly laughed. "You're always telling me how prideful you are about your stamina. One mountain slows you down?"

He huffed and puffed as he crawled up the stony pass, trailing after the flattened grass she made. His tongue quickly darted back between his lips with a pant, and he couldn't help but give a smirk before he

knelt to her shorter level. "Guess I've just been a little out of shape lately."

"And here I thought retirement would suit you better," Vixelda teased again before she leaped for a kiss on his cheek. "We're not too far from the forest we saw, though! Come on, you can make it that far, at least?" "For you, I should," He replied with a murring tone, but warily eyed the hills above. "At least we're getting closer. Right? Not too good with directions."

She eyed him for a moment once more with fondness in her eyes but quickly turned to stare in the direction he had indicated. Above, the tree line swept down and closed off the world in large wooden trunks, with a canopy rich in greenery and life. A distant sound of rushing water - no doubt from the dozens of waterfalls that ran with the melting snow of the Azure Span - crashed down to puddles and lakes. All throughout the climb, all they heard in the silence between them was the cry of distant birds, the whistling winds that raced across the crags, and the wet crash of distant falls.

*"All throughout the climb, all they heard in the silence between them was the cry of distant birds, the whistling winds that raced across the crags, and the wet crash of distant falls."*

The forest was close enough that she could almost smell it in the wind, and whenever she inhaled, she did so deeply to take in the essence of life around her. "I'm pretty sure!" she eventually quipped.

"You know what, I'll take it," he placidly replied.

Giggling, she reached out to his paw and waited until he wrapped his strong, clawed fingers around her own and pulled him with her. She was small compared to him—barely a little over half his height—but she knew her own strength, and he didn't resist.

Onward they both went, and soon the hilly terrain smoothed out to miles of plateaus that belied the fact they were technically going uphill. The wind chilled compared to earlier in the day, but Vixelda figured

that would come with their elevation and the fact that the trees started to crowd around them now and shade them from the harsh glare of the sun. Several ruins rose out of the ground, covered in a viney kudzu that made the ancient stone barely visible beneath them.

For a moment, they both stood, gawped, and moved on. All around them, the sounds of life echoed as the call of hawks, the quacks of ducks, the chitter of insects, and the hidden bellows of predators encircled them.

For her, it was music and life—one that she smiled as they wandered in. Give her home comforts any day of the week, of course—she loved her home in the Wetlands, the neighbors and friends she made in the small town she purchased a home in, and the life she made for herself when the call to adventure quieted. It was just that there was something about seeing the world that constantly called her to action, even if she was in semi-retirement, like Rease behind her.

Eventually, they came to the location they were guided towards: a small pond close to a distant waterfall deep in the thicket of the woods. Twisted trunks interspersed with straighter tree's all around them, creating thick coverage above that protected them from the glare of a setting sun, and the ground was dry and even despite being so close to a small running rivulet.

Looking all around, Rease eventually sighed and thudded the heavy backpack from his shoulder to the ground. "Light, I take it this is where we're camping for the weekend?"

Vixelda's tail flicked behind him with an exciting wag as she gauged the area around her and found it perfect. "Yep!" she said, leaping excitedly with a laugh. "Love, why don't you set up the camp? I'll do the hunting this time. Give your poor feet a break for a little bit."

He eyed her for a moment with a curl of his dark lips. "And miss all the fun after trundling up this mountain for hours? I've still got plenty of energy in me, you know."

"Not that I don't believe you," she coyly responded, poking his stomach. "But someone has to watch over everything. Plus, we need that tent and a fire going if we're going to eat tonight unless you want to eat everything raw."

He opened his mouth to reply, and before she could hear a smarmy retort, she poked his belly harder till

the tip of her claw sunk through the fabric of his shirt to the plush fur hidden beneath.

"Point taken," he teased and relented.

It was as she thought, so she patted him afterward with a fall of her ears and another kiss to his hand before she promised to return with at least a few mouthfuls. Turning, she swept out to the underbrush between two large trees and dove into the bushes without a sound.

Truthfully, it was where she excelled, and she wanted the solitude for a moment to sneak around like the shadowblade she was. She loved the man dearly, but his brand of hunting tended to interfere with her own style. He was big on strength but not as light on his feet as he should have been. When hunting an elk or - shadows damned - a moose, she knew to call on him. The sound of the ducks quacking in the distance told her she needed a subtler approach to acquire their meal tonight. The beasts of the plains were perfect for him, but the critters that could move and fly at a moment's notice were better suited for her.

Taking on the mindset of the huntress, she let her vulpine ear pin to her head as she lowered down upon all fours and skittered through the forest floor. The tight, black leather that clung to her body did more than flare his imagination in the best of times, as it helped to hide her in the shadows. The spotted patterns over her dusky fur broke up her body more when the light didn't catch her, and she used it to her advantage as she honed her senses all around her.

With a sniff, she raised her head to the air and peeled back her lips from her teeth before finding the scent she wanted: water and feathers. The ducks she heard on the way up splashing in the water would make for an excellent meal, coupled with the roots, tubers, and onions they gathered on the way up, especially when diced and stewed.

*"From where she hid in the darkness, she couldn't tell what sort of predator it was."*

Reaching for her dagger, she stealthily made her way to the sound before she stopped for a moment at the sight of a large beat resting atop an outcropped rock.

It was larger than her, with a wingspan that rested against its furred body. From where she hid in the darkness, she couldn't tell what sort of predator it



ART BY VIXELDA

was, but she felt that it might have taken umbrage to a little fox woman taking resources from its territory. Silently, she moved around it and thanked herself for keeping her boyfriend at the camp. Keeping one eye on it and one on where she needed to go, she eventually maneuvered around where it slept and made her way towards the larger ponds, where she knew her goal would be.

Crawling through the grass as it tickled her belly and cheeks, she soon found the prize she sought.

There in glittering pools of running water were a dozen or so ducks, all enjoying their lives as much as they could among the shallow banks. Each of them unaware of her presence as they quacked, waddled, ate, swam, and cleaned themselves. Greedily, Vixelda wanted to take them all back to the camp and eat her fill, but another part of her said one or two would suffice, so she rested and waited until an opportunity came.

Soon, it did. Two large fowls - extravagant in their coloring - wandered by with swaying heads, looking for a meal. She felt the tension coil into the pit of her belly as her muscles tightened to springs, and once they were within arm's reach of her, she leaped from

beneath the tall, reedy grass. With a quick pounce and a flurry of sharp knives from her belt (and a snap of her hands around one neck), she dispatched the ducks efficiently as the others now alerted, panicked, and took flight.

Triumphantly, Vixelda picked up the now lifeless ducks and melded back into the shadows to leave. The whole trip had taken 30 minutes, and in that time, the sun had started to dip in the distance. Long shadows stretched out as the world became darkened by the oncoming night. When she returned to the camp, she saw its disarray.

The tent was erected but lopsided, and Rease growled and cursed as he tried to strike the flint and tinder against the kindling he had gathered.

“Stupid... son of a...” he barked, his tail flicking in agitation behind him as the fur of his mane bristled in anger.

Vixelda sighed, but smiled still as she watched him for a few more minutes and spoke. “Having fun?”

Then he yelped, quickly looked back behind himself, and relaxed when he saw that it was her. “Ohhh, Vixen, I’m having a great time. I’ve almost got the fire going. I just need to get it to cooperate, is all.”

“I see that, love,” she said, walking towards him before she reached out to replace the flint and steel with those of the ducks while she smirked at his chagrined expression. “I’ll make you a deal. You prepare the ducks nicely and properly, and I’ll fix everything else. Deal?”

His tail wagged behind him, and he snuck in a lick across her brow before he agreed and went to prepare the ducks as best he could. For a moment, she watched him as he shouldered his burly body down slightly while placing the ducks against a cutting board. She watched as he used both knives and claws alike to pluck, dice, and break the bodies down. For her, there was just something about the way the man moved that she adored, and had she nothing else to do, she could have enjoyed watching him work throughout the night.

Luckily, it didn’t take long for her to settle the camp to a proper setting. The tent just needed adjusting, the fire given a spark of life, and some aromatics to make the area smell clean and sweet while she settled a pot and water atop the flame to let it boil. Once she secured all that she needed to do, she relaxed and stared up at the waning twilight with a smile. Everything was at it should have been, and for that,

she was immensely contented.

Something rustled in the grass nearby, and two large points of light shone out of the grass's shadows. Instantly, Vixelda's hackles rose as well, and a coldness swept down her spine. She quickly shifted to her knees to knelt, reaching for her daggers. "Rease... Rease, in the grass," she hissed to catch his attention.

*"Vixelda's hackles rose as well, and a coldness swept down her spine. She quickly shifted to her knees to knelt, reaching for her daggers."*

He turned, saw what she meant, and widened his eyes as he ceased his bloody preparations. Then, he defensively knelt a bit to widen his center of gravity while he prepared his bloodied claws. "Light Vixen, don't think anything followed you back?"

"Probably interested in the meat," she whispered from the corner of her muzzle. "What do you think we should do?"

He stared ahead towards the predatorial glint, and she got the message and turned to stare as well. She was certain it was the beastly thing she had seen earlier, come to take its pound of flesh that it was owed since she scared off the flight earlier and ran off with its prize. Her own eyes widened as she tensed, and felt the growing coolness seep from her thighs up into her chest. It was their ducks by right of conquest, and she'd be damned if she gave it up.

But then suddenly, the grass weaved and flattened, and the creature they so feared emerged! It was small - no bigger than one of Rease's large paws - with a fox-like face, large, wide eyes, and wings along its arms connected to its side. She had seen these before in the last two years she had been here and recognized it as one of those flying fox creatures. This one was small, skinny, and possibly no more than a lost kit nosing around for a meal.

Suddenly, her heart melted, and she gasped while lowering her daggers. "Rease! Oh no, it's adorable. Oh, I can't believe we were going to attack it!"

He chuckled, relaxed his body as well, and knelt back up to his full height above them all, careful in his movements not to scare the little kit away. "Aye, it's cute. Don't think we have to fear it then. Probably got

separated from its mother and smelled the fire and meat."

The meat...What's what it was after! She stared at the little creature more and felt a pang of solidarity with it. Not only did it look similar with familiar vulpine features, but the fearful look it had in its eyes, coupled with its malnourished body and dirty pelt, told her the story of how it wasn't taken care of properly and struggled to survive. It was as if looking at a reflection in the form of an animal with similar features.

With a coo, she raced towards the preparation area where Rease had already diced up the ducks and elbowed him firmly in the stomach to shove him aside. He barked, but didn't argue as he leapt aside, and she tore off a hunk of breast meat from the larger of the two waterfowls.

Then she turned back as the creature recoiled in confusion, and tossed the bloody chunk towards it til it landed with a wet smack to the ground.

Still confused, its ears perked but lowered as it eyed the two beast folk at the fire and then tentatively sniffed at the chunk to see if the charity given was bait. When neither moved, it quickly grabbed the meat, chattered in thanks, and ran off into the night with its prize.

"I want one now," Vixelda declared afterwards. "Oh, Rease, we are going to get one now, aren't we? We'll go looking for it in the morning, right? It can't have gone too far away!"

He sighed but smirked as he reached out to brush her cheek, leaving dried duck blood in her fur. "Alright, alright. In the morning. We'll be here for a while so we might as well. Maybe Teenkle will like a pet for when we get back. Though you're sure, right? It's mother could be around out there, and I'd imagine she'd have an opinion."

She hadn't thought of that, and her face fell slightly in reply. "Well, then, we'll just bring the mother with us. We have the room," she said, making up her mind. Whether they would bring the whole family was irrelevant, and she doubted he'd even say no to her anyway. She had her ways of making him agreeable to her whims and ideas, and he happily became her partner in shenanigans.

An hour or so later, they had finished their meal. The duck was sliced and cooked with leftovers stewing in a pot over the fire. The bones were picked and cleaned for another soup (or treats to entice the kit). They laid in front of the fire full bellies and relaxed

beneath the blanket of stars above as the embers and logs cracked and popped in front of them.

The stars were bright in the night sky above, with hardly a cloud to mar the view into eternity. Vixy was satisfied and contented with everything that had happened for a while as she leaned into the crux of his arm and listened to the large man's breathing beside her. The last several years had been something else, she knew—something fun and exciting but ultimately one that changed them both. The Dragon Isles had them see so much, do so much, and experience so much that it was hard to keep track of everything.

Yet she was happy. Her belly was full, she had a plan in the morning to help a creature that might have needed saving, and she was with someone she loved, respected, and admired. For her, the next two years could last a lifetime if she wanted since she had everything she desired here.

Who knew what would come? Vixelda was looking forward to it.

- END -



## About the Author



Rease Stoneheart  
Writer, Editor

*Rease Stoneheart is an experienced Roleplayer who has been a part of the Warcraft Roleplay Community for ten years with no signs of slowing down. A writer who loves Fantasy, Horror, Sci-fi, and more, he's often bouncing between Azeroth and the created worlds of his original novels. Currently, he's working on his debut Novel Series "Hearts of Stone in a City of Gold" alongside the Warcraft Fanzine and other projects. You can find him at <https://linktr.ee/reasesoffice> for all that he's involved with.*

# Memories and Novices

BY ANGELA  
RIDDER

## *The Cathedral of Light, Stormwind City | Modern Day*

It was late in the evening when Ishala was abruptly pulled from her meditation by a knock at the door. The draenei woman felt disoriented as she was so suddenly pulled from her deep trance. “Come, “ she ordered in a less-than-polite tone. She would give the person a piece of her mind for ignoring her do-not-disturb sign.

She aimed her best glare at the door but stopped as soon as she saw the two young human girls, accompanied by a draenei youth, step into her office, followed by a familiar elven woman. “Miani... What is the meaning of this? It is late, and they should be ready for bed.”

“Under normal circumstances, yes.” Came the elven woman’s emotionless tone. “But these three have been referred to for disciplinary matters.” She motioned to the two girls and the young draenei. All three of them had bruises, and the Draenei had a bandaged cut across her cheek.

“I see...” Ishala said softly. “Leave them to me.” “As you wish, Ishala.” Miani said and bowed before closing the door behind the three alleged troublemakers.

“Celine, Amy, A’lenra...” Ishala muttered as she stood up and approached the three. “Why is it always you three?” She asked them, not really expecting an answer. The three were known troublemakers, but it had always been small things that could be looked past. They had never gotten into a fight before.

“Bishop, please... we can explain,” A’lenra said. They were the oldest of the three. Extremely young by draenei standards, but at sixteen, they were the oldest of the three. “If... I may,” they added quickly.

*“Sitting in her chair, Ishala focused her attention on the two human girls for a moment. She’d never seen them look so gloomy.”*

Looking at the three, Ishala nodded slowly. “You may, come sit down.” Ishala motioned to the couch in the corner. Sitting in her chair, Ishala focused her attention on the two human girls for a moment. She’d never seen them look so gloomy.

“To start... if anything, it is my fault,” A’lena said softly. “We snuck out last night. It was my sister’s idea.” They admitted, and Ishala arched an eyebrow at the young draenei.

“Your sister is... Ly’rinala, yes? The Blademaster.” Ishala asked.

“Yes, she’s been away for a long time, and I wanted to see her and these two came wanting to meet her.” They admitted in a soft tone.

Pinching the bridge of her nose, Ishala sighed softly. She knew that woman well, and she could only guess what came of that meeting. Trouble always followed Ly’rinala. It had ever since Draenor.

“We met her by the tavern by the mage quarter.” they continued, and Ishala nodded. “That part was fine, we had a good time and she even...” A’lenra trailed off into silence.

“Bought you all drinks?” Ishala finished questioningly. She knew the woman, she wasn’t shocked at that, but she knew that was likely where the trouble came from.

“Yes...” They mumbled.

“It wasn’t much!” Amy protested. “We all only had a glass of wine!”

Celine nodded in agreement, though she stayed quiet.

“Right, I do not approve of underage drinking, but for now continue.” Ishala prompted with a kind smile. “I assume you were hurt when you left?”

“Yes,” Amy admitted and seemed to take over. “We left the mage district on our way back when... we crossed paths with...” She trailed off into silence. “Yes?” Ishala prompted, her tone a little more stern. “We ran into William and his friend.” Celine finished for Amy. “William pulled A’lena’s tail and called them

a bad word.” She said with a nod.

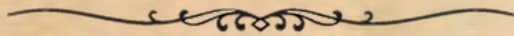
“I punched him first,” A’lena admitted. “I shouldn’t have, but he kept referring to me as a boy and...” Ishala nodded slowly. “I understand. I will be back with some tea. You three stay here.” Ishala said softly as she walked to the door, looking back at them for a long moment. She said nothing more and left the room to the girls.

Walking the dark hallway towards the kitchen, Ishala sighed softly. Her tail flicked slightly to the side as she wondered what her mentor would do if she were in her place. “What would you do... My Exarch...” She muttered lightly as she walked into the empty kitchen.

“You know what she would do.” A voice whispered to her from the darkness.

Ignoring the words, Ishala started to prepare a soothing tea. She took the gem from her robe’s inner pockets and brought it up as the water was put on the fire. She looked into it, watching the strands of memory swirl in the liquid.

“Yes, remember~” The ghostly voice told her. “Remember that night...”



### ***The Abbey of the Burned Rose, Argus | A Long Time Ago***

“NOVICE ISHALA!” The voice broke the peace of the abbey’s chapel. Ishala shot up from her prayer. Her head spun around to look at the tall woman marching towards her. The mother superior looked particularly angry this time.

“Honored Anchorite Vallaa, how may I-” Ishala started to say when she was cut off by the woman.

“Do not play dumb. My office NOW.” The woman shouted, her anger palpable in the air. “You know what you did. Don’t play dumb with me.” She said, regaining a modicum of composure as Ishala stood to follow.

“Yes, Honored Anchorite,” Ishala said softly, following the woman through the halls of the abbey. As she walked behind her, she looked up to the summer sky outside the windows. The golden leaves of the trees swayed in the wind, and the sky was a perfect blue. The subtle scent of summer hung in the air.

“Your sister has already been brought here,” Vallaa said, her voice stern and serious. “She has her own punishment waiting for her back at the Conservatory. But she will receive the same punishment as you here. You both tarnished the reputation of our abbey.”

Ishala simply nodded as she followed. Following Vallaa into her office, where she met her sister. The magus was smiling like she had gotten away with it all or, perhaps, that she didn’t care she was being punished. Ishala knew her twin was proud of her actions; she had always been the one eager for a fight.

“Sister...” Ishala mumbled as she stood beside Averia. Had it not been for the differences in clothing, the two would have been unable to tell apart. Pale blue skin, bright blonde hair, and horns curved like those of a ram.

“Ishala!” Averia called warmly. “Fancy-”

“Silence!” Vallaa snapped.

The two young draenei stood at attention and watched the woman standing behind her desk. Ishala felt her sister’s tail coil around her own, like when they were children, and their mother would scold them angrily. She returned the gesture reassuringly.

“To start with, Averia.” Vallaa started with a glare at the apprentice wizard. “Not only did you lure a novice to a den of sin in the pleasure district.” She paused with a glance at Ishala. “The fight you started caused an estimated thousand pieces of silver worth of damage.”

*“Ishala cringed at the thought. The memory was still fresh in her mind.”*

Ishala cringed at the thought. The memory was still fresh in her mind. How she’d been grabbed by that one woman, thinking she was a woman of the night in costume. She could have handled it herself, but instead, Averia had to strike the woman magically in anger.

“Yes, my aim needs work,” Averia said. “I was aiming for the window, not the wall behind the bar.”

Vallaa opened her mouth to say something but paused as Ishala smacked her own sister on the back of the head. Not violently, just reminding her she was not supposed to speak right now. “Don’t be a smart-ass,” Ishala muttered.



SUBMITTED BY ANGELA RIDDER

“Right...” Vallaa said with barely contained anger. “And you.” She turned to Ishala, her glare more intense than the one her twin sister had gotten.

“You’re not allowed to leave the grounds without permission. We both know this is not the first time either, Ishala.”

Ishala froze. Her eyes widened as she looked at the Anchorite. “That’s n-”

“Don’t you dare lie to me.” Vallaa’s voice turned to ice. “If your mother knew, she would die of shame.”

She stated it so confidently that Ishala felt like she had been stabbed through the heart with a shard of ice.

“I know you sneak out to see your sister.” Anchorite Vallaa looked between the two. “I know what for, too.”

The twins looked at each other and remained quiet. Ishala noted that even Averia, who would normally defend her intensely, was silent, not wanting to add fuel to this raging inferno. She swallowed nervously, returning her gaze to the Anchorite.

“I have ignored it until now.” The Anchorite informed them both. “No more. Apprentice Averia, you have already been informed by the conservatory that one more mistake will result in immediate expulsion, yes?” Vallaa asked her.

“Yes, Anchorite,” Averia answered plainly. “The headmaster himself informed me, loudly and clearly.” “Novice Ishala.” Vallaa continued her tone, soft and stern. “The same can be said for you. One more mistake, one more misstep. And you go home to your mother in shame, understood?”

“Yes, Mother Superior,” Ishala said. She understood well enough. She knew her mother would not be angry with her, nor disappointed. But she would be shamed by her expulsion. A High Anchorite whose daughter was removed from the priesthood... would be a black mark on her.

“Furthermore... the fact that you both were involved in attacking an honored exarch’s daughter suggests you both need a reminder on etiquette.” The woman continued as she looked between the twins. “... you will both receive ten lashes each, so this won’t be forgotten.”

Ishala bowed her head and reached over, forcing her sister into a bow. She knew she was going to complain, but the act silenced Averia. “Yes, Honored Anchorite,” Ishala said, accepting on both their behalf. “Dismissed,” Vallaa said. “You will both remain on the grounds. I will call for you.” She instructed.

Ishala and Averia walked from the room silently.

### ***The Cathedral of Light, Stormwind City | Modern Day***

Ishala let out a heavy sigh as the memory faded. A cold touch on her shoulder sent a shiver up her spine as she pocketed the memory gem once more. She remained silent and pulled the wailing kettle from the flames. The memories were always so vivid, she could still feel her sister’s tail on her own.

“Yes, you should punish them like they did us.” The specter touching her coaxed. “They tarnished the church’s reputation. They are under your care, they tarnished your good name.”

“Enough...” Ishala muttered, “I’m not Vallaa.” She protested weakly as she prepared the tea. “I would never assign that kind of punishment to children.” “Liar.” The voice called out. “You did that and much worse. So much worse.”

Biting her bottom lip angrily, Ishala looked down at the four cups. “Shut up...” she said quietly to the voice.

“Isn’t fratricide a sin, dear?” The voice taunted her. “Or are you still deluding yourself into thinking it was justice how you killed her when she be-”

“SHUT UP!” Ishala screamed, throwing a cup at the wall behind her. She watched it shatter against the far wall and was left in complete silence. A curse in her native tongue slipped out as she cleaned up the mess.

Taking another cup, filling it with herbal tea. Ishala set them on a tray and started walking the hall with a heavy heart. The voice was silent now, but as ever, she felt watched. Alone yet never truly alone. As she returned to her office, Ishala looked at the three still sitting on her couch, they looked nervous. She managed to bite back a sigh as she offered them the warm tea. “Here, drink it while it’s warm. It will help you sleep... and the bruises.” She said softly.

Sitting back down, Ishala looked over the three of them and sipped from her own cup. “I gave it a lot of thought.” She said softly. “What you three did, I need to stress, is unacceptable behavior for wards of the church. You can not be a novice and get into fights, you can not be seen drinking at a tavern either, at your ages.” Ishala said sternly. She looked at A’lenra.

“Even you, you might be of age by human standards, but you are not human. You are still bound by our culture, young girl.”

The three were about to protest, but Ishala held up her hand. “That being said. In my eyes, they started the altercation. Touching someone without their consent is not okay.” She paused for a moment to let that sink in. “I should be punishing you rather severely for such an unacceptable display. But you three are young... so don’t let it happen again. I will know if it does, and I will not give third chances.” Ishala said softly. “You may finish your tea in your room. Now run along, sisters. It is late, and curfew is upon you.”

She smiled at the three girls.

“Yes, Bishop Ishala!” The three girls chimed and rushed off back to the dorm. Ishala watched them go, sighing softly. Standing up, Ishala drained her cup and placed it on her desk with a light sigh. She took the bundle of keys from her desk and locked the door behind herself as she left.

“You miss it, don’t you? Being that young?” The voice asked from behind. “Like we used to be.”

*““You miss it, don’t you? Being that young?” The voice asked from behind. “Like we used to be.””*

“Yes, I do... sister.” She said. Ishala clasped her hands behind her back.

Ishala didn’t look at the ghostly apparition of her twin leaning against the wall across from her office. She didn’t need to look to know she was there and now following her. Putting on her best smile, she started walking to the exit. Ishala walked out onto the dark streets of Stormwind City.

“I miss it greatly, those days long ago.” She mumbled.

## About the Author



Angela Ridder - Writer

*Angela Ridder is a non-binary writer and programmer who likes to claim that they do nothing more than scribble nonsense across the internet (I do!). They have a long history of roleplay in the World of Warcraft community, originally on Argent Dawn (EU) and since 2018 on Moon Guard (US). Angela started writing fan fiction in 2016. They are currently working on their first novel. You can find out more about them at <https://angelaridder.com/>*

# Scenes of Azeroth



“SAL AND THE SPIDERS”  
BY HYDRA



“TALAKJIN AND REVA”  
SUBMITTED BY REVA



“ARGENT GENTLEMAN”  
BY ASSIAR



“THE PRIORY”  
BY HYDRA



“WORKING OUT”  
SUBMITTED BY J.S  
MADE BY ELWYNN



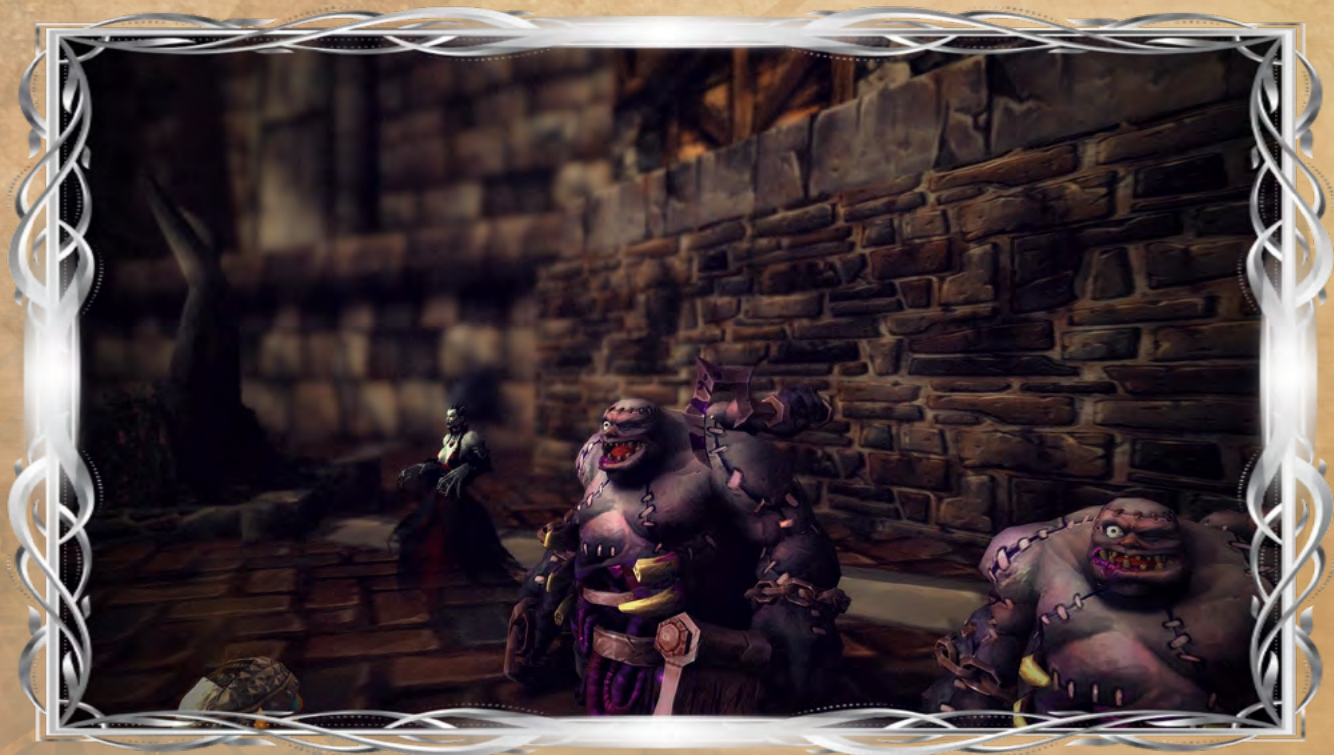
“WINTERVEIL GALA FUN AND DANCE”  
SUBMITTED BY REVA



“THERE TILL THE END”  
SUBMITTED BY REVA



“HALLOWFALL BEAUTY”  
SUBMITTED BY HYDRATHESYNTH



“ABOMINATIONS STANDING GUARD”  
SUBMITTED BY REASE



“STORIES”  
SUBMITTED BY REASE

“SURFS UP”  
SUBMITTED BY J.S





“BJORN ATOP HIS STEED”  
SUBMITTED BY BJORN CANDLEMAN



“BATTLE OF LORDEARON”  
SUBMITTED BY REASE



“ONE LAST VIEW OF VALDRAKKEN”  
SUBMITTED BY REASE



“A CUTE DATE”  
SUBMITTED BY REVA

*Please Note: This is an AU story inspired by The Apothecary Diaries.*



It had been many millennia since the Zandalari had taken our land. Obviously, to us Pandaren currently living, it's merely history. I frequently wondered, however, what life could have been without the Zandalari influence...

Only small pockets of our culture remain, kept alive only by the mere mercy of our rulers. From what I've been told, our aesthetics—clothing, food, and other minor customs—have been kept largely unaltered. The Zandalari keep a broad thumb over it all, however, shaping it to their will.

Those of us kept in Troll palaces are not allowed to speak unless we know the Zandali language. Pandaren language is forbidden in the presence of the high-caste, such deeming it lowly and primitive. Disgusting on their ears, I've heard. Ironic, for a race so large and imposing...

The Pandaren unable to learn Zandali were deigned to live their lives as servants, working for whoever would take them under strict watch of appointed translators. I never offered to allow them to know I could speak and write both, having learned from a young age after my parents sold me to Mogu traders. It was either their lives or mine, and... I suppose they felt it was better to keep theirs. I was only so lucky to have a matron zandalari woman take me under her wing. Perhaps she felt pity for the small ugly thing that was barely weaned from teat?

*“I never offered to allow them to know I could speak and write both.”*

That woman had been so kind; she was a translator for the servant's quarters, primarily overseeing the kitchen. I learned how to cook with her. In my time off, she would instruct me to learn how to read and write. Suppose not much else a young cub could do within palace walls. It would've been too dangerous to go out and play like a normal child.

How, though... did I end up here?

Dressed in silken robes, dancing for the King's court along a line of other pandaren women. Was it because I was so exceptionally subservient? I never spoke back. I followed every order given, no matter the task. I kept my gaze averted — pandaren were to never look a Zandalari in the eye unless spoken to directly.

My curiosity always got the better of me, though... Seated alongside these other women as we awaited our next dance, their painted faces turned downwards with sleeves lifted to cover their lower face, it was only I who foolishly took a moment to look to the gathered crowd.

They wore our clothes, robes and silks fashioned with their garish gold jewelry. Many were too busy drinking, distracted by festivities and the overt attempts to bed one another. I scanned the room cautiously, mouth covered like the others, before my sight landed on such a specimen.

He was massive, standing taller than any troll I had seen before him. The robes he wore — a deep purple adorned with gold runes imbued into the fabric — barely contained his expansive chest. I could feel my heart flutter as I examined him further.

His features were rugged; an older troll, perhaps? Soft bags under his eyes and noticeable wrinkles at the corners as he laughed. Protruding stones along his chin and jawline. Tusks large and engraved with runes painted gold. Part of his long dark blue hair was pulled back into a loose bun while the rest fell down his back and shoulders. His skin was so dark as well, like the scales of a royal koi.

My mind wandered, wondering who he was. No woman was at his side; most who had approached he gave no second glance outside of a formal greeting. No consort or mate...? Was odd, for an older man. And by his attire alone, I could tell he was definitely high-caste. I was a fool to allow my gaze to linger, eyes drifting back up to meet his face. To see him staring straight back at me.

I could feel my body run cold. I would be punished severely if caught and I quickly snapped my focus to the floor before me. Did anyone notice? Was I trembling...? My composure would falter if not for

my training, but there was only so much training could do. Seconds passed so agonizingly slow as my heart thrummed painfully within my ears. Flattening them atop my head did nothing, only bringing further attention to myself as the golden jewelry adorning my visage faintly clicked against one another.

I pursed my lips tight behind my sleeve, only to quickly force myself to relax so my lipstick would not smudge. I breathed a soft exhale, my breath shaky as I composed myself. Time would not be granted, however, as the distinct sound of bare feet atop stone approached.

“You,” came a voice. The designated translator for the dancers of the night. I do not like him. His voice was like a viper’s tongue and his appearance was no better. He stopped before me and I kept my sight pinned on the anklets he wore. “Come.” I could feel the eyes of the other dancers on me; but, I obeyed. Dipping my head forward in a bow, I moved to stand with practiced grace. I said nothing. I was subservient, after all. I followed behind him, wondering what my fate would be.

The eyes of the room still bore into me, causing my fur to stand on end. I hated the attention from these nobles, knowing they saw me a mere piece of flesh. A pawn to use and gawk over, like an exotic beast.

We finally came to a stop and I kept my gaze down. Looking at the feet of the two men before me I could tell, by the sheer size difference, that he had most certainly noticed... I swallowed thickly. My mouth felt so dry. I could feel a presence next to my face, my peripheral catching a glimpse of a large hand. I held in a flinch, wondering if I would be struck for my transgression; it would not have been my first.

However, no pain came. A massive knuckle pressed under my jaw, lifting my head to meet the eyes of the one I had gazed upon mere moments ago. My hand followed, keeping the lower half of my face concealed as we shared eye contact. He didn’t appear to be angry. In fact, though hard to tell with those massive tusks, it appeared he was... smiling?

“What is your name?” His voice was so deep and the way it thrummed through my body caused my breath to hitch.

“Pomf.” Idiot. My eyes slowly widened with realization, having answered his question in Zandali. The translator hadn’t been able to speak; I had responded so swiftly, and I could feel the absolute hatred brimming from him.

To his knowledge, none of us knew Zandali. To

make a fool of him in front of another troll, one no doubt in power. The lashings later would be severe... I swallowed again, this one audible. And yet, the larger troll simply seemed to smile all the more? He exhaled a deep chuckle and then, perhaps to the surprise of all present, began to gradually lower himself to kneel.

Audible gasps were heard from troll women, hushed whispers soon following. I could hear some words, but I forced my focus on the man before me. My gaze followed his as he came to my level – a servant’s level – and spoke once more.

“You speak Zandali?” he asked while lifting a hand to stroke over his stone beard. I couldn’t lie anymore. To lie now would mean certain death. I inhaled deeply and nodded before responding softly. “I do.” His eyes lidded as he looked me over, tracing my features with his gaze. I wasn’t sure what he was thinking. Most zandalari look upon me with disgust; yet, he seemed more... intrigued.

“Can you write it?” My ears flicked forward and the gazes felt even heavier now. I nodded again.

“...Yes. I have assisted my former matron with transaction orders in the past.” I don’t know why I admitted that to him... He didn’t even ask. Suppose I didn’t want to sound like I was lying? Maybe he just felt so easy to talk to? As if he wasn’t this large, merciless monster who had enslaved my people and just... a person.

His smile was so broad now, baring his sharp teeth. His hand lifted again, reaching for a lock of my hair to gently take and rub between his forefinger and thumb.

“One more thing...” The hand drifted towards mine, engulfing my covered palm with ease, and slowly lowered my arm to reveal my face. I tried keeping my composure, though my ears had fallen submissively. I felt so exposed now, knowing so many eyes were on me as I stood with this behemoth of a troll who’s name I didn’t even know.

*“His expression softened as he looked at me and, again, I was left unsure of what he was thinking.”*

His expression softened as he looked at me and, again, I was left unsure of what he was thinking. That was, however, until he spoke.

“I will buy her.”

My eyes flew open at that, my red dyed lips parting in mutual shock along with the nearby patrons.

“S-she is not for sale,” came the viperous man. His response contorted the large troll’s face, his once fond expression shifting so dramatically to annoyance and ire. He released my hand and slowly rose to his full stature, standing to loom over our translator.

“That was not an inquiry.” The air was thick with tension and a smothering aura of arcane suddenly began to overwhelm me. I tensed from the feeling, the power making me nauseous. My mind began to race.

What did he want to purchase me for? To be a personal servant? A cook? Or, worse, for carnal self-indulgence?

It wasn’t... uncommon for trolls to bed pandaren. I had heard many stories of the female workers being taken without consent. Pulled from their duties by drunken men or trolls possessed by rut. Though, if the women were discovered, it would have resulted in either exile or...death.

Perhaps it was different for the men in high-caste...? Men so high in power, no one dared to question who or what they wanted to lay with. I’m sure that alone did not go without consequence, though... A man in power, choosing to lay with one deemed as beneath them. I could only imagine the political tensions that could bring.

It was only just now I realized... I barely came up to this man’s waist. I could feel my body run cold and I prayed to whatever Loa or God listening, that he merely wanted me as his cleaning lady...

“...I will have her paperwork drafted by the night’s end.” My ears flicked upwards as the arcane pressure swiftly dissipated from the air. My head swiveled on its own, staring briefly at the translator before I quickly corrected and looked to the arcanital.

He puffed out his chest, head rising as he said nothing else. Watching the snake leave, he then smirked before his gaze turned back down onto me. “From now on... You will refer to me as ‘Master Ankhan.’”

- END -

## About the Author



Reva - Artist, Writer

*Reva is an Artist, avid roleplayer, and in-game event organizer who has played World of Warcraft for 15 years while roleplaying for six years. She’s a fan of drawing, gaming, collecting bones, fishing, and hunting, and currently is running a Discord Server - The Wyvern’s Tale - with her best friend, where they catalog Warcraft lore to help other roleplayers develop their characters and RP. A cryptid of sorts, you may be able to find her on Moon Guard hanging out on one of her many alts. You can find more of her art on her X and Instagram at <https://x.com/pastelpygmy> and <https://www.instagram.com/PastelPygmy>*

# The Tempest

BY ELUVIANNA



TO THOSE SENSITIVE TO UNSEEN THREADS,

I HAVE NOTICED A GROWING DISTURBANCE, FAINT BUT PERSISTENT, LINGERING JUST BEYOND OUR PERCEPTION. THE ECHOES. PERHAPS YOU TOO HAVE HEARD THE WHISPERS, FELT THEIR PULL, THE SHADOWS SHIFTING IMPOSSIBLY TO OFFER A TRAIL WORTH FOLLOWING.

THESE ECHOES ARE NOT MERELY OF THIS WORLD. I SUSPECT THERE IS SOMETHING DEEPER, SOMETHING WORTH OUR STUDY, AND IT WOULD SEEM PRUDENT TO SHARE OUR KNOWLEDGE. AS ONE OF THE FEW WHO MAY HOLD THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING, I ASK FOR YOU TO SHARE ANY RESEARCH OR PERSONAL EXPERIENCE. YOUR DISCRETION IS OF COURSE OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE.

PLEASE SEND YOUR FINDINGS, HOWEVER SMALL. TOGETHER, WE MAY SHINE A LIGHT ON THE GROWING DARKNESS.

THE VEIL GROWS THIN,

*Eluviana UmbraStar*

*The tempest rises on the ocean's breath,  
A verse of beauty in the face of death,  
Its coming stirs the sailor's soul,  
A dance with fate, a story to be told.*

Balancing the wobbling crate, he kicked the door closed behind him. Dark hair fell askew over a blaze of gray eyes, light rising against the fog of an impending storm. Boots scuffed against the worn floorboards as he threaded through the mismatched tables. Boisterous hands clapping at his shoulder as he passed.

The weathered door of The Anchor & Ink opened with a groan, the tide of night air meeting the tavern's brine with a gust. A brawny Kul Tiran shouldered a large crate through the entrance, whistling as he stepped into an ambiance of lively chatter. The smell of spirits and pipe smoke drifted around tables filled with a dossier of the city's notorious underbelly.

A gruff voice rose above the tavern's bustling energy, a stout man whose large frame easily overwhelmed the flamboyant tricorne perched on his head. He sat amid notable company, all crammed about a small table barely able to accommodate its occupants. "Oi, Duncan! Me old bones be catchin' the chill o' death with ye comin' and goin' all night like some proper portside lady!" The man shouted.

Duncan nodded his acknowledgement to the griseled man, “Aye, and that’s the last of ‘em.” Grinning as he passed the man’s table, he added, “Though fancy callin’ a poor fishmonger’s son lady. With words like those, ye best be showin’ me some proper respect now.”

The man dramatically leaned back in his chair in feigned consideration. “Ahh, best leave the door then, lad—should luck fancy sending more such fine company our way.”

His company let out a chorus of raucous laughter. Settling the crate in the end of the bar, Duncan turned to the man folding his arms in appraisal. “And pray, and who’d be wantin’ te see what horrors of the deep we serve in the Anchor?”

More loud laughter, now from a few patrons distracted by the exchange.

At a corner table, an imposing Kul Tiran lifted the brim of her plumed tricorn with a stout finger, offering him a playful wink. With a rough tone she interjected, “I’d be havin’ him, lady or otherwise.”

Duncan returned the wink, deftly sidestepping a barstool suddenly pushed into his leg.

“Aye, now ye’ve gone an’ confused the lot.” He sighed, moving behind the bar to unload glasses from the crate.

Beside him, Cormac hunched over a small, worn journal, an ink pen clenched between his teeth. The warm light from iron sconces fell over polished dark wood beneath his elbows. The surface notched from errant daggers and broken bottles that had missed their mark.

“Well,” Duncan said, lowering his voice as he carefully stacked the glasses beneath the counter. “The night is certainly spirited what with all the ships coming to port.”

He paused, expecting some acknowledgment, but Cormac’s attention held steady on the scrawl. Elbows on the bar, he playfully nudged Cormac’s shoulder. Eyes following the ink curved along the parchment, “Oi, Thorne, this some fancy way of tellin’ me to prepare for a storm?”

Cormac gave a halfhearted side glance, a charming smile lifting an indent at his cheek. “Aye, but you know those omens be walking through the tavern doors on their own now. Though if you’re offering to secure the place, far be it from me to stop you.”

*“Aye, but you know those omens be walking through the tavern doors on their own now.”*

From the end of the bar, a older man’s grizzled face brightened. He was gaunt with buggy eyes, a comically wide smile revealed rough teeth. He wore a rumpled eye patch, though it sat on his brow. “More stories of adventure I’d wager.”

He continued with a practiced tone, “But did I ever tell ye the tale of the Siren’s Squall? Tossed overboard by Ozumat himself, I was.”

Duncan straightened with a weary nod. His attention shifted to the glasses as he arranged them just below the bar’s edge. “Aye, Ozzie, more than once. I could tell the tale as though it were me own.”

Already lost in the tale, Ozzie’s voice lowered with a dramatic tone. “The seas were angry that day, lads. A real brew of the Old Gods. But imagine my surprise when I washed up on the shores of beautiful Theramore—”

“—No doubt surrounded by sirens takin’ pity on someone so daft,” Duncan interjected, rolling his eyes with a laugh.

Ozzie’s weathered face creased into a grin, his voice rough, “Aye, ye would be well to heed their call, lest ye be taken to a watery grave.”

“But imagine bein’ sent off in such pleasure,” Duncan mused, a roguish glint in his eye. “Aye, my pants would go down singin’.” He straightened, hands considering his belt with a sharp tug.

Ozzie chuckled, raising his near-empty tankard. “A different tune if ye’d actually been ta sea, ‘stead of bein’ cooped up ashore like Cormac’s first mate, spyglass fixed on finding him a lass, stepping off a glittered galleon or some such.”

Duncan snorted, clapping Cormac on the shoulder. “Aye, our lad’s got charms his own. And how the floorboards be howling, caught in some beastly tempest. A heart set on findin’ one worthy of them poems.”

Steadying himself from Duncan’s gesture, Cormac’s lips quirked in amusement. “Aye, a rare find needs a skilled eye. But nothing wrong with the balm of a tumble when one goes misjudging a lady’s

intentions.”

“Sirens swayed to courtin—Bless me soul what a tale ye spin, Thorne,” Duncan quipped with a rough grasp at Cormac’s shoulder. “Ye best be careful, or ye’ll end up with naught but whimsy in yer net with that one.” Ozzie scoffed, this was a young man’s lark. “Bah, I be for the rare treasures, myself. Have a keen eye for it, ol’ Ozzie’ll look out for ye.”

Cormac laughed, eyeing Ozzie’s near-empty drink. “Aye, Lady Luck be an old sea dog herself, outdrinkin’ us all.”

Ozzie raised the drink with a serious tone, “Keep ‘er glass full, lads, or you’ll all be kissin’ the locker ‘fore long!”

The front door wheezed open carrying a dark silhouette on its current. The tavern’s patrons barely stirred, but Cormac’s eyes lifted leisurely from his company.

The figure was a Ren’dorei, though much smaller than most of her kind, a cloak draped heavily around unusual elven curves. Long, pale hair fell from beneath the thick velvet hood, ghostly waves stirring with sentience. Deep within the shadows, a mysterious glow of violet eyes. She wore a dark robe draped low, a luminous blade of pallid skin plunging into the cinch of a wide leather belt.

The Anchor was no stranger to dark patrons, though this one held her own. He felt a soft focus settle, echoes of his past, old habits of observation. While he didn’t see any threat in her, there *\*was\** something more in her presence—a puzzle to contemplate. A deeper story hidden within the mundane. Details that the discerning eye of a could surely use to their advantage. Though now, entertaining such things were more whimsy than strategy. A smile tugged at his lips as listened to her tale.

Her steps were measured, guarded with purpose, yet they carried a faint echo of a life once lived in society. She was well-dressed, but the wear on her leather gloves and soft boots spoke of long travels far beyond. The note of someone who had toiled through dark places was unmistakable. Yet, the obscurity with which she shrouded herself was more than just Thalassian—something learned more out of necessity than formality, a need for discretion he knew well. His curiosity followed to a pendant resting low on her chest. Its indigo gem caught the light, facets winking in acknowledgment. Weaving through the night’s unusual cacophony, her hourglass swayed, the cloak brushing a small scabbard. The spiraling grooves

of a dark silver pommel warmed by the light of the tavern’s scones.

His eyes suddenly narrowed; though obscured, the blade was familiar. The swirls along the metal distinct. Not often surprised, his parlor trick now struck at a curious nature long forgotten. Cormac had intended the tavern to offer opportunity, and now found himself intensely wondering what she was looking for.

At his linger, Duncan looked up to see the source of his friend’s curiosity.

Duncan leaned in close. “Seems your pretty verse was a summons, mate.”

Closing the book he lifted a glass from the counter to veil his notice, idly running a cloth over the rim. His eyes casually followed her.

Ozzie was nudging his tankard along the bar, the usual signal that he was expecting it to be filled. No doubt he had crossed many a siren in his day, but even still, Cormac had never seen him respond with anything other than benign indifference, long immune to the call.

As she glanced at an open stool at the bar, he acknowledged her with a nod, his gaunt features spreading with a genuine grin. No doubt thrilled with the idea of new ears for his tales.

Ozzie, ever bold in his bumbling way, offered her a grin. “Ah, the fates be seein’ seen fit to grant us mysterious company tonight! Perhaps a tale for the weary.”

She seemed charmed somehow, taking the seat next to him. “Mystery presents itself in intriguing ways.” A nod to her own curiosity.

“If it be discretion yer looking for, the Anchor rarely offers it te rare sights. But otherwise they be mindin’ their own.”

“I’m no stranger to such welcome.” She placed a hand on the bar with a look to Cormac.

He shifted toward her, throwing the linen over a broad shoulder. Setting the glass aside he leaned on the bar casually, a half smile deepening with charm.

“What’s your fancy, milady?”

She smiled, a hint of impishness, a subtle glance at Ozzie’s glass. “The same.”

“Ah! A fellow adventurer!” Ozzie said loudly with a joy to his tone.

Cormac nodded, his gaze low. Smiling as he poured the drinks. “Though I be fit to tell you this old sea dog would drink lamp oil if it gave compromise.”

She stifled a laugh, and Ozzie threw his hands up, “At sea, you learn to make due. Isn’t that right?”

Cormac slid the drink toward her, eyebrow raised. “Aye, though we don’t be fixin’ to maim here.” Ozzie a long drink with a long sigh, “but I do be enjoyin’ a stiff spirit. Makes it easier to tell me tales.” “Then maybe Duncan should find somethin’ more fittin for us to offer.” Cormac smirked.

*“‘The lads be enjoyin’ the stories nonetheless. I’m sure you have tales of your own, lass. Boralus be itchin’ to give you more, I’ll wager.’”*

Ozzie returned his attention to the woman, waving his hand dismissively, “The lads be enjoyin’ the stories nonetheless. I’m sure you have tales of your own, lass. Boralus be itchin’ to give you more, I’ll wager.”

Taking a sip of her own glass, she gave no reaction to its bitterness. “And its tales are precisely my purpose. Though I did not expect a place so dark to welcome outsiders.”

“Ahhh but new secrets be a coin worth more than gold to some.” Ozzie noticed her pendant. “A scrying device of old. Haven’t seen one of those in years. Pity it now hangs at your neck as a bauble.”

She nodded, mildly impressed. “Not many can recognize it, I’m impressed. But it is a family piece. Though it’s whispers are withholding to many.”

Ozzie settled in closer, his elbows folding against the bar’s edge. “Aye, it’s been damaged I see. Though I do be wonderin’ what it’s led you to.”

“How is it you know so much of rare things?” Her expression softening.

Ozzie straightened with pride. “You must a not been here long, then My shop is well known, perhaps we be findin’ proper company to yer skill.”

“What, dusty books and tall tales?” Cormac sighed. “Aye and more’n that. All manner of what calls to the adventurous spirit.” Ozzie nodded.

She shrugged. “As it turns out I am hunting for some rare tomes.”

“Books eh? I’ve got quite the collection. Even tempting ol’ Thorne here.” Ozzie winked at Cormac. She raised her drink. “Oh? You have my curiosity.”

“Then ye come find me. Curses & Curios: Tall tales free of charge.” He raised his own mug to tap it dramatically against hers.

Taking a final swig, Ozzie gave a deep sigh and shifted off the stool. “Ahh, but best be off before these old legs be taken with the tide.”

He lingered for a moment, watching patrons drift out into the Boralus night. Soon enough, the Anchor would be shoving them off to whatever business the evening still held. A sight to behold: sinister privateers, minor criminals, and rough deckhands alike could be heard singing familiar shanties in questionable harmony, their voices bellowing between bursts of laughter. In the distance, the groan of fog horns echoed across Tiragarde Sound, their low calls signaling the approaching tide.

Sliding a few coins along the bar, he nodded to Cormac with a wink. “Though the night still be young for some.”

The woman bowed her head at his departure. Then gaze returned to Cormac, appraising eyes wandering over him before offering a knowing smile. A look he knew all too well.

Leaning on his elbows, he returned the appreciative glance. “I spose even mysteries come with a name.” Voice lifting in curiosity.

“Seems only fair since I know yours.” She gave him a pointed look, lowering the hood of her cloak.

“Eluvianna. Pleasure.”

“Indeed.” He said playfully as he leaned in, idly nudging her drink. “It’s pretty... but I ain’t sayin’ all that.” His voice lowered, meeting the intensity of her gaze. “Elu.”

At the end of the bar, Duncan rolled his eyes. He grabbed a ring of rusted keys from beside the till, that was his cue to check the stock out back.

Eluvianna leaned in, amusement crossing her expression. “Well now that we’re properly acquainted—”

Cormac’s eyes flicked to the back of the tavern, implicating a narrow wooden staircase disappearing into the second floor. “Proper ain’t quite what I were thinkin’.”

A smile tugged at his lips, nodding at the steps. “But even a lady with fancy words don’t come here askin’ for a gentleman.”

Cormac leaned in, allowing her answer to go bridge the space between them.

“Good thing I’m no lady.” She smiled darkly.



- End -

## About the Author



Eluvianna - Artist, Writer

*Eluvianna is an artist, writer, pin designer, Oasis community lead, roleplayer, and Void Elf VTuber. She loves dark fantasy, badass line art, Eldritch horror, and tragic stories. She frequently shares her process and collaborates with folks who appreciate the comfy side of chaos. Her current project, Umbral is all about the origins of her void elf character that started everything she’s working on. <https://elu.art/>*



# Dance at the TOA

BY ASSIAR

## Assiar's Performance

Assiar sassily waltzed up to the stage, carrying with her a closed, brown wicker basket as well as a gnomish device meant for emitting music. Both items were tucked beneath her arms, and she had a broad smile on her face. Today, she wore a fancy fuchsia-colored dress with a sarong that jingled with glittering gold coins tied loosely to her waist and tugged tightly to her broad hips. Her horns were decorated in flashy, golden chains that jangled with every step she took, and it was apparent it was all meant to command and demand attention and garner wide-eyed gazes.

Every step she took, every bounce and flounce she gave caused an alluring jingle of those ornaments, and she couldn't help but wiggle her fingers in a teasing wave and flash the rings that covered each finger and several bangles that coiled along her wrists. Once she found herself at the center of the stage, she smiled at the crowd that gathered and leaned forward - making sure to make a show of it - as she set the basket beside the musical device. With a flick of her finger, she hit the start button and then bounced to its true center to strike a pose full of poise and elegance, with one hip cocked forward and her hands raised above her head.

As soon as the beat of the song started to play for the assembled masses, she lifted her right leg and stepped forward, letting her dress pull back along the slit of her dress as her hooves clopped upon the wooden platform. Deviously, she smirked, pouting out her plush lips as she anticipated the first proper opening of the song, and her glowing, portal-like eyes scanned the crowd.

Then, as the music began, she held her stance a moment longer. Four eyes curiously peered from beneath the rim of the basket's lid, and two long, forked tongues flickered out as they rose up further to expose themselves. Bright green eyes locked onto Assiar, and the Dreanei woman turned towards the basket with narrowing, daring alien eyes. With a flick of her wrist, she beckoned the beasts to her, and two large twin snakes soon followed out to answer her as they slithered free from the basket to join her side. With another intricate twirl of her wrist, Assiar soon slid her hands down along her wide, curvacious side while tracing against her body. Shimming from side

to side as the music started to pick up its pace. Then, suddenly, she raised an arm and goaded the snakes to follow her lead. They happily obliged, slithered and bobbed to her swaying, the clicking jingle of her rings, and the music. The snakes themselves dressed in a purple and gold cape that flowed against their serpentine bodies, pressing against them and moving with their motions alongside Assiar's.

Then, as she continued to dance, she laughed during the song, and the Snakes—not missing their cue—wrapped around her calves and up around her highs in an intricate pattern, guided by the performers' movements.

As the crowd cheered and awed at the sight, Assiar couldn't help but laugh! This was, after all, no easy task! Each snake weighed around 20 lbs each, and it was a wonder how a singular one of them - let alone one - could fit within the basket. Yet, it was clear that they had prepared for this dance for some time, and Assiar continued to showcase her mastery and skill

*“With a hissing command in their language, she watched the snakes extend their necks up from along her legs and curl up as they bared their sharp fangs to her.”*

over the animals and their trust in one another.

Then, as the temp reached a higher crescendo, she licked her fingers together and tapped the rings against one another in unison with the music. With a hissing command in their language, she watched the snakes extend their necks up from along her legs and curl up as they bared their sharp fangs to her, appearing ready to strike! Alas, they wouldn't harm their charmer, so there was no danger here! They were entranced by the music and hypnotized by the woman's movements as she showcased her lissom movements.

She popped her hips left, then right, and rolled her

belly and hips three times over, dancing in a slow, spinning circle upon the tips of her hooves until her back faced the crowd. Then, with a cheeky wink to no one in particular, she peered over her shoulders and



ART BY CROSSWORLDS

lowered herself as she stretched her legs to sit upon the stage in a perfect split.

As Assiar listened to the sounds of the gasps and cheering behind her, she beckoned the snakes on towards her with a click of her fingers and rings once more and watched as they twirled and wrapped around her waistline, careful not to squeeze too tightly. Then, once she was satisfied, Assi pushed herself up to her hooves once again, using nothing more than pure thigh strength. She'd roll her hips upon her ascent, making sure the snakes and her moved in a perfect figure eight. The snakes, of course, followed along with her movements in unison.

As the song started to end, Assiar twirled again once, twice, three times as her dress lifted up around her, and then leapt up with a slam of her hoof down to the floor with a confident stamp! When the last drum beat hit, she and the snakes abruptly ended in a squatting pose with her knees down and a deep arch of her back to the floor. Both snakes landed in the same post right at her ankles, bowing their large heads to the crowd as well.

Her chest heaved with deepened breaths, and she looked up with a proud, toothy grin to the crowd as beads of sweat and glitter trickled from her flushed face onto the stage. With a quick snap of her fingers and a rolling hiss, the snakes scaled from her legs up along her body to her arms, and she held them as all three stood and bowed once more to the adorations in front of her.

She mouthed "Thank you" to them repeatedly and then helped the snakes retreat back into the basket, where their impossible-sized bodies fit into the quaint basket. Then, she'd wave, pick up both the musical device and basket, and saunter off the stage, happy with the results.

- END -

## About the Author



Assiar - Writer

*Assiar has been a dedicated World of Warcraft role-player for almost ten years now. She has been an original Moon Guard enthusiast since joining the game. Many hours have been dedicated to her craft of writing and creating. Now more focused on game content, her writing has slowed but still burns a deep passion in her soul and will always hold a big piece of her heart. Assiar's player is lovingly devoted to her husband and family, which keeps her busy along with working out of the home. No matter how long gone, she always finds a way back to her favorite video game.*

# The Best of Us

BY SANGUINIA

Jeanette Reeve let the scent of smoke fill her and remembered. After nearly five years, forgetting was easier every day. That was why she'd asked for this post.

A veteran who'd earned a knighthood for her service could have any post she wanted in Stromgarde. She'd held the line while the kingdom was reduced to a few tents in a ravine. She'd been in the vanguard when the great Danath Trollbane rode out of a legend and raised the banner of the Crimson Fist. She was one of the first to put a boot on the battlements of An'gorok when they drove the Horde from the Highlands. Most importantly, she was still alive, all too rare a trait for the "heroes," who'd seen those dark days.

Most women in her position, especially those lucky enough to be over 40, would have asked for a cushy desk job, a teaching position, or just left the army so they could live a quiet life. She'd asked for the ramparts above the east gate.

The smithies and foundries never slept, these days. The capital's reconstruction was an ongoing affair, and every craftsman who could lift a hammer had an insatiable appetite for bolts and hinges and struts and who knew what else. Nobody wanted to deal with the constant ringing of hammers or the stink of burning coal.

"Dame Reeve! Your lunch is ready, ma'am!"



Almost nobody.

"Private, I didn't ask you to get me any food."

"I was anticipating your needs, ma'am!"

"Ambition is a piss-poor trait for a greenhorn. ...What is it?"

"Venison, ma'am."

"...Give it here, then."

Private Kyler Fulton hadn't yet seen his twentieth winter. He was a strong lad. Well fed, which told you that he'd grown up on some farm near Stormwind rather than in the turmoil of the north. If the Light was just, Jeanette often thought, this child would still be down there. He could be the plaything of some frisky farmer's daughter while they were waiting for the next harvest. Instead, he was letting the smell of a foundry ruin his lunch while guarding a wall with a bitter old woman.

"Why are you here, Fulton?" Jeanette asked for the hundredth time.

"It's my shift, ma'am," Fulton replied for the hundredth time.

"I know it's your shift, you dolt. I told your Captain I don't want a partner. Why do you keep coming back?"

"Regulations require two-man teams on every tower, ma'am. No one else wants the job."

"I know no one else wants the job. I put a lot of work into making sure no one else wanted the job. Do I need to shove you off this tower for you to get the message?"

"No, ma'am."

"Then leave."

"Can't do that, ma'am."

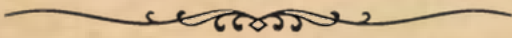
That was a lie. Jeanette had gone to the boy's captain a few days ago and demanded to be left alone. That night, she was told, Fulton had begged that officer not to be reassigned. He'd even agreed to extra duty

shifts if it meant he could keep wasting his time on this particular tower. It had taken some arm twisting, but the captain eventually told Jeanette the boy's reason. It was one she didn't want to dignify with attention, so she continued to feign ignorance.

*“That night, she was told, Fulton had begged that officer not to be reassigned.”*

They ate their meal in silence. Then, Fulton stood at the parapets, watching the road for any sign of trouble, as the regulations said he should. Jeanette stayed seated, her back resting against white stone, and watched the sky. It was the only thing worth her attention. An hour later, they came, right on schedule. Jeanette counted the distant figures as they soared past, as she did every day. She could recognize their silhouettes from this distance. Three dire bats from Taren Mill and three wyverns from Frostwolf Keep, all low and slow thanks to a heavy burden of packs and crates. For two years, these deliveries had run like clockwork. When the Fourth War first ended, such supply runs had been rare. The Horde feared provoking Stromgarde or the Wildhammer Dwarves on the far side of the mountains. Now, they felt safe. Jeanette started to pull out her journal to record some information about the flight, but she froze. There was something else in the formation. She raised her rifle and peered through the scope. The boy asked what was wrong, but she ignored him. After a few moments, she sighted the creature. It was huge, with wings like a bat but a highland raptor's gaunt, predatory body. That body was protected by armor-like blue scales, but also gaudy plates made from gold-plated storm silver and bone. She knew at once what that meant.

“Zandalari.”



Jahira, Prelate of the Temple of Rezan, swooped low over the village of Hammerfall. She knew from her notes that the settlement pre-dated the founding of the modern Horde, but it looked almost brand new to her eyes.

Her back was sore. She had flown in circles for nearly two additional hours so the supply beasts could land and be unloaded first. Worse, she hadn't really rested since she first got off her ship in Silverpine Forest. After the Sepulcher's innkeeper smirkingly

assured her that they had specially constructed the coffin in her room to account for her near eight-foot frame, she'd refused to give her Forsaken hosts any satisfaction by complaining.

Unfortunately, propriety demanded that she present herself to the village leaders before finding a bed. The flight master told her they were waiting at the Spirit Lodge, though she didn't understand why they hadn't simply gathered at the landing point.

At least, she didn't understand until she spoke to the orc overseer, Drum Fel.



“Thrall's Balls, is this what the Council is sending me to hold the town these days? She may be tall, but she doesn't even look like she has enough meat on her bones for the Witherbark to bother eating her!” By standing on a raised dais while Jahira remained on the pathway, Drum Fel had managed to loom roughly two or three inches above her. No doubt he had hoped she was shorter so she'd have to crane her neck to speak to him. A Frostwolf soldier she'd shared a drink with in Tarren Mill warned her that Fel liked to play the part of a blowhard. This was partly because he was one, but also a tactic designed to scare off weaklings before they became a burden on his community. Even before the loss of An'gorok and the reconstitution of Stromgarde, Hammerfall was a difficult place to live. Fel couldn't afford to feed anyone who wasn't prepared to fight to the death for this little patch of dirt.

“I'm afraid you are misinformed, Master Fel. De Witherbark Tribe are a cruel and aggressive lot, but dey do not practice cannibalism. Surely you were thinking of de Vilebranch Tribe to de north?”

The orc blinked a few times, unsure how to respond to the old diplomat's trick of presuming an insult was made in good faith. This prompted the Forsaken woman leaning against the wall nearby to start snickering. "You'll have to forgive Old Drum, my dear. I think he ate the last three books someone put in front of him."

The female orc, who had watched the conversation silently to this point, let out an angry puff of air. "Watch your tongue around my husband, Battlemaster. If I cut it out it'll be days before the Undercity sends you a new one."

"Also," Jahira interjected, hoping to preempt further bickering, "I was not sent by de Horde Council. A petition was received in Atal'dazar. De Defilers of Arathi requested an envoy from Queen Talanji. In recognition of de service granted to de Throne by Forsaken forces during de Fourth War, I am here to answer dat request."

Now it was the Forsaken's turn to be caught off-guard.

"You're kidding. The queen of Zandalar actually read Tanner's letter? And sent someone? Talk about a bad joke."

"You are de one known as Black Bride, are you not?" The armored undead's amusement was gone. "That's right. And as Doomrider Addington's superior officer and leader of the Defilers, I ask you to do me the kindness of getting back on your flying lizard and going home."

The tension that had suddenly entered the conversation was palpable, and it wasn't only coming from the undead woman. Drum Fel's bluster had contracted, but there was fury in his expression. His wife, on the other hand, was hiding a smile. Jahira had to know what this was about. "I'm afraid my duty does not permit dat. A Prelate of Rezan must die

*"The tension that had suddenly entered the conversation was palpable, and it wasn't only coming from the undead woman."*

before failing to uphold a command from de Throne. My command is to speak to de one who wrote de petition. Where may I find Doomrider Addington?"



From her perch above Hammerfall, Jeanette had a clear view of the entire village... except for the Spirit Lodge, where the Zandalari was meeting with both Drum Fel and the Black Bride. That was frustrating, but she didn't dare try to reach the vantage point near Drywhisker Gorge during broad daylight.

"Dame Reeve, I-"

"I ignored you on the ride over here because you were quiet, Private. If you get me caught, I'll kill you myself."

"Yes, ma'am. But this is too dangerous. You confirmed a Zandalari agent is visiting Hammerfall. We should report back. We're under strict orders to avoid Horde territory to prevent potential risks to the armistice. Coming here without permission could see us hanged!"

"I warned you ambition was a piss-poor trait, and now you're seeing where it gets you. If you want to go, then go. I'm not leaving until I know what that thing came here for."

"How do you propose to do that? Uh, I mean... Ma'am."

She didn't answer and continued to watch the village through her scope. Five minutes later, the eight-foot grey-skinned troll came back into view and made its way to the tavern.

Without a word to Private Fuller, Jeanette reached into a pouch on her belt and drew out a ratty old eagle

feather. She closed her eyes and muttered a few syllables of old Arathi. The next moment, it was as if she was standing in the pub's doorway. Eagle Eye was simple hedge magic, a trick human hunters had passed down even before the elves saw fit to share the mysteries of the arcane. She couldn't hear what was being said, but she could watch as that Zandalari sauntered up to the bar and greeted a Forsaken soldier.



“Prelate! I confess, I hadn't been certain if the letter informing me of your visit was genuine or a joke at my expense. Sir Tanner Addington, Defiler Doomrider, at your service.”

Jahira grasped the offered hand gingerly. Forsaken hands were so emaciated she always feared she would break their bones if she wasn't careful. Of course, that wasn't as big a problem for them as most races. One was never too far from some animal with enough bones and flesh to fashion a hand.

“Taz'okun, Tanner Addington. 'Sir,' you say? Dis is de address of a human knight, is it not?”

“Indeed. I was a knight of Lordaeron in life. I hope you'll forgive the pretense. Most of my brethren prefer to distance themselves from the trappings of the past. But... well, I enjoy it. Call me sentimental.”  
“Dere is nothing to forgive, Sir. So, what would you ask of de Throne?”

By way of answer, the Forsaken retrieved a map from somewhere on his person and laid it out on the bar counter. It depicted not just the Arathi Highlands but most of the northern Eastern Kingdoms.

“Prelates are renowned as both great warriors and wise councilors. What do you make of the Horde's strategic position in this region?”

Jahira did not truly need to study the map to provide an answer. It was a question asked often in courts all over the Horde. “Stable, but vulnerable. De Forsaken's efforts to reclaim de Undercity and rebuild Tirisfal have been impressive, as were your Desolate Council's diplomatic moves in Gilneas. Many would have called Lilian Voss a fool for helping a blood enemy reclaim a city on her border. Yet her gamble led Genn Greymane, one of de Alliance's greatest warmongers, to relinquish rule in favor of his more temperate daughter.”

Her finger traced the line of the Greymane Wall, then swept east. “De Alliance reoccupation of Southshore is a grave threat, but it is made worse by de fortification of Chillwind Camp. During de Fourth War, Alliance forces built a dam near dere capable of choking off de Darrowmere River. If dey rebuild it, Tarren Mill will be caught in a vice. Still, dere is no easy way to strike Horde territory from either foothold. Stromgarde would not do much to tip de scales, either, not with Thoradin's Wall to act as a buffer. De Alliance could easily break demselves on de Forsaken and Frostwolf Clan like waves on a rock if dey attacked, and dere top commanders know it. Lilian Voss was wise to extend her hand given dese conditions. A spear in one hand will keep an enemy at bay, and a coin in de other will help dem forget dat sometimes a spear must be broken.”

*“There was a dry, raspy sort of noise as Sir Addington clapped his hands. “Excellent. Your thinking aligns perfectly with Forsaken High Command's most recent memoranda.”*

There was a dry, raspy sort of noise as Sir Addington clapped his hands. “Excellent. Your thinking aligns perfectly with Forsaken High Command's most recent memoranda. However, there is a strategic problem you failed to note.” His long, claw-like finger pinned itself on a lonely red spot at the map's eastern edge. “Hammerfall. We're helpless here. The daily supply drops from our core territories are enough to keep the village from starving with help from Go'shek Farm and our holdings in the Arathi Basin, but we're barely holding on. Our position could soon prove untenable during peace, let alone if war breaks out.”

Jahira looked at the map again. He was right, of course. So many things could wipe this place off the map. The Witherbark Trolls or the Boulderfist Ogres could be enough on their own. The Stromics wouldn't even need to attack directly. A few 'inexplicable' fires destroying harvests at Go'shek and a few airlifts getting 'unlucky' during the storm season would be enough. Even a particularly harsh winter could doom them all.

"I agree with your assessment. Do your leaders' opinions of dis information have something to do with dem being angry dat I am here?"

Sir Addington scratched the back of his neck. "That has more to do with my plan to fix the problem. They've been sending letters to Orgrimmar for months, trying to convince the Horde Council that we need aggressive action. They want to annex the Daybrie Farmstead before Stromgarde's borders are more formalized, or begin a 'low-risk, small-scale' offensive to seize more of the Basin. Rather, they have been attempting to send letters. Master Drum's wife, Korin, has been wise enough to intercept and burn them. All it would take is one falling into Stromic hands. We'd all be dead by dawn."

Jahira nodded along. "Den, what is your proposal?"

That dagger-like Forsaken nail jumped over the eastern mountains beside Hammerfall and prodded a tiny speck of green on the far side. "On this spot, you'll find an abandoned dwarven village. It's been unoccupied since at least the War of Three Hammers. I want to rebuild it. Not only does it have enough useable farmland to meet many of our needs, but the dwarves built docks that are still intact and could be easily expanded." The nail moved north. "Instead of small, vulnerable shipments by air, we can trade for everything we need by sea from the Reventusk Trolls."

That made Jahira's eyes go wide. It was a clever idea. Even at the height of the Fourth War, the Reventusk had managed to avoid provoking significant attention from the Alliance. They were fervently loyal and had often spoken on the Horde's behalf in Atal'dazar. They would be pleased to aid their brothers in Arathi. There was just one problem.

"How will you get de supplies from dis farm to Hammerfall? Dere is no path through de mountains."

"That's why I need you, Prelate. Or, to be more precise, I need Zandalari gold."

"Gold? For what?"

"I want to pay the dwarves of Aerie Peak to build us a road through the mountains, just like the one they built to Stromgarde."

It had been a while since Jahira had been legitimately surprised by something. "I don't understand. Why not build a tunnel yourselves? Or pay your Goblin allies?"

"Because it's not Forsaken or Goblin land. That village rightly belongs to the dwarves, even if they don't remember it was ever theirs. If we take it and start building something there without telling anyone, the Alliance will eventually find out. They'll remember how the Forsaken seized Gilneas under Garrosh. They'll remember how we eyed Stromgarde as a second Undercity because it was mostly abandoned. They'll see a threat. You talked about Lady Voss extending the hand to the Worgen. This is my contribution to diplomacy. In Lordaeron, when a man wanted another man's land, he didn't grab a sword; he paid a fair price. We will deal with the dwarves as one great nation to another, fairly and justly. We will both hold our heads high when the bargain is struck."

Jahira barely repressed a grin. No wonder the man clung to a title from a prior lifetime. Who would have thought a hopeless romantic was hiding among the Forsaken?

"Why should Zandalari fund dis venture, I wonder? What's in it for us?"

Sir Addington froze. "I... uh... I hadn't... worked that part out yet."

"And what will you do if de dwarves will not do business with you?"

"I don't... know?"

"Tanner Addington, all other factors aside, what is de point of all of dis? Dere is a much simpler solution: abandon Hammerfall. Even if all goes as you wish, dere are still de Stromics to contend with. Dey could march on dis place tomorrow, and no one could stop dem. De Horde Council will not fight a war for dis hamlet. Dese lands were lost to us in de Fourth War. De wisest course would be to accept dis and let dem go."

Sir Addington sighed... and smiled. "Tell me, Prelate, do you know Hammerfall's history?"

"Only dat it was built some decades ago. I thought it was odd dat de buildings seemed so new."


“This place was an internment camp after the Horde lost the Second War. One of the largest, in point of fact. I wonder if you can imagine it: thousands of orcs crammed into ramshackle housing. Walls that could barely keep out the wind. As the demonic blood drained out of them, many struggled to maintain the will to live. Sometimes, they would go to sleep and just... not wake up the next day. Food and medicine were always in short supply because nobody wanted to prioritize caring for the monsters that tried to kill us all. I remember my Lord used to ask at dinner nearly every night why his taxes were paying to keep... ‘the pigs’ alive. Better to kill them all and be done with it, he always said.”

*“Reading Forsaken expressions wasn’t easy, but no one could mistake Sir Addington’s sadness as he said those last words and remembered the day they were spoken.”*

Reading Forsaken expressions wasn’t easy, but no one could mistake Sir Addington’s sadness as he said those last words and remembered the day they were spoken. Jahira hadn’t thought about what it meant when the man had said he was a knight of Lordaeron. What he might have seen. How old was he when the Scourge raised him? A man in his prime, helping to fight the orcs who had the temerity to rebel against their imprisonment? An old man on the brink of setting down his sword, with little but memories of his past actions for company?

“You say the Horde Council wouldn’t fight for Hammerfall, if it came down to it. I think you might be wrong. The name honors Orgrim Doomhammer, a Warchief of the Horde. He died in that courtyard below, about thirty feet from the gate. He died fighting side-by-side with Thrall, freeing his people from bondage. Hammerfall is holy ground. That’s why I wanted it to be a Zandalari that I asked for gold. I trusted you would understand. Or was that presumption?”

Jahira looked down at the map, at that lonely spot of red. “Dere are many details to be worked out with your plan. I will begin by flying to Reventus Village on your behalf, and conferring with dere leaders. If dey do not agree, dere is nothing more to be done. I trust you will not begrudge my mount and I a few hours rest?”



“Dame Reeve, why-?”

“Shut your mouth and stay low.”

If only she could have heard what they were saying... but the map was enough. The way they’d stared at it and their fingers lanced about from Horde settlement to Horde settlement, there was no question. They were preparing for another war.

What better place to plan it than Hammerfall, right under Stromgarde’s nose? They’d seen the years of complacency, how they’d been allowed to freely use Stromic skies even though the land was denied to them. No one craved human blood more than the Black Bride, and none craved conquest more than that pig, Drum Fel.

But the hand of fate was at work here. She’d noticed the courier. She’d seen the thing they’d summoned to hear their scheme. The Forsaken and orcs had no hope if they attacked alone, but with fresh forces from an unexpected ally... yes, it all made perfect sense. There was a low ridge and some brush in the shadow of Hammerfall’s walls. It wasn’t much, but it gave her a perfect view of the skies around the village. No matter which way the Zandalari flew, she would be ready. Whether it was west, to Lordaeron, south, to the Dragonmaw Clan, or north, to the Blood Elves, it didn’t matter. That lizard-worshiper couldn’t hide once it was in that big, starry sky.

She started to tremble slightly. Adrenaline. She wished she could light up some tobacco, an old Dwarven trick, but she didn’t dare this close to the enemy. The burning ember would give her away in the dark. She resorted to a trick of her own: thinking out loud. “A Pterrordax is a tricky target. They’re sturdier than they look. The best way is through the eye, but that’s no good for this one. I saw the barding. Zandalari always enchant their eye-guards; it’s too obvious a weak spot for their otherwise unstoppable beasts. The best option will be the neck. There’s only some decorative rings there, nothing that will protect it. Pterrordax blood pressure needs to be high to keep the body warm at high altitudes and the wing muscle fed. It’ll be gone in seconds if the impact angle is right.”

Private Fulton was close enough that she heard him swallow the lump in his throat. “Ma’am, what are you-”

“It’s not enough to know the prey, greenhorn. You

need to know their pets to do the job properly. It wasn't their brains or their spells that built their empires; it was the animals they tamed through their so-called 'gods.' When the elves were still stumbling across the sea, the Amani had already bargained with Jan'alai the Dragonhawk and Nalorakk the Bear. Our ancestors wrote all about it in the old scrolls. Do you know what a seven-foot, three-hundred-pound forest troll on the back of an eight-hundred-pound battle bear can do to a line of infantry carrying iron weapons? Do you know how fast a flight of dragonhawks can burn down a village made from wood and hide? It's no wonder we taught ourselves to forge steel and build using stone. If we hadn't evolved, we'd have died out long before the damn ELVES came along!"

*"Do you know what a seven-foot, three-hundred-pound forest troll on the back of an eight-hundred-pound battle bear can do to a line of infantry carrying iron weapons?"*

Fulton was very quiet now. He was staring at her face as if something was wrong with it. What was his problem? "This is the stuff you wanted to hear, right? This is why you followed me around like a lost puppy. You wanted to hear stories from a true Troll Hunter of Strom, like the ones Grandma used to tell you about at bedtime. You wanted to be mentored by the great 'hero' Jeanette Reeve! Where's your gratitude?"

"...Dame Reeve, are you feeling alright? You look..." Her heart rate had gone up. Her face was flushed. In Hammerfall, a bell rang out. A flier was departing. Jeanette loaded her rifle.

It was one of her special rounds. She hadn't used one since An'gorok. It was a high-caliber slug, built for maximum penetration, but the real danger was the runes she'd inscribed. They were far older than elvish magic. The ancestors who wrote them down had forgotten it was a Vrykul spell, but they had known that if you inscribed them on a spearhead, it would explode inside the target's body. Then, the fragments would burn like a sun to ensure nothing grew back. She had missed when she fired one at the great Shadow Hunter Rohkan, now Chieftain of the Darkspear Trolls and member of the Horde Council.

What a waste.

"Dame Reeve, you have to stop! The armistice!"

The Pterrordax gained altitude quickly, then banked... east? It couldn't climb too steeply, so it switched to gradually circling upward. It wanted to clear the mountaintops at the Highlands' edge. So, the Zandalari was going to the Reventusk in the Hinterlands. Not that it would ever arrive.

Jeanette cocked back the hammer. She sighted her target. It was high now, and the sky was so dark that nobody in Hammerfall would see the beast fall. A single rapport would be the only evidence anything was amiss, and she would be gone when the guards came looking for a source. It was too perfect. "DAME REEVE! STOP!" Fulton's armored hand grabbed the muzzle of her rifle and jerked it away from her target. He wasn't ready when she dropped her end without hesitation and tackled him. If he wasn't off-balance and exhausted from lugging full plate around all day, he could have handled her weight. A Troll Hunter needed to be ready to pounce on such opportunities instantly. Her prey would always be larger and stronger than her. Fulton didn't know how to react when she ripped off his helm and dug her forearm into his throat. A Troll Hunter could never afford to hold back when striking a weak point, for her prey's hardiness was the stuff of nightmares. The boy was unconscious in less than twelve seconds. She recovered her gun. The target was only moments from leaving her range.

She aimed and fired.



Jahira woke up screaming.

The pain in her belly was one she'd felt before, though rarely. She was known among the Prelates for being meticulous when constructing her holy barriers. Granted, she was also known for her recklessness

leading her to grievous wounds, but she always took extra care around fire. Any troll would.

When the agony stopped, she could smell her own seared flesh. A voice entered her ear. “Yes, that’s it. That’s the smell. I’d come so close to forgetting.” Slowly, Jahira’s awareness grew, and she wished it hadn’t. As the pain from the burn ebbed, she began to feel four deep gashes that had been carved into her upper body. Blood was oozing out of her, staining the pool of ankle-deep cave water she’d been sat in by her captor. The clarity brought on by exploding nerves was quickly giving way to light-headedness.

*“When the agony stopped, she could smell her own seared flesh. A voice entered her ear.”*

“I never thought I’d have the pleasure of killing a Zandalari. Forest Trolls? I’ve killed hundreds. Took a tusk from every tribe in the north. Got a few Jungles, mostly Darkspear during the war. Even nabbed a Frost Troll once when I drew the short straw and got sent to Ironforge to recruit mercenaries for the Basin. But Zandalari... that’s a trophy fit for a king.”

Jahira tried to force herself to think. Her armor had been removed, and her legs were bound. Her hands were free, but the gashes in her arms had severed tendons. She doubted she could move them. She tried to estimate how long it would take to bleed to death, then realized she had no idea how much blood she could afford to lose. It wasn’t a problem trolls typically had to contemplate.

“If you’re wondering how long you have until you bleed to death, I’d say less than five minutes. You’re small for your kind, not even eight feet. With four open wounds you won’t last long.”

The human had an aged face, dark red hair, and grey eyes that looked beyond crazed. In her hands were a wickedly curved axe and a torch—the traditional weapons of a Stromic Troll Hunter.

“You are making a terrible mistake. I am here as a Speaker, a diplomat. To kill one of my station is a grievous crime, even among your own people. You will surely hang for dis, assuming you do not start a war.”

The torch went right back against Jahira’s belly. She screamed again.



“Start a war. You’re funny. Now, you’re going to tell me your attack plan, and for every answer that I like, I’ll burn one of those gashes closed. Start with where your forces plan to strike first.”

Jahira gasped for air, and sweat poured down her body, but she still managed to summon some incredulous confusion. “Attack? What are you talking about? Dere is no attack.”

“Only about four minutes left. Are you really going to waste them lying?”

“You think a Prelate would lie? I was invited here for trade negotiations! And de Horde could not attack in dis region even if we wanted to! It would be a disaster!”

The Troll Hunter jammed the wet, grimy heel of her boot into one of Jahira’s bleeding wounds. “Oh, believe me, it will be. There won’t be any ‘armistice’ this time. We’ll purge you misbegotten monsters from our continent once and for all, just like we should have five years ago! The only reason you exist is to wage war, so the only way to have peace is to exterminate every last one of you! It seems like the whole world wants to forget that, but I won’t let that happen to me.”

She pulled out a small, leather-bound book and slapped Jahira’s face with it. “Every day since the war ended, I’ve watched crates full of rightfully human wealth flow into that little hovel of yours. Food, ore, wood, gold, all taken from our land to keep murdering animals and walking corpses out of their graves. I won’t have it anymore, you hear me? I WON’T HAVE IT! I didn’t survive so many battles so our boys could keep shoving themselves into suits of armor and waiting for the day something like you comes out of the dark to cut their throats! I’LL HAVE PEACE, YOU HEAR ME?! I’LL BURN YOU ALL, AND I’LL HAVE PEACE!”

Jahira glared up at her captor. "I'd tell you to go to hell, but I can see you are already dere."

The Troll Hunter's anger erupted, and she drew back her torch, intent on burning out her victim's defiant eyes.

"Dame Reeve!"

Jeanette looked up. At the edge of the cave pool, Kyler Fulton stood tall and gleaming in his fresh-forged armor. The only marks on it were a few stains from the dirt and grass she'd ordered him to crawl through near the Hammerfall walls. In his hand, there was a sword. At his side, there was a Forsaken.



"My Lady, I must ask you to step away from Prelate Jahira," the undead said in a surprisingly calm voice. "If you permit me to take her, no one need know that this happened."

Jeanette ignored the undead. All she could see was Stromic steel pointed at her. She charged. "YOU DAMN TRAITOR!"

She thought her axe would meet the sword's edge, but the boy had paid attention during his basic training. He turned, allowing the axehead to glance off his plates, and wrapped his free arm around Jeanette's upper body, attempting to restrain her.

"Dame Reeve, please stop! I don't want to hurt you." Escaping his grip was simple. The boy was too green, and he meant it when he said he didn't want to hurt her. He hadn't applied nearly the amount of strength he needed. What a fool.

Her axe's second swing slipped under his left pauldron, ripping it free like a shucked crab shell. A Troll Hunter's weapon was heavy, designed to sever limbs. Her next blow, aimed at the neck, wouldn't

likely pierce the breastplate's gorget, but it would surely shatter the collarbone beneath.

Suddenly, she was off her feet. Through her anger, she realized she'd just felt an armored shoulder slam into her flank at full sprint. A moment later, she was on her backside in blood-strained water. The torch in her off-hand sizzled as it was doused.

*"Suddenly, she was off her feet. Through her anger, she realized she'd just felt an armored shoulder slam into her flank at full sprint."*

"Boy, see to the Prelate!" the undead commanded. "Use the potion I gave you. If she's been burned, her wounds won't close without it! I'll handle your friend." Fulton hesitated. "Sir, you... you won't hurt her?" "On my honor as a knight."

This seemingly satisfied the young idiot, who rushed to tend to the troll. Jeanette pulled herself from the stinking pond and drew a pair of daggers from her belt. "Honor? That's a word the Horde loves. But you're Forsaken. You don't even have the sort of honor an Orc would recognize."

The undead tightened his grip on his short sword and carefully positioned his buckler, watching both daggers with the practiced poise of a professional soldier. "I know your name, Jeanette Reeve. The League of Arathor drank toasts to your valor for years in the Basin. You are a hero to your people. Don't stain that legacy with an unprovoked act of war in defiance of your orders. Leave this place."

His words were like needles in her eyes. "The real heroes are dead, you filth! If you want to know why, look down at that tabard!" She charged. The edges of her daggers had been enchanted with fire magic. They scorched the monster's shield as he fell back. "'Defilers.' What a perfect name. You're a blight, and I'll burn you out of my homeland!"

Her flurry of blows was too much for the small shield alone, but when the undead brought his sword into play, it was only to parry, not to strike back. He continued to give ground, step by step.

"I was a defiler long before I was undead, my Lady. I just didn't know it."

They were only a few yards from the cave wall.

Jeanette was sure that if she could force him against it, she'd be able to open his guard and take his head.

"Typical Horde rhetoric. We're not the same! Your precious Banshee Queen showed that to the entire world!"

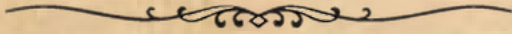
"You're correct. As a human I was bad, but as a Forsaken I was far worse. I reveled in violence. I joined the Defilers to make humans suffer. But when Sylvanas betrayed us, I chose to change. I embraced the best of myself instead of the worst!"

Jeanette didn't think she could be any more angry than she already was. She was wrong.

"WHAT THE HELL GIVES YOU THE RIGHT TO MAKE THAT CHOICE AFTER WHAT YOU'VE DONE!?" She wouldn't wait for him to hit the wall. She stepped into her thrust and sent both blades straight toward his throat.

The sword was like a lightning bolt. In less than a second, the daggers were out of her hands. She had over-extended. When his buckler struck the side of her head, the world went white. The cave water was terribly cold. The last thing she heard before she passed out was,

"The same thing that gives YOU that right, my Lady."



Kyler adjusted himself in his saddle. He kept feeling a powerful urge to look back at Dame Reeve. She'd been tied onto her horse, and her hands had been bound, so she wasn't going anywhere. Still, her defeated expression was even more painful to imagine than actually see.

"Sir Addington, Lady Jahira, I apologize once again on behalf of Stromgarde. This, uh... incident-"

"Never happened," Addington finished. "If anyone with authority in Arathi finds out about this they're as likely to start a war as they are to throw anyone in the stockades. We're all going to keep quiet about it. Is that clear, Private?"

Kyler coughed. "Of course, Sir. But Dame Reeve..."

"We cannot control what she chooses to say, or to whom. But broadcasting that she abandoned her post without leave and came back with nothing to show for it isn't likely to convince anyone of anything,

especially if you refuse to corroborate her story. Lying to a superior officer isn't something they teach you in the training yard, but-"

"I can handle that much, Sir. They raised us to have stiff spines on the farm."

The undead grinned behind his mouthguard. "Good lad. Make sure you untie her before you get in sight of the city walls."

The two Horde soldiers were still rehearsing their story of rogue elementals from the Stone of East Binding shooting down the Prelate's mount when they left Fulton's sight. For about an hour, there was no sound but the wind and the horses' hooves. Finally, he decided to pull himself alongside Dame Reeve. He offered her a hunk of dried meat. "Hungry? You haven't eaten since yesterday's lunch." "You're a traitor. When we get back to Stromgarde, I never want to see your face again."

He'd learned not to let her crass remarks get to him, but he knew she wasn't just trying to chase him away this time. She meant that from the bottom of her heart. "I understand, ma'am. I'm sorry I let you down."

They rode in silence for another ten minutes, and this time, it was Dame Reeve who broke the silence.

"I only knocked you out because you were in the way. I could have killed you, but I didn't. It's no excuse to side with the enemy."

"I didn't care about that. I was trying to help you. You weren't well."

There was a slight pinging noise as a mouthful of spittle struck the side of his helm.

"You bastard. You damn fool. I was saving you! Do you understand that? As long as those things are here we'll never be safe! NEVER!"

He wiped his helm clean.

"You might be right, ma'am. I'm just a farmboy. I never saw any Horde until today. Those two said their leaders would use us as an excuse to hurt people, so I suppose there must be some pretty rotten ones. But that's why I joined up. When my family came from the south, I could have settled down on a patch of good land and kept living like I had been. But when I saw what our people had built and thought about how hard the ones who stayed behind fought for that chance, all I wanted was to help keep Stromgarde safe."

Unexpectedly, the great Troll Hunter's fire went out, and she stared at her saddle. "You shouldn't have to keep it safe. None of us should have to keep it safe. It should just... be safe. Haven't we suffered enough to earn that much?"

Kyler Fulton thought on that for a moment. If he had been a wiser man, he could have given some grand, philosophical response about the nature of the world, life, or the future. But he wasn't.

Instead, he said, "I don't know, ma'am. I do know that you've done more to keep it safe than most. That's why I asked to work with you. Maybe I also wanted to hear war stories from a real-life Troll Hunter, but I saw pretty quickly that you didn't want to tell them. After that, all I wanted was to help you keep Stromgarde safe until I could learn enough to do the job as well as you. I still want that. What you did today was wrong, but I still believe in you. Ma'am. Sorry..."

They trotted on in awkward silence for another ten minutes. Then Jeanette asked, "What sort of meat was that?"

"Venison, ma'am."

"Give it here, then."

- END -

## About the Author



Sanguinia - Writer

*Sanguinia is a lifetime enjoyer of genre fiction in all its myriad flavors, from the bookshelf to the tabletop to the screen. Warcraft is just one of his many passions in the realm of fantasy, though it holds a special place in his heart. In addition to enjoying nerd ephemera as a member of the audience, he also loves to engage with it as a writer and critic, creating fiction, analyses and indulging in roleplaying for many beloved universes. His current big project is a weekly series of essays critiquing and commenting on Final Fantasy XIV. You can follow his work on <https://ko-fi.com/sanguinequest>, <https://bsky.app/profile/sanguinelp.bsky.social>, or, if you're truly desperate, <https://twitter.com/SanguiniaLP>.*

# In the Echoes of the Past

BY REASE  
STONEHEART

*Point of View: Dame Shalaine Belford*



War was hell, even if it was a way of life in Azeroth for many.

Dame Shalaine Belford looked out over the desolate landscape of what had once been a part of the shining jewel of Lordaeron in both life and undeath. The large scar left from the Battle of Lordaeron gouged out of the ground like a stain as devastation ran straight from the ocean towards the gate of Capital City itself. What had once been full of smooth cobblestones, beautiful trees (even if sick with rot) and tended to gardens and little hamlets that sprung up to Brill were now littered with deep pits, ravines of bones, and littered with broken weapons, armors, and siege equipment.

Death clung in the air more permeable than before, creating an uneasy atmosphere even in the best of calm weather. Shalaine was thankful at least that she couldn't smell - or at least as well as she could before - since she was sure had she been alive, she would have gagged. A part of her wondered why this section of the city that divided what was left of the Kingdom hadn't been repaired since the Banshee Queen left, but then, another part of her knew that the Forsaken probably didn't care.

After all, everything was broken beyond repair even after the Kingdom had been scourged, and why fix what was more than an inconvenience? For years the Forsaken people had languished in their depressive state, telling themselves that was just how it was and things wouldn't be better for them all. Why improve, when they were all damned as it was? Even after one of the most significant battles of the Fourth War was fought here on their doorstep, and they tried to pick themselves back up and regain some of their self-respect, they still didn't seem to care about cleaning up and moving forward to something better.

It was a little disconcerting for her and certainly brought out memories of the past that she hated to dwell on. She hadn't been back to Capital City - much less the Undercity beneath it - since the end of the battle some years ago. Not even at the end of the Fourth War. She had been far too busy in the northern part of the Kingdom establishing her estates and seeing to its defense and the reclamation of a lost

land from the feral, mindless undead that still prowled those northern forests.

"Mistress," Amarri spoke behind her. "I don't want to hasten you, but don't you wish to continue to the Undercity?"

For a second, Shalaine forgot she was with others on the road and quickly snapped her head to look at the two attendants she had brought: Amarri and Cherrise. Both were Forsaken women, much like herself, and both were equally pleasantly attractive despite their death state. Amarri was the more unassuming of the two, with soft glowing eyes that were often downcasted beneath the bangs of her simple bob haircut, while Cherrise was skinnier and more lithe in her form with a gouging rip at her cheek that exposed the bone beneath.

A harsh reprimand stilled in her throat as she narrowed her eyes towards Amarri. She thought to remind the woman that Shalaine was the one in charge, not her, but instead, she sighed and looked towards the ruined landscape again and what little remained of the path forward.

"I do. Let me think in peace, though. It had been some time since I had last been here, and I wanted to let my mind wander. Our business can wait," she said with steel in her voice.

Sufficiently cowed by her Mistress's words, Amarri bowed her head once again and tightened her hold over the reins of her death charger, letting the beast whicker in reply instead of her.

Though it was Cherrise who spoke next. "True, Dame Belford. But even the Desolate Council's patience hasn't been known to hold forever, and you said this was rather important."

Shalaine damned the woman for being right and growled.

"Ever the correct one to hold me accountable," Shalaine venomously said. "Let us go then."

She dug her spurs into her mount's bony back, felt it shiver beneath her, and walked. Its hooves found purchase in the hardened, cracked earth as all three wandered through the remains of the battle around them. Lordaeron's reckoning after the burning of

Teldrassil had come in full force, decimating what little beauty had remained.

*“Lordearon’s reckoning after the burning of Teldrassil had come in full force, decimating what little beauty had remained.”*

While she had been focused on the trip’s task, Shalaine still let herself think and remember things of the past as she eyed the ruins of old buildings, roads, and siege equipment that had been blown apart by the fighting.

Light... How long had it been? She didn’t want to know. The further into the old battlefield they went, the more she pulled back through the annals of time to the parts she had played in all of this destruction. Her eyes closed for half a second, and it was all that consumed her for now.



She was back in the memory of the battle so long ago. The familiar sights, smells, and sounds all roiled around her as if they harkened her back to the past, pulling her through the currents of time to keep her in a false purgatory.

She opened her eyes and remembered how her fellow Death Knights surrounded her. Every single one of them - all varied races of the horde who had risen into their version of damnation - gleamed with their thick, dark armor and glowing weapons. Her own armour was much the same she continued to wear now: thickly plated, with spikes that ran along every limb. The weapon she wielded was also the same; a large, wide blade with a grinning skull at the cross guard, spilling foul magic trails along the fuller.

There she stood in the shadow of the buildings around her as the ground shook with distant explosions. Men and women screamed and yelled, and foul smoke filled the air and choked the lungs around her. The Knights’ job was simple enough: charge the Alliance’s flank when they so much as stepped into the upper portion of the city. The command was simple to follow, but hell to wait for.

Eventually, they’d have their chance to spill the blood they all ached for, and Shalaine tensed as she remembered how much she looked forward to

proving herself that day.

A large ship sailed the sky, firing all the cannons on her side. Explosions once more heavily shook the ground, lurching up small hills of dirt and stone and unbalancing several Knights around her. Then, the battle drew closer, and a call to pull back rang out. She knew what was coming, and her eyes widened as she felt a rush of excitement fill her core.

The gates smashed wide open with a crash, and in streamed the banners of the Alliance and the races that comprised it. Gold, blue, silver, and grey suddenly filled the streets as humans, dwarves, elves, draenei, and others started to scatter and clear the streets. Bullets and spells fired in the air, hotly whistling as they struck the ancient stone, burning and shocking everything in their path.

A shout screamed from her Captain - a large Tauren bull wielding an axe that glowed with blue runes - to charge, and then the thundering steps of a hundred Death Knights leaped from where they hid and charged into the unruly, unorganized mob of Lions to cut a bloody swath.

Shalaine’s sword had tasted blood that day and she felt more alive than she had in years. She remembered how scared a human infantryman looked at her as his eyes widened just as much as her own in fear, yet he hadn’t raised his spear or shield in time for her to cleave him in two and taste his deathly scream in the air. She followed through next to her brothers and sisters as she brought her sword back down to a dwarven lass with hammers and spells, using her wildhammer tattoos as a guide on where to cut.

*“Shalaine’s sword had tasted blood that day and she felt more alive than she had in years.”*

Mindlessly, she continued to fight and stare down every opponent she felled. Her sword might have been large and almost unwieldy, but in her hands, it was as light as a feather. It hit like lightning, and everyone who felt her might regretted where they died that day.

The Alliance fell back. They outnumbered the Death Knights nearly five to one but were outmatched by their ferocity and outflanked by their position.

“Retreat to the King’s Vanguard!” their Captain bellowed in their ranks. “Back up King Wrynn and the

Champions! We cannot let them reach them!”

No sooner had he yelled than the Tauren Captain next to Shalaine death gripped the Alliance fool out of the crowd and crushed his head in a shower of gore and broken metal in his palm.

“Leave none alive,” the Tauren man barked.

Then, once more, the ground shook again, nearly heaving up enough to break the terrain in long, winding cracks. Unlike the earlier explosions, this one felt different, almost dangerous. The hairs along Shalaine’s neck stood on end, and she ceased fighting to stare at the ground beneath her again. A second, third, then fourth quake buckled her knees, and the air suddenly became thick with a pungent, bitter gas that burned her throat.

“Blight! Everyone run!” someone yelled in the crowd. She couldn’t tell if the order came from one of her fellow Death Knights or the alliance dogs she cut down, but she wouldn’t ignore the advice.

So she scattered in a random direction as the ranks of ally and foe alike broke down, and armoured men, robed wizards, and others haphazardly collided in a mash of bodies that sought to escape the cloud of death now filling the air around them.

Explosions continued to echo off in the city both above and below, and those who didn’t hold their breathe sooner succumbed to the rotting air as they fell with burning, dying lungs and gasped weakly for a saviour. Even the dead - those immune to disease and defilement - were not protected from the blight as forsaken and death knights alike fell beside their hated enemies. A field of dark saronite armour, and silvery, blue steel littered the ground as bodies piled up in the fog, and Shalaine forced herself to escape the damnation that came.

She stumbled through it all, cursing the entire time as she tried to fight against an enemy she couldn’t prevail against. Eventually, she escaped the gaseous death and found that she had stumbled up the ramparts, separating several sections of the undead city.

With a gasp, she inhaled the fresh air into lungs that didn’t need it, and turned back to face the destruction behind her, eyes widening as she-”

“Dame Belford?” Cherrise quietly said, awakening her from her meditations. “We’re at the gates, Mistress. You hadn’t said anything for the last five minutes, so I wasn’t sure if you were paying attention.”

Once more, another acidic reprimand burned in Shalain’s throat, but before she could speak, she bit her lip and looked up towards the yawning opening of Capital City proper.

It had been as it was before when she last left. Even the walls were encrusted in cannon marks, bullet holes in the stonework, and remains of fortifications, and none of it had been cleaned up in the time she was last here years ago.

“So it would seem.” Shalaine tersely replied. “Let us make our way inside. We shouldn’t keep our betters waiting, should we?”

The other two silently followed along, knowing better than to answer her now as they bowed their heads and let their mounts lead them on. For Shalaine, it made little difference whether they talked among themselves or remained as silent as the grave. Her mind was fully focused on the task ahead of her, and she desired nothing more than to at least let some of the painful nostalgia harden her heart and steel her resolve.

No other souls moved within Capital City, which made sense to her since most of it was underground in that ancient sewer. The silence was a reprieve that she had enjoyed for the last several days since leaving the Belford Estates. Ever since that damnable battle that haunted her thoughts now, the silence had been something that she sought after more as the years went on.

Ash fell from the sky, and as she rode her deathcharger through the very same path that Arthas Menethil walked through on his return to Lordaeron before it’s scourging, she looked up to the sky as several dark flecks kissed against her cold face.

Raising her hand, she caught those thick cinders and rolled her thumb across it to smear it in a gritty mess along her palm. Shalaine didn’t want to know what and where it was from, but it boded well that there was at least life (such as it were) still out here.

The path towards the Undercity was much the same as she remembered it. The Castle at the city’s epicenter remained the best path below, and within the Castle, several paths led to inner gates that led down to the catacombs. The further she and her entourage went, the more unlife she started to see



in the shadows, until eventually, she came to the first people she had seen since arriving on the outskirts of the city.

Two large abominations stood as sentinels to the path below, blocking the entrance. Their bulging eyes stared at Shalaine dully as they gurgled and sputtered sickly in a language all their own. For a moment, they gauged her and the other two behind her, but they stepped aside, as the large fleshy monsters knew well to keep her barred from within.

Neither of the guards spoke, though it wasn't as if abominations were good for conversation. Nor did she want to speak with them. Disdainfully, Shalaine grunted as she dug her heels into the charger and watched from the corner of her eye as Amarri cowered beneath the gaze. Cherrise kept her head straight and unyielding.

The stones beneath the undead horse's hooves echoed in the hallway, and soon, Shalaine and the other two found themselves upon a platform that descended the moment they both stepped upon it. Heavy, rusted chains ground hot loudly as the floor beneath them sharply shifted - threatening to tilt - but settled before they made their way down.

"I hate these things," Amarri grumbled atop her worried steed. "I always feel like I'll fall to my doom through these if I'm not careful."

Shalaine smirked but didn't say anything as she turned her eyes to the grimy walls and continued with her thoughts. Eventually, cracks opened in the stonework, reworked, and chiseled into decorated windows with pig iron rebar dug into the old stone. Possibly made there during the Undercity's temporary time as a hell hole full of blight and made from the bombs that had gone off.

The new windows were at least decorative and gave a view into the sewer city down below. While the above part of Capital City was dead and quiet, down below, the Forsaken moved with renewed vigor and efficiency. People of all types and sizes—old and new—worked with a fastidiousness that Shalaine hadn't seen in years. Craftsmen created, artisans painted, soldiers trained, and abominations, ghouls, geists, and Death Knights bartered and traded in the newly refurbished centre and bank.

A din of noise filled the air as the elevator approached the ground. As soon as it stopped, Shalaine dismounted her charger and stood with hidden amazement at the scene. It had seemed some new hope had risen in the Forsaken in the last several

years.

It was a welcomed change that left her breathless. Shalaine could almost feel it thrum into her bones like a drum; in a way, it was an emotion that she didn't think she could ever feel again. Hope was a lost emotion that the Forsaken thought incapable of feeling under the weight of their collective ennui. Perhaps this Desolate Council and its effects on the populace were better than Shalaine had hoped. It was something better than the emptiness they all felt after the Banshee Queen's abdication and abandonment of them after all.

*"Hope was a lost emotion that the Forsaken thought incapable of feeling under the weight of their collective ennui."*

"Come, you two. We have work to do," Shalaine Belford said, instantly feeling hopeful that things would be better now.

- EΠD -

## About the Author




Rease Stoneheart  
Writer, Editor

*Rease Stoneheart is an experienced Roleplayer who has been a part of the Warcraft Roleplay Community for ten years with no signs of slowing down. A writer who loves Fantasy, Horror, Sci-fi, and more, he's often bouncing between Azeroth and the created worlds of his original novels. Currently, he's working on his debut Novel Series "Hearts of Stone in a City of Gold" alongside the Warcraft Fanzine and other projects. You can find him at <https://linktr.ee/reasesoffice> for all that he's involved with.*

# The Winds of Coming Changes

BY REASE STONEHEART

Point of View: Yui



It was a peaceful night, much as they had been in the waning twilight of the summer. The seasons came and went as they always did in Azeroth, and much of the world's problems had been dealt with, much as they always were when they cropped up.

It had been that way for Yui ever since the wars in Pandaria raged and even after. The Blood War died down, the Legion was dealt with, the Old Gods were quelled, and even the Dragon Aspects found renewed hope while the Elves welcomed another World Tree to the world. As usual, it was a cycle of pain and blood that soon fell back to a hopeful outlook for the future—something that seemingly happened every few years.

And, like the seasons as well, the ending of that cycle started to quiet down and turn relaxing even though there was always endless work to be had and the anticipation of what was going to come around the corner to usurp the previous cycle's tragedies.

Still, Yui chose to keep her mind off of all that and work as hard as she could to put her focus on other things. She might not be as vaulted an adventurer or heroic as many in the world were, but she still had her Enchanting and Tailoring profession that she very much enjoyed. In a way, it helped her be a part of the struggles that often cropped up, even if she never was on the front lines utilizing her magic and skill to combat foes directly. There were a time or two when she was at the front and fought as hard as she could, but these days, most of her pride in helping to safeguard the world came when she could enhance someone's armor or clothing to absorb magic, deflect a blow, or keep someone alive.

Well, that and enhancements that helped a person glamor themselves up prettily or created minor illusions to enhance them in a lover's eyes. She enjoyed that more, but it was a delight for other reasons.

Yui leaned against the open window on the second floor of the Tailoring Business she freelanced and rented out of. Dalaran was much the same as it had always been for her, with its long, winding streets of

pinkish-purplish stones and white-marbled sidewalks. Tall stone buildings reached up towards the sky, with the distant domed minarets reaching up even higher like fingers atop the myriad of buildings. Each belonging to a mage of some renown living and studying in them.

*“Dalaran was much the same as it had always been for her, with its long, winding streets of pinkish-purplish stones and white-marbled sidewalks.”*

It was a Magical City, and she loved it there. Magic thrummed through the air and crackled like energy. A lot of times, that energy moved through her and tingled the tips of her soft fur, and it was then that she couldn't help but enjoy it. For her, it was much like one who enjoyed the breeze in a field, and she couldn't help but stop, close her eyes, feel goosebumps prickle her shoulders, and let the moment pass her by while the smell of cupcakes filled the air.

Even now, as the sky turned darker and the promises of the morning ran away by the imminent night, she couldn't help but want to watch the sunset and count the stars in between the clouds. Yet she knew that this moment would have to pass her by. There was a lot of work tonight that she needed to finish up in time if she was going to make a client happy and keep to a schedule.

So she sighed, reached out with her hands to close the window, and stared at herself in the reflection of the glass juxtaposed against the buildings in front of her. At least she could take a moment to adjust herself now that the wind had messed up her hair. Plus, she liked what she saw in the window. While she wasn't the prettiest Pandaren woman in the world, she was still pretty attractive with large blue eyes, coppery soft fur streaked with clean, bright white fur in between, and long hair that she brushed and tied into various buns or ponytails. The fact that she was soft and voluptuous - as most Pandaren women were - was also something that she did like about herself, to say nothing of the men who chased after her and

tried to gain her attention.

Quickly, Yui fixed her hair up, turned away from the window, and grabbed a box of cloth, threads, and enchanting dust. She easily hoisted it into her deceptively strong arms, careful not to pinch her bust as she grunted and turned towards the stairs behind her. Her little dalliance was over, and if she stayed behind too much to gawk at the sky, she'd have to pay for it with a lack of sleep, which could affect her studies.

Carefully, she trundled to the top of the stairs, tentatively taking careful steps each way down for fear of slipping up. Her mind wandered to the current enchantment that she needed to finish up - one that reflected light - before the heel of her sandal slipped off of one carpeted stair, and she stumbled at the midway point, gasped, and straightened her back as the items in her arms jostled and clinked (with even one spool falling and bouncing down the stairs)

With a curse, she puffed her cheeks in annoyance, waiting for her heart to settle before eventually finishing and reaching down to the first floor. A dizzying array of clothing in different styles, sizes, and fabrics were displayed in colors as numerous as the rainbows. Some were hung up in racks, some of the better pieces made with richer, more luxurious cloth decorated atop mannequins, and some were folded and placed on tables near the clearance isles. The room itself smelled sweet and spicy from the incense, and in a way, it always made Yui feel like she was walking into a cloud that caused her head to buzz lightly.

She wasn't sure what incense it was, but it was lovely. It made her feel more relaxed and made her want to work harder. No sooner had her sandaled, pawed feet stepped down to the floor than a lilting, gentle voice from her fellow worker called out to her from the door.

"Geeze, don't scare me like that!" she called out. Yui shifted the box in her arms and looked at the young, blond, elven woman with a sheepish smile.

"I'm not trying to! I just let my mind wander a little bit, that's all."

The elven woman ceased her frowning and sighed with a genuine smile in reply.

"Well, I'm heading out for the evening, so I just want to make sure nothing happens while I'm gone. I don't want to come back in the morning and find you on the floor knocked out, is all. You're the hardest worker here, and I've seen you push yourself more than

anyone else."

Yui nodded, fully aware of Cassandra's concern. The woman was technically older than Yui by deign of her elven blood, and despite looking just as youthful as Yui, she was more matronly. Still, Yui offered that smile as she strolled to her workstation, placing her box in front of her sewing and enchanting equipment.

"I know, I know," Yui muttered. "I'll be careful. You rest well tonight or whatever you're doing, and I'll see you tomorrow after classes end?"

"You take some breaks, too," Cassandra replied, accusingly pointing at the other woman.

"We're not at war anymore. I know our current big-name client wants some pieces for some ball she's planning and wants her sequins to shine and be the center of attention, but that's not for another month, so one day behind isn't going to kill her."

*"This was a part of the peace that was the roughest for Yui to deal"*

This was a part of the peace that was the roughest for Yui to deal with, though it was still a far better cry than when she had to work during times of War or Conflict. At least during the conflicts when she worked late into the night, she felt like she was helping the cause in her own way. An enchantment she placed on armor or even a weapon could help deflect a blow or strike true to an enemy's heart. She took great pride in saving lives that way, and when clients came back for more and told her how her magic had saved them from certain doom, it made her work harder than ever before.

Peaceful work was still a battle in itself. She loved her repeat clients when they returned and told her how her magic had helped their love lives improve or made them stand out among their peers. But for certain clients who felt they were owed something because they flashed gold and had a name, it made her fur frazzle out from stress. For every ten who smiled, tipped her, told her to take her time, and bragged about her to their friends, there was one who made her want to go fight wars on the front lines. This client was one of them.

"Y-yeah," Yui replied as she dug in her box for the sequins, silks, and spell needle threads. "I'll remember that. Thank you."

Cassandra gave one last look to the Pandaren woman, pinched her face like she didn't believe that Yui would

take that break (she wouldn't), but then sighed, smiled once more, waved, and left as the door chimed shut. It was just Yui now in the store to work alone during the rest of the dwindling day.

Which was fine for Yui: She enjoyed it that way because it allowed her to let her mind wander a little bit while she worked. Turning to her workstation, she sat back and relaxed before she grabbed the rest of her materials and started to work while her mind was off and away to other things.

Most of those things were the battles she had thought of earlier and the heroes, adventurers, soldiers, and others who came to see her in times of strife. When she was younger, she dealt with those hardships when Pandaria first returned to the world at large, and she was more hot-blooded then.

Even against the might of the demonic Burning Legion, she stepped up and did her part since Dalaran was on the cusps of those battlefields.

Battlefields such as the Brokenshore, Ashenfall, and all those others that resulted in so many dead on both sides. She remembered the resulting devastation since she had seen it firsthand and remembered being part of the coalition that wanted to do their part to protect their world from being burned.

Now, she just indulged in the stories. In fact, there was even one man she met regularly who told her tales of his daring and bravery, and she found herself swooning over those stories each time he returned with a new one.

As her mind wandered off, though, she increasingly grew careless with her stitching till, eventually, she pricked her finger sharply on the padding of her index. With a yelp, she pulled her hand back to suck on her digit to lessen the pain as a tiny drop of blood pooled along her tongue.

"Dammit," she chasted herself with a sigh, rising from her seat. "Careless. I really should be focusing instead of daydreaming."

Slowly, she walked to the front of the store, where scraps of cloth and other items were tossed in a small bits-and-bobs container sold by the handful. She grabbed a strip of silk to wrap around her finger, careful not to pinch it too tightly when wrapping it in a bow to stem the blood. For now, she knew she'd have to focus more to avoid a repeat of stabbing herself. Yet her attention soon drew back outside as robed figures moved towards the door of the tailor's shop.

Three Kirin Tor Mages walked in with dark purple robes and the symbol of the order on their chest. The first of them - a human with wild, uncombed hair despite his impeccable hygiene - nodded to Yui as soon as he entered.

"Sorry, Miss. I know the shops are closing soon, but it's pretty urgent right now," he said respectfully.

"Well, if it's medical, that's down the street," Yui replied, pointing with her bandaged finger. "But I can still help you if it's clothing or enchanting related."

"It is. We just needed to put in an urgent order, you see," the man replied again and fumbled into his robes before producing a small missive. "From the Council itself. We're in dire need of enchantments that can reflect all manner of magic and weapons off of armor and robes. Every trader in the city is being tapped right now in case of the worst."

Yui raised her brow, felt her stomach clench tighter, and reached out to take the scroll to read. Within were instructions from the Council on what was needed of every tailor and enchanter in the city, which certainly included her.

"I see," she simply said.

The three Kirin Tor bid her goodnight and left just as silently as they approached. For once, Yui was glad that there weren't any other customers tonight. It seemed the client who annoyed her with those sparkling sequins would have to wait another day for her ball gown to be perfect.

Rolling the scroll back up, Yui couldn't help but sigh and look towards the horizon again.

*"The sky was still as beautiful as it was earlier, with the waning sun gone over the edge of the horizon. It was the darkening clouds that drew her attention the most now."*

The sky was still as beautiful as it was earlier, with the waning sun gone over the edge of the horizon. It was the darkening clouds that drew her attention the most now. Rolling cumulus blanketed the sky, hiding the infinite stars, as streaks of hidden lightning glowed bright blue in arcing streaks. A distant boom of thunder shook the whole of the floating city, and

for a moment, all Yui could do was sign.

It was an omen. The cycle was beginning anew again. She knew this peace wouldn't last, but she had hoped it would have been one that stuck around for at least three, like the last cycle's end.

With a sigh, Yui finished her bandage and returned to her work. Who knew what would come and how horrible it would be? Once more, Dalaran shook beneath her feet as another shock of thunder called out in the distance. Whatever would come, at least Dalaran would be her haven. She just needed to work now and clear her busy schedule for the returning soldiers, heroes, and adventurers who would need her again.

- END -



## About the Author



Rease Stoneheart  
Writer, Editor

*Rease Stoneheart is an experienced Roleplayer who has been a part of the Warcraft Roleplay Community for ten years with no signs of slowing down. A writer who loves Fantasy, Horror, Sci-fi, and more, he's often bouncing between Azeroth and the created worlds of his original novels. Currently, he's working on his debut Novel Series "Hearts of Stone in a City of Gold" alongside the Warcraft Fanzine and other projects. You can find him at <https://linktr.ee/reasesoffice> for all that he's involved with.*



# Five Minutes

BY ALNARRA



ART BY GALINN ARTS

Five Minutes—sometimes, it only takes five minutes for a state of complete peace and serenity to become chaos and more, the serenity washed away in a haze of violent and rapid changes. It seemed today would be one of those days for a druidess devotedly working in her clinic.

Booty Bay was no stranger to odd events and strange happenings; if anything, it was host to them regularly. Alnarra had lived in the little bayside city long enough to know that a moment of peace was hard enough to come by on the best days. So, when the opportunity came for the druidess to have a simple moment in her clinic without patients to run some research, she was practically giddy at the notion.

Her days were usually spent tending to pirates and the various strange diseases that they had acquired from either the city's red-light district or a 'siren' they had met at sea. Beyond all that, the nightlife of the city left her with no shortage of patients needing small stitches or casts for their various ailments after bar fights and the occasional shakedown.

Of course, some days were decidedly more traumatic.

It was when those patients needed organ or bone mending that went well beyond what simple first aid kits can provide that the Kaldorei most often found herself calling upon a treant or two to assist her. On those days, she would work until the wounded were stabilized and the dead recorded. She did not realize that today would be one of those days.

*1832 Hours Booty Bay Standard Time (BBST)*

The druidess sat quietly at a little makeshift table in the back of the clinic. It was one of the small areas where she could play with new substances and salves to see if they might work, play with various new gadgets and gizmos, or, her favorite activity, sit down to read a medical journal or two.

On her desk were a set of vials she had shipped in from one of the world markets some months back. It was a small vulpera trading company that had promised her that the various salves and liquids helped work miracles, especially with patients suffering heat-related ailments. There was almost a blep of her tongue as she watched the reaction excitedly, her whiskers twitching as she prepared to take notes.

She listened to the little sizzle as the liquids mixed, practically giddy at the thought of finding a new way to treat sunburn or, worse for many of her less... careful beachgoing patients. What's more, she had a book on Dracthyr biology to look forward to. It was a species she was beginning to come to know and, more importantly, one that she was excited about spending some time with. They seemed like a fascinating anomaly to her: an Azeroth native species older than even the oldest Kaldorei.

*“They seemed like a fascinating anomaly to her: an Azeroth native species older than even the oldest Kaldorei.”*

With so many Dracthyr coming in from the Dragon Isles, it was becoming apparent that special care

would be needed for a species that had scales rather than fur or skin, and a unique anatomy. It was a challenge to the druidess, and one that gave her a little bit of hope that her skills were not wasting away in the little bayside clinic. Setting down the bottle, the woman stood to stretch and catch her bearings.

She looked around with bemusement at the mess of items she'd accumulated. The small ship in a bottle was a gift from one of her patients, whose leg she had saved with Ironwood. The various potted plants were a combination of herbs she had shipped in to help keep supplies stocked and, in part, to help liven the place up. The truth was that a sterile clinic was as bad for her mental health as it was for her patients. She needed a place where they would feel comfortable and relaxed.

Cracking her neck, she started to make her way towards the window, looking out and seeing one of the merchant vessels pulling into the dock. The sailors looked giddy to be back on land for a small amount of time, or perhaps it was just that they knew what Booty Bay was famous for. Smirking, she tried to guess the ones in the crowd that she'd find herself treating.

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#### *1834 Hours BBST*

Flexing her fingers, she started to walk towards a small break area. It was a place to keep teas and snacks. She could not help herself; she was always a bit of a snacker, something that her wife knew all too well. Opening the little drawer, she pulled out a few crackers and popped them into her muzzle, happily munching on them as she wiggled the tip of her tail. They were those little fish-flavored crackers, something Elynxdria had gone out of her way to find on her last shopping trip.

Giggling to herself, she broke out a small can of tuna, cracking it open and using the grace one might come to expect of a druidess in Saberon form. She used her finger to scrape the tuna out of the little can and onto the cracker. She was alone, she thought to herself. No one would care if she was using her finger instead of a spoon or fork! It's not like she enjoyed such utensils either way; table manners were never her specialty. It was something her mother had spent years scolding her on.

She seemed to savor every bite of tuna-loaded crackers as she went to twirl some nobs on a little

stove infused with arcane and some manner of gnomish technology that would give her a little fire. Setting a pot atop it, she began to wait for the pot to boil.

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#### *1835 Hours BBST*

Tapping her foot against the ground and waiting to make tea was always the hardest part. She tried to keep herself distracted by humming a little tune as she continued to snack on crackers and tuna. Occasionally, she would take a moment to wipe that purple muzzle free of the various tuna juices. The tufts on the top of her ear twitched as she let her eyes lazily wander across the room, double-checking that everything was in order.

She had been sure to do all the sheets for the cots to ensure they were clean, using plenty of sanitizing liquids. She had gone out of her way to restock a few of her first aid kits to hand out to the local bruisers, less they want to care for injured on their own time and of their own accord. The little waiting area at the front of the clinic had been cleaned, and the simple till on the front desk had been emptied, with its contents taken to the bank.

Alnarra didn't make much profit at the clinic; in fact, financially, it was technically in the negatives. But in a society as economically diverse as a goblin city, she thought it was important to ensure that everyone got care without worrying about financial burdens. The price list that she kept was more a suggestion and more akin to a tip than a payment. She would take any money donated for care to the bank under an account specifically for the clinic.

Some of her more generous patients were the reason she had all of these new experimental salves and liquids, and she could not have been happier for it.

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#### *1836 Hours BBST*

The pot was starting to boil, she could hear the occasional bubble rising to the surface with those extra sensitive ears. The tuna tin was empty, and she casually chucked it into a little garbage bin here in the makeshift break area of the clinic. Her ears deflated a bit, knowing with that can, she was out of tuna. But

there was the bright side: she could see the results of the test she had been running! These little hills and valleys in the day were how she best functioned, how she remembered to stay grounded.

She had fought depression for years. With the death of her children, her mate, over the preceding 1,000, it was a beast with which she had an uncanny familiarity. Things were getting better, slowly, over time, and it was cresting those little hills after falling into the little valleys that helped her from finding a valley and trying to dig herself further.

*“The clinic work made her happy and was a way to honor her eldest son, who had been a medic during the War of the Shifting Sands”*

The clinic work made her happy and was a way to honor her eldest son, who had been a medic during the War of the Shifting Sands: a way to remember him when he was at his happiest. She went to open the little coffin-shaped locket that stayed as a constant companion around her neck, looking inside to see their faces again. It was a family photo the five of them had gotten when they visited Hyjal together. Her three children and their father, all who had passed in the various brutal and bloody wars that the Kaldorei and Alliance had fought. Bloody wars that she hoped might finally be at a close.



1837 Hours BBST

Whiiiiiiiiieeee

The kettle began to boil, the familiar whistle catching those sensitive Kaldorei ears. Sadly, it was not the sound that caused the druidess to rip her head towards the window.

Boooooom

A massive explosion near the dock, a plume of smoke and fire rising into the sky. The woman immediately flicked off the stove, whipped into her lab to grab her satchel, and raced out the door in the direction of the explosion. Mistakes in shipping cargo were not uncommon, and as her mind raced with the possibilities of what was being transported as she ran down that long pier, it was then that she spotted with

her silvery eyes a Nerubian flyer whizzing past her head.

Running faster, the source of the explosion soon became clear: A large portal from which multiple Kirin Tor mages lay - likely having escaped the blast, and the source of which must have been the other side. But the explosion was not all they brought through the portal with them.

A nerubian soldier, one she'd easily recognize from the campaign in Northrend stood ready with his weapon to strike down the mages, who scrambled from their portal, clearly injured and not just by the explosion. The feline hissed, seeing the bruisers were already occupied with the flyers and other nerubians who had flooded through the portal with the escaping mages. The dockhands were terrified, not soldiers of any kind.

And so, the druidess, the doctor, and the former Kaldorei agent did the only thing she knew to do. The form she used, this Saberon form, had been developed specifically to allow her to keep her combat prowess on two legs while retaining that feral form's agility, strength, and stamina. Grabbing an ironwood seed from her pouch, she quickly concentrated on her druidic magic, focusing on growing the seed faster than it was meant to.

In mere seconds, her heart rate and breathing slowed as she focused, the Ironwood unfolding into a halberd. She charged the Nerubian without a second thought, conjuring up a vine to rip its weapon away. Leaping into the air, the Saberon roared as she shoved the newly grown spear directly into the arachnid creature's back, silencing it in those few moments.

With the threat eliminated and the bruisers tending to the other creatures that had come through, the druidess quickly used the other part of her brain, trained in combat and emergencies, looking over the wounded there on the dock. Two were already most certainly deceased, little remaining of them but mangled corpses. Still, she leaned down and went to find a pulse, quickly determining there wasn't one.

The three others looked to be in mixed shape. Two could stand and walk if labored, but the third would need a stretcher. The woman went to rip a large white sheet from her satchel and then used two more ironwood seeds to make poles. Pointing to two dockside workers, she pointed to the poles, now intertwined with the sheet and the injured man going to offer her shoulders to the two wounded mages to help them limp back to safety.

She yelled for dock workers to follow her to her clinic to do what any combat medic would do: protect and treat the wounded. The mage, who seemed in the best shape, glanced back behind them, sealing the portal and giving a wince as he exerted yet more energy. Coughing, he tried to explain.

“The council.... Dalaran, moved to... Khaz Algar. Trap... attack. Nerubians everywhere...” The mage paused for a long moment. “Rift was forming, the city was collapsing, had to make an escape.” The man panted as she nodded.

Who, what, when, where, and why were questions for people far above her paygrade. For now, though, she knew two things. She had three patients to treat... and the fragile peace that the Alliance and Horde had worked so hard to maintain had once again shattered. The world was once again at war.

She tried to assure the mage that he needed to remain calm to conserve his energy, rushing the trio towards her clinic as fast as her feet would carry her. All the while, those terrible little nerubian flyers would dive-bomb her and the dockworkers, trying to get them to drop their precious cargo. Anger welled up in the druidess as she worked to protect her patients, glaring at the little bat-like creatures as they swooped down.

Calling upon the powers that nearly every druid had been taught, but only a few had made a habit of mastering, the druidess went to stop for only a moment, turning to point that feline like muzzle towards one of the attackers and unleashing a purple blaze from her maw that would coat the small creature. The magic of the Fae, often gifted to druids through their teaching with sprite darters.

*“It was magic intended to directly combat the arcane, yet here it was, saving arcane casters. The irony would surely not be lost on someone out there.”*

It was magic intended to directly combat the arcane, yet here it was, saving arcane casters. The irony would surely not be lost on someone out there. Though with the path cleared and the dockworkers having gotten the most injured of the mages to the clinic, she let them know they could seek shelter here in the clinic. As she managed to get the other two mages in, she

shut the clinic door and went to take stock of things.

There were three patients: two in moderate to severe condition and one in critical. Her mind raced as she called upon her druidic magic once more, conjuring two treants to life there in the waiting area. It was not all too uncommon at this point in her career, the assistance of treants in combat triage and medical aid. She quickly instructed the summoned trees to begin looking for broken bones, burns, and obvious signs of injury and blood loss. All the while, she grabbed the mage on the stretcher and carried him to one of the cots, setting him down and starting to do a quick visual inspection.

Her silvery eyes scanned his body as she conjured a root to pull a gnomish arcane torch to her hand. Opening his eyes and seeing they were nonresponsive to light stimuli, she bit at her lip. Then, she grabbed a nearby stethoscope lying amongst a wealth of other gnomish inventions and listened for a heartbeat and breathing, trying to figure out just how far gone her patient was.

Letting a singular claw unsheathe itself, she began slicing off clothing, looking for bruises or lacerations, and upon finding a large one on her patient's side, she got to work. Druidic magic to encourage the damaged organs to start mending on their own, all while nimble fingers began to stitch and hold together torn flesh. Her ears twitched as she managed to remove a piece of shrapnel, no doubt partly responsible for the injury.

It seemed like hours passed as she worked, finally stabilizing her patient and putting them on a gnomish device to help them breathe. She had used ironwood stitches, planting them in such a way that they'd press under flesh and muscle to wrap, bind, and work at healing broken bones. The stitches would be absorbed back into the body once the healing was completed, but for now, they were working to help keep together some of the most shattered bones.

The treants, meanwhile, had been tending to the other two, taking time to wrap up arms in casts and bandage easier to manage lacerations. They were offered some potions brewed just that morning to help encourage their bodies to begin trending towards a more mended state.

The crisis was over for now. The bruisers had pushed back the fragment of Neurbian forces that had managed to sneak through, and all three of her patients were taking the time to rest. At some point, the two dockworkers had left, rejoining their compatriots, leaving the druidess alone with her

treants, watching over resting victims of a newfound war.

She sighed; now, instead of experimental salves and concoctions covering her coat, it was blood. The sheets she had cleaned would need to be cleaned once more. The mana drain required to maintain the treants left her exhausted as she glanced out towards the window. The sun had long since set, and mother moon now graced the sky. Dismissing the treants, she took a sheet and began the second phase of the job.

Scribbling down notes, she recorded the names of her three patients, the third and previously critically injured patients' names having been provided by the other two Dalaran citizens. She made her way outside to the dock with a set of body bags, always deeply saddened to have to use such things. As luck would have it, another medical unit in Booty Bay had recovered the deceased.

Her ears twitched softly, expressing sadness at yet more death, though a quiet fragment of joy at not having to do the paperwork or write letters to friends and family. She let out a deep sigh and returned to her clinic. Her tail dragged along the ground, the white tip now stained with dirt and blood.

She returned to her little chair, watching the resting humans, pondering and considering what all this could mean going forward. How many more days would she have moments of peace? If war was once again on the horizon, would she find herself returning to battlefields rather than living a quiet life here in the bay? The druidess pondered all these things and looked over to her teapot. Perhaps she should stick to water tonight.

Her mind was a blur, thoughts racing through her head. The mage who had first explained where they had come from would fill her in on the details. It seemed Dalaran had transported itself to a dwarven home of some kind far off the coast. He did not have the details; only the orders had come down from the council. Upon arriving, the city was immediately besieged by nerubian and shadow forces.

The details were sparse once the combat began, only that the mage and his companions saw an explosion that was coming from the council chambers and rapidly consuming the whole of the city. They managed to escape through a portal, but not before being pursued by the nerubian she had taken a halberd to earlier.

Taking this all into account, her snout twitched as she closed her eyes. There was nothing she could do

now to avert or change the path of things. So, she wrapped her tail around her feet, threw her lab coat on the ground, and closed her eyes, ready to stir if any of the various gnomish devices monitoring her patients began to beep. Ready to once again shift from serenity to chaos.

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## About the Author



Alnarra - Writer

*Alnarra has been a roleplayer in the Warcraft community for over 15 years, having spent time in various guilds and organizations. They are a Cybersecurity Specialist by trade and can often be spotted on their singular druid, Alnarra-Moon Guard during their off hours. If you're interested in learning more about the wily druidess, you can see it all at <https://alnarrarp.blogspot.com/>*

# Blood in the Fields

BY NERUMA

Things were tense as her hands gripped both of her daggers tight. She was a wolf among the grass and sat as still as she could; time felt like it stalled, waiting for one moment to pass. This was a hunt that wasn't for food, but instead was one of war and to repeat an endless cycle.

Crawling through the tall grass like a shadow, she eyed her target and rushed out of the field in a flurry. Her daggers exploded out in shimmering sparks on the target's backside as she tried to go for the kill. Her target? A large Tauren woman in steel armor. Out from the shadow of her flanks, she stabbed as hard as she could, and within a split second, her target shifted, turned, and parried her weapons with her own. Sparks clashed as an echoing growl resonated between them, though it did little to slow each other down.

Within this battlefield, a Shu'halo woman and a Worgen woman were locked in combat, throwing each other at one another. Both managed to keep their footing as they fought one another, though now, for the Worgen, her shadows lingered and were swept away. The Shu'halo now fully knew where her attacker was and gauged her abilities.

Dirt kicked up under her hoof as she charged in close. Her weapon dipped down as it cut through the wind. The sound of metal would ring out as the dagger of the Worgen deflected the swing and dropped down to get around the barreling wall of muscle. One wrong move, and she could end up trampled under a hoof.

Clearing from the path of pain, she used a dagger to pull her to a stop. Trying to act fast enough, she would roll towards the Tauren and go into a run. Leaping into the air, she raised both daggers to lunge at their enemy. She could see her target falling with every beat of her heart. Fighting for the pride of her people, who ordered her to this battlefield.

But then there was a sudden snap to reality as she felt her neck grabbed in mid-air. Both daggers would find purchase in the shoulder and slightly the arm holding her. Snarling escaped as she tried to kick or cut herself free of the iron grip. If she did not escape, it was over.

Blood slowly dripped from the Shu'halo wounds as she stood tall. The Worgen did not even realize them as she kept her pose. Thoughts crossed her mind that would drive her into madness. But finally, something

gave as she bellowed and slammed the Worgen onto the ground.

The pain hit her hard and quickly as she slammed into the ground. It felt like all the air left her lungs as she felt the hard earth crack along her back. Trying to remain awake grew near impossible as darkness would take her. The only thing that remained in her vision was the look the Shu'halo gave her.

The darkness that had taken her would slowly recede. The last thing she recalled was the Shu'halo and the open sky. But now pain flowed from her neck as she looked up at what was the roof of a tent. Who's tent was she in?

With a groan, the Worgen's eyes wandered about, taking in the rest of the space. "Where the fel am I? This does not look like an Alliance tent," she said as she started to sit up. A jolt of pain ran through her shoulder, and a small curse escaped her lips.

*"There was no doubt that she was in a Horde tent with all the Shu'halo decorations and paints. Much of the room looked slightly unorganized and barely cleaned"*

There was no doubt that she was in a Horde tent with all the Shu'halo decorations and paints. Much of the room looked slightly unorganized and barely cleaned. Trying to find a guard or any magic-related detainment....There was nothing. She was alone in the tent and resting in someone's bed.

"What is the meaning of this? I need to get back to camp and report in. They might have marked me M.I.A.," she said.

Slowly, she crawled to the side of the bed, trying to listen for anyone else. The silence was the only thing remaining, and it was creepy.

Stepping around the bed end, she took stock of the surroundings. To her surprise, her armor and weapons were left in the open on top of a chest. This didn't feel like a prison camp to her. Why could she just freely walk about? Questions continued to add up as she

looked on.

It was not till a table covered in scrolls that caught her eye. Many messages that seemed to be tossed aside and ignored. Approaching the table, it became clear that many were bearing official Horde emblems. Was this her luck in finding Horde's secret orders?

"No way...This can't be real. I know I was captured, but why? Who leaves official orders just sitting out?" She asked herself, reaching to take the one on top of the pile. Rolling it in her hand, she spied the wax emblem that kept it shut.

The wax seal sat, calling to her to open it. At the same time, guilt crossed her, as it felt wrong to read their mail. But they were the enemy! Why should she miss this chance to get useful intel? Her claw dragged across the seal, slowly cutting it open. Slowly, it would open up, calling her. Grabbing at the paper, she would read it.

*Attention Hunaka,  
We have repeatedly sent missives out to recall you back to service. You are still enlisted within the Horde army and are bound by your duties. This message is the last attempt to have you return. If you do not return within fifteen days of receiving this, you will be listed as Awol. You have fought for years to help bring victory in the war against the Alliance. Many still need you.  
From  
General Olgreg*

As soon as she finished reading the letter, a look of confusion filled her expression. "What the fel?! What do you mean she is ignoring orders? I was fighting her..." Slowly, she grew quiet thinking.

She recalled they were outside the main gate that led to Mulgore. So, was she actually avoiding service being there for her homeland? It made her think of how she had once been recalled to her homeland to do what she could for her people, only to see it eventually fall. Somehow, this brought her further frustration, and she tossed the scroll toward the tent wall.

Outside, she could hear noises picking up as people spoke in Taurahe, leaving her a bit worried. Glancing at the pile of scrolls she dug through, trying to learn more, she saw the same thing repeated over and over again. Each passing scroll seemed to frustrate her more and more. When it was too much, she had to confront her.

"What is this woman doing? I thought all these Horde people only wanted blood. Yet, she disobeys orders, "

she said with frustration. But to go out, she had to find something to wear. Her armor was within reach but might cause her some trouble in the village.

While the village outside went about their day as usual, tending to chores, their day was disrupted when a Worgen stepped out in what looked like a Shu'halo robe she was gliding in. It was tied up to try and look as normal as possible. Still, she felt flustered that this was really her only option to try and look like she belonged.

*"Her attempt to make her look like she belonged did not work, as many of the villagers stopped to look at the Worgen wandering about"*

Her attempt to make her look like she belonged did not work, as many of the villagers stopped to look at the Worgen wandering about. Here and there members began to talk among each other. A few of them took up their weapons in case something was happening.

With a bit of frustration, the Worgen stopped and panted. She looks to a few of the tribe members speaking in rough Orcish. "Forgive. I am looking for Tauren. One called Hu-Hunaka?" She hoped to the light that the name was pronounced right.

While a few of the females look between each other muttering. One stepped up to reply to her. "She might be at the edge of the village. Visiting the burial ground."

The Worgen calmed down a bit as she listened to the lady speak. A mix of emotions began to rise as she wondered why she might be there. "Ah...I see. Forgive my disturbance. Thank you for the info." She said with a slight bow. With that knowledge, she sprinted for the village's edge, trying hard not to trip in the robes.

Off on the south side of the camp sat a single tree. It overlooked the burial ground where members were sent off to join the Earthmother. Under the tree sat Hunaka, who stared down at it with sadness. Memories claimed her mind as she looked back to the days her parents were still alive—days spent with her mother cooking, training, and fighting with her father. They both helped build her up for the future.

What she did not expect this day was a disturbance to break the silence. From behind her, a voice rose up. "Hey! There you are. What is the meaning of this?"

said the Worgen in an annoyed voice.

Hanukkah focus would shatter as eyes went from sadness to annoyance with little trouble. Laying eyes on the Worgen caused a moment of surprise.

“W-What are you doing out of bed?! Your wounds still need time to heal...How did...” At that moment, she realized the robes she was wearing. “Y-You! Why are you wearing one of my mother’s robes?”

This made the Worgen snort.

“Like I know whose clothes these are. They were the only thing I could find that did not make me look hostile. And why am I not bound up? Am I not a prisoner?”

Hunaka briefly blew off the question, looking back at the burial site.

“Still should not be wearing stuff randomly from my tent. It would be best if you headed back. Your wounds still need time, especially around your collar.”

The Worgen would roll her eyes.

“Someone sure is friendly to an enemy. But then, are you truly an enemy? It seems you don’t mind disobeying orders from superiors. Seen all your mail on the table.”

That was the one thing that pushed Hunaka up to her hooves. Marching up to the Worgen, she sticks a finger at her. “You stay out of my business. My letters are personal.”

Turning, she would let a small scream out of rage that faded just as fast as it raised. “You...would not understand...”

“Oh? Do you think I would not? Try me,” the Worgen demanded. She stood her ground, wanting an answer, and she did not know why.

Every muscle in her body tensed as she was challenged. Reaching up, she would rub her face, leaning against the tree.

“Fine! Cause you asked... It’s because being away has led to my parents being killed. You know that field we were in?”

For a brief moment, she looked confused till she recalled seeing the torched camp. While she had not had a hand in it, there was still a sliver of guilt for those who got hurt.

“Yeah? Were they among those who were in that camp left burning?”

Hunaka looked to the Worgen, nodding. “Yes. While I was off trying to protect our lands in other places... The Alliance moved here and just wiped them off the face of Azeroth. And from there, I just felt...lost.”

*“Silence fell over the Worgen as she listened. Orders were to be followed without question, she thought.”*

Silence fell over the Worgen as she listened. Orders were to be followed without question, she thought. But standing here now with Hunaka and listening made it hard to believe that. What was she to do? Stab her in the back with it wide open?

Instead, she moved up and placed a hand on Hunaka’s shoulder.

“I am sorry. My words might not mean much. But I can see why you are lost.”

Shifting away from Hunaka, she looked at the burial site. With a shrugged shoulder, she spoke. “You know...I felt anger and hatred towards the Horde. But it feels snuffed out with...things right now. Don’t even know why.”

Hunaka raised her ears, listening but not giving them one glance. The words and hand felt like a knife cutting through her tough exterior. Deep in her mind, she rolled the means of what she said, trying to discern her meaning. After all, she was a member of the Alliance that she swore to fight.

Still, something held her blade back then. Tears ran down her face as she looked at the unconscious Worgen before. Why was it hurting so much to take a life in a war? Even now, this Worgen could attack but does not. They even had their backs on each other. Of the two standing, the Worgen spoke first.

“You know...Mulgore seems...rather nice. It’s nothing like Gilneas. But it might be my second favorite spot.”

That managed to shift Hunaka’s mind as she looked past the burial ground. Mulgore was before her and every other family that needed protecting.

“Yeah? What does that mean? Am I going to have to house you after you healed up?”

“Maybe?” the Worgen said off-handedly as her mood seemed to calm slightly. Reaching up, she pulled a few hair strands from her face.

“Would that be too much trouble? I might be labeled as M.I.A.”

Pushing up from the tree, Hunaka moved up to the Worgen, looking at her.

“Maybe? We will have to get you some robes that will look nice on you. I mean...even what you did, those colors look good on you...uh...” Her words trailed off as she now had no clue what this woman’s name was.

A bit of shock filled the Worgen as she realized that only she knew Hunaka’s name. “Ah! Right, sorry. Names Revera...Think I will skip all my military ranks,” she said, waving it off.

Without much warning, Hunaka wrapped her arm around Revera and started to escort her back to the village.

“Revera...I like it. As much as I could list off my rank. I don’t really think we need it. But in time, we will need to speak to the Chieftain to get clearance for you to remain.”

For a moment, Revera’s cheeks would turn bright red at the arm around her. A slight grumble would escape as she walked. “I see. Hopefully, they are not too hard to convince.”

There was a slight shrug from Hunaka as the pair returned to the village. To where their road would lead is for the future. But from these two souls, they found understanding and change in how they looked at their enemies.

- END -



## About the Author



Neruma - Artist, Writer

*Neruma is a roleplayer with several years of experience on both Moon Guard and Wyrmmrest Accord. A writer, as well as an artist, they’re an exceptionally skilled individual who is always fun to have around, whether being creative or just playing World of Warcraft. Currently, they’re working on improving their skill in both Writing and Drawing, and you can find them on their Twitter at [https://x.com/Neruma\\_art](https://x.com/Neruma_art), as well as the various links in their pinned comment.*

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2020

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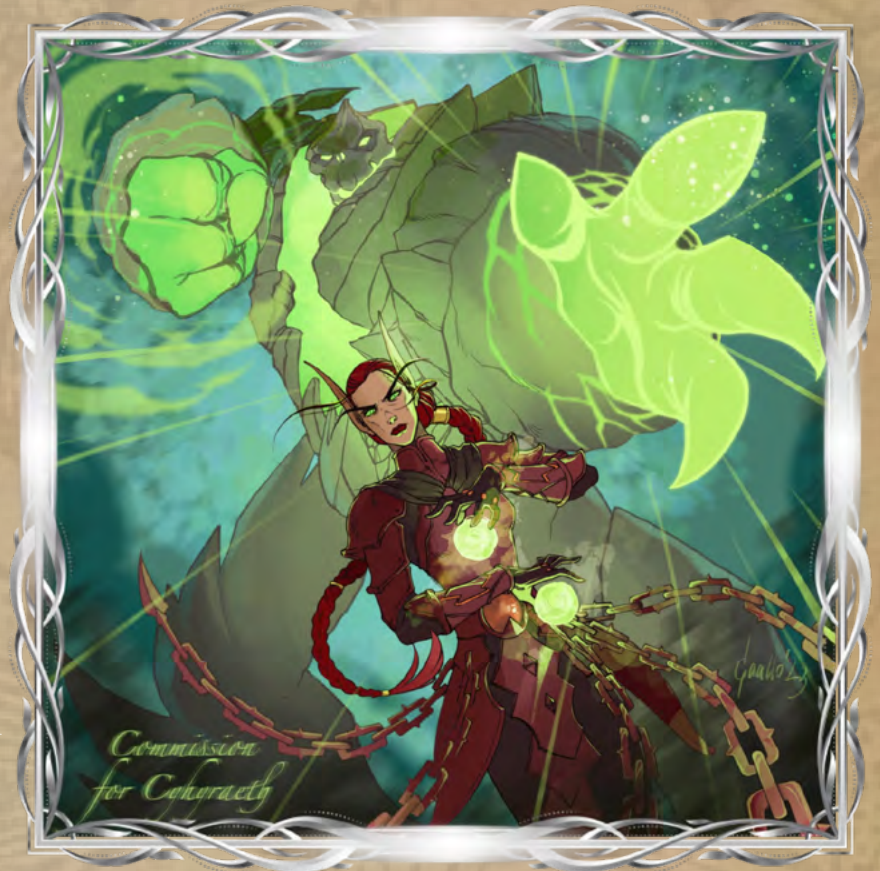


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BY KEORI



“EARAÑA SUNFURY AND HER  
STAN ROLLING STONE”  
SUBMITTED BY GAALLO



# Credits

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*Rease Stoneheart*

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# Further Reading



Don't think this is the only World of Warcraft fan anthology collection out there! The best part of the Warcraft Fandom is that there's much to enjoy, with new and exciting things created daily. In fact, this Fanzine is just a tiny sample of the larger collective. Between Twitter, Discord, Tumblr, Reddit, Deviantart, Ao3, YouTube, and more, there's an endless amount of Warcraft Fan Content.

The best part? Nothing is stopping you from looking for it or even creating your own content.

For more stories and art, be sure to check out the following:

## [World of Warcraft Roleplay Guidebook](#)

Are you a Warcraft Fan looking to engage in the game outside the usual Raiding, PvP, Dungeon, and Questing gameplay loop? Want to create a character, act out your adventures, and tell unique stories while meeting other creative people? Then Roleplay might be perfect for you! This Guidebook will help get you started on the Ins and Outs of Roleplay, tools, addons, and how to engage with other players.

## [Artists of Azeroth](#)

Artists of Azeroth is an older fanzine that, sadly, is not taking submissions right now. However, you can check out their Tumblr posts and links to anything they published. It's highly recommended to see all the amazing artists who signed up and were featured!

## [Orctales](#)

Orctales is a fantastic Fanzine that's everything Orc related! From stories and art that range from the brutal, the adventurous, to the heart felt and more. If you've ever loved Warcraft's Orcs, this Fanzine is full of amazing talent from some of Warcraft's best fan creators. It is highly recommended that you check it out. Plus, any Fanzine purchases go directly to a good charity.

# Further Listening



Don't think Writing, Art, 3D Modeling, and Screenshotting are the only ways to enjoy Warcraft. In fact, many fan creators enjoy creating Music, Podcasts, Machinima, and more for Warcraft fans to enjoy. Here's a small sample of the numerous creators out there who use song, cinematics, podcasts, and more to enjoy the world of Azeroth.

## [Oasis In Azeroth](#)

If you're a laid-back player of WoW, then Oasis in Azeroth is the perfect listening for you! It's the best place to kick back and relax while enjoying the conversation on topics that range from Lore, The Current Expansion, Game Mechanics, and More

