

The Caves of Da'Nath

Book One

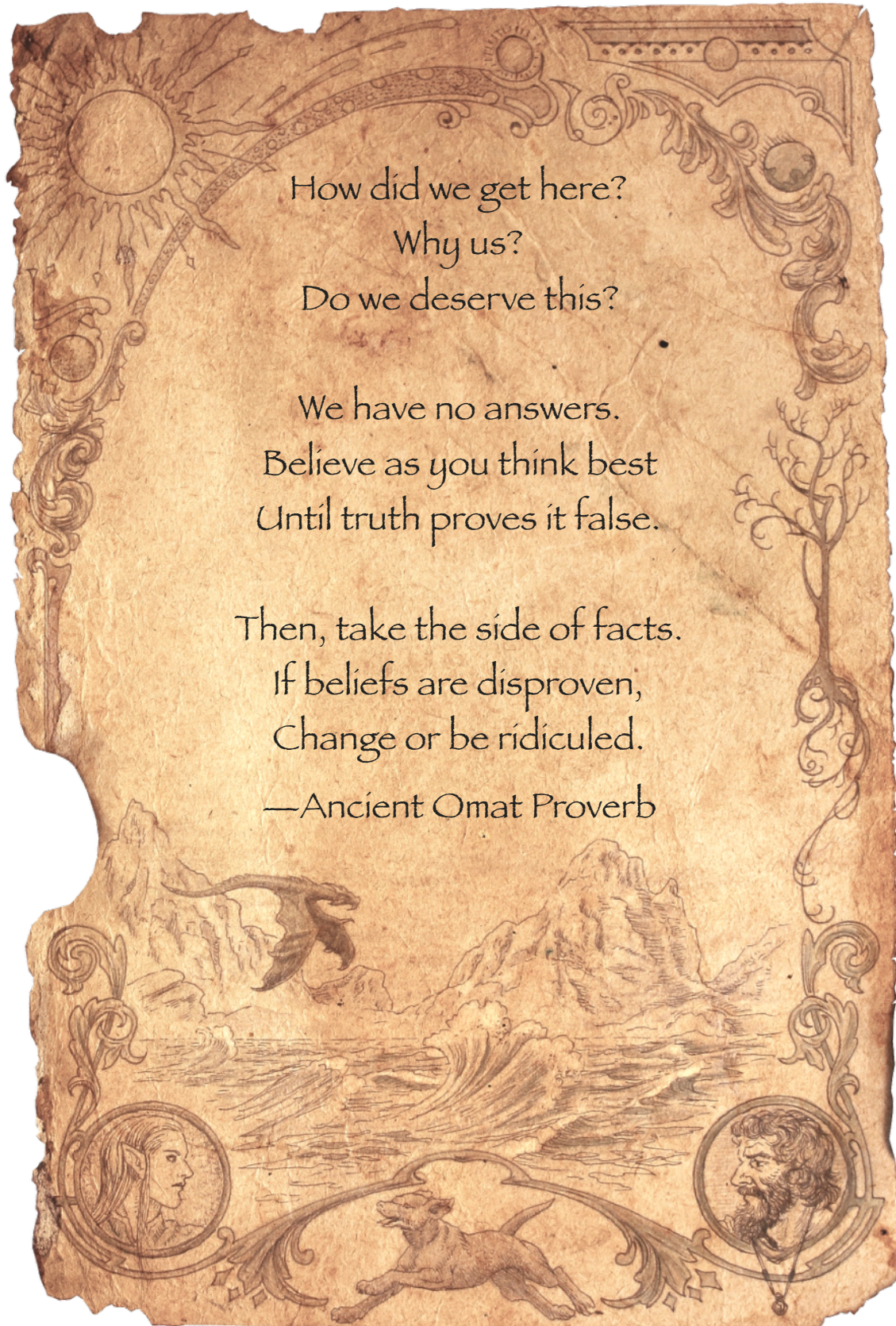
An illustrated epic fantasy trilogy

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TheCavesOfDaNath.com



How did we get here?
Why us?
Do we deserve this?

We have no answers.
Believe as you think best
Until truth proves it false.

Then, take the side of facts.
If beliefs are disproven,
Change or be ridiculed.
—Ancient Omat Proverb

Prologue

The watcher had to act; the foolish old man had walked into a trap—again—and she needed access to the secrets he’d uncovered. The council’s policy was detachment, avoiding contact with mortal humans at all costs, but she could feel the secrets of the Caves of Da’Nath quickly slipping beyond her reach. She’d intended to wait, let Nubbins gather the information, and then take it from him. All of the clues she’d left for him would be for naught if he was captured now.

Still... centuries of training warred with her instinct to pull Nubbins into the mist. It could change him—and the course of human events—irreparably. She hesitated, running alternate scenarios in her mind and discarding them one by one. A yelp from Feebee made the choice for her; she would not leave the wounded canine unaided.

Wrapping Feebee in a shroud of mist, she began chanting the song of healing. In her mind’s eye, she saw Feebee’s bruises heal, her broken bones knit together, and her mind relax into the unconscious dreamless state the mist trapped the uninitiated in. This watcher had a strong affinity with animals, but people were another story.

She watched as Nubbins groped forward, clearly disoriented and in pain. Could she simply take his possessions? Or did she need him? He could be useful, but what would she do with him afterwards? A pawn that learns it’s a pawn may refuse to act like one, and then what? With cold calculation, she watched Nubbins’ pursuers come into view. She knew then she wouldn’t have time to search him before they arrived.

Frustrated, she summoned the mist, sending it into his lungs, wrapping him in icy tendrils until he passed out. She’d get what she needed from him and figure out the rest later.

1. Nubbins

“To protect the future – remember and understand the past.

Lost knowledge means less wisdom and a more perilous future.”

—Loree the Elf

Scribe’s Note: *I am the third son of John the Scribe, who was descended down a long line from Thoth. My given name is Bidi Ardake, but my friends call me Nubbins. I prefer Nubbins. There is strength in that name, and intelligence, though some think “stubborn and dimwitted” better fits me.*

These are the first of my writings with R’ya Bugaboo, an eyewitness to some of what you’ll hear. Her tales begin in the very, very distant past, long before I was born or even thought of. The story continues to unfold today. What we do today will determine tomorrow.



Working with R’ya was hard but rewarding. She led me to the Caves of Da’Nath and showed me its marvels, paintings and scrolls hidden and protected for eons. She told me many of them were created by

participants at the Conclave in the Valley of the Giants. You’ll have to wait to hear that story, as I had to. It’s worth the wait, I promise you.

If there are mistakes in the narratives, I alone am to blame. I also cannot take credit for the story; it was theirs and hers. R’ya tied together paintings, scrolls, songs, and lore to share the past as it happened. I pulled together the multiple parts, consolidating them into a coherent story and revising the narratives based on her corrections. She became my confidant, my fact-checker, and my protector. But most importantly, she became my beloved friend and mentor.

You’ll see I use “Scribe’s Notes” in the story. I do so to provide context, background, or commentary on what happened. I want you to know where R’ya provided facts and where I filled in gaps. I think it’s important for you to know the difference.

I feel incredibly lucky and humbled that I was chosen.

Just think about this: I am sitting in the Caves of Da’Nath, surrounded by artistic and linguistic beauty beyond my wildest dreams. I have been chosen to document the stories of our past—the truth behind our legends!

What you will hear is true - told and sung, drawn and written by witnesses to the events - consolidated by me. They are the stories of friends and companions: some life-long, and some that blossomed along the way. You will hear about the lives of many ancient peoples, some of whom may be your ancestors. It’s the story of those few who were just there at decision time, willing to do what was needed.

Pay attention and you may begin to understand why all of us are alive today. If the leaders among you heed these lessons, the future will be safer. That is our belief. It is based on the observations and wisdom of those who made it happen. Think about what you read; sing the occasional song; be amazed at the stories; and celebrate those that lived them!

/s/ Nubbins

Today, on my Birthday,

In the Year of the Bee.



2. R’ya, the Indigo Dragon

Scribe’s Note: She was called “Bugaboo” by people who spoke to her, and many other names by those who knew her by reputation only. Indigo, Gort-Slayer, Blue, Caro-al’Ehibe, Yerr’Kal the Destroyer, Chef A’Blaze and The Last, names given to her out of respect. At her request, I use the name she calls herself, R’ya, so that you can understand her as she truly was. What you will hear will disagree with some stories about her, but those are accounts spoken by others. These are her words.

When I first met R’ya, I was a rather handsome young man, if I do say so myself. Okay, in truth, I might have been, and probably still am, a bit full of myself. But hey, I became the youngest person ever to enter the Thoth Circle as a Scribe, despite **not** being first in my class at the University. Before graduating, I had researched, written, and published my first book, *Greater and Lesser Dragons*, to critical acclaim. Many said that was the reason I became the youngest Chief Scribe ever; it certainly wasn’t my good looks. The book’s monetary success drove the University to hire me after graduation.



R’ya was very, very old, though still young in spirit. I couldn’t tell her age with any certainty and I didn’t dare ask. She was tiny compared to what I had expected; she could easily have perched on my shoulder, if she’d been inclined to. Of course, no one smart mistook her size for lack of ferocity. If you did, in her own special way, she would make that a learning moment, which you remembered long after things cooled down.

Despite the fact that I am the Chief Thoth Scribe, she was hard on me; or so I felt at first. But I learned she was driven by time and the need to accurately capture what happened. We learned to respect and trust each other, working days that stretched into many happy years. Our relationship flourished.

I guess I earned her trust. One day, while she sat on my book, she leaned forward, looked me in the eye, and said “I have come to realize that you are too valuable to be eaten. Imagine that! Who would have ever thought that could come to pass?” She then nodded her head and smiled in her own special way.

I was too valuable to a dragon to be eaten! I was so relieved. And then, in her devilish way, she smiled and explained “Besides, you’re too old and tough to taste good, unless I am desperate ... or challenged in a chef’s cook-off.” I eventually learned not to worry about “desperate” but the cooking competition kept me awake for a long time after that.

Occasionally, I would see her look at me with one eye squinting and the other wide open. Her mouth was crunched to the side and quivering, as if she was deciding something important about my health. I called that look her stink eye, as she was obviously weighing whether whatever I just did or said was too much to ignore. I learned her forbearance meant she would only singe or curl my hair intentionally if she thought I deserved it. And I learned not to deserve it.

So let’s not dally, and get on with the story.

2.1 A Scribe’s Journey

When “Greater and Lesser Dragons” was published, I toured the major cities on Pang with Feebee, my friend and ever-faithful canine companion. We intentionally took a long and slow path winding through as many small villages and hamlets as we could. In fact, it became the longest trip taken by any scribe in decades. At long last, I arrived in Turvin, my journey’s last stop, having been away from home for over a year.

Small towns were usually the most fun to visit because I could speak directly with the people in the markets. They were poorer financially, but living a happy and peaceful life surrounded by nature.



No matter where I went, people seemed interested in my book. Occasionally, I got the feeling that some faces were really familiar, like I had seen them before, but I dismissed it as the results of a year on the road.

Dragons had pretty much disappeared by then. It was so rare to see one, that books about dragons, especially from a university scholar, piqued a lot of interest. Though the older (and may I add, wiser) of us knew dragons were a real part of our world, some of the younger ones had begun to disbelieve. They couldn't believe that an entire species—an intelligent species, at that—could just vanish from existence. It makes me sad how fast we forget our history.

Understanding the value of remembering though, most villages scraped together enough money to buy at least one book for their community. Sometimes, if they were in need, I would give them a copy in exchange for a night's sleep or a good meal, or just friendly gossip. It was simply unacceptable to me that wealth should determine whether you had inspiring and well-researched books to read.

People sought out traveling scribes like me for the news we carried from the rest of the world. They usually wanted to know what was happening everywhere, but I could rarely stay long enough to fill that void. There just wasn't enough time.

We were often used as messengers, sometimes without our realizing it, which occasionally led to wishing we had been a little smarter, a little more attentive, or spent a lot more time thinking about the news we spread. People heard of my far-reaching journeys, and there were always lots of questions about the University, the towns I visited, or even just the state of the weather in the northern mountains. I had to be careful what I said, how I said it, and to whom I spoke, or the message could get misinterpreted. If that happened, all sorts of unintended consequences could occur. The snowball could turn into an avalanche.

Along with researching and writing about the past, scribes document the present, by traveling across the lands every year, recording important events. It was a big undertaking, talking to so many. We did it because it was our job and responsibility, but more than that, as scribes, people and their stories are our passion.

I often talk about how Muley faithfully dragged the cart for me wherever I had to go. People took to calling him "Jack Draggin," because Jack was the polite version of an unflattering nickname for his species, and my book was about dragons. I forget who first named him, but

people soon called him that wherever I went. Even the healers refer to him that way. I call him Muley, out of respect and friendship.

I tried to sell as many copies of the book as I could, and I was fairly successful at it. That year I sold almost every book Muley hauled across Pang. Selling lots of books keeps us scribes well-fed and in soft beds. I believed my book was so accurate and well done that I might become famous because of it. I could live with that.



The journey ended in the spring of the Year of the Butterfly. But as things so often do, with that ending, another adventure began.

2.2 I Meet R’ya

Scribe’s Note: *When you first meet someone, you never know where that relationship will go. Sometimes it*



works out and leads to adventures and life-long friendships, and sometimes not. I learned a lot from what some called a dumb ass. In point of fact, Muley was a direct descendent of Midnight, made famous by the song of Waltah Bren. Despite the fantasies we’re sold, true heroes are often just plodding along like mules, doing what needs to be done. People should emulate the work ethic of those “dumb beasts.”

In any case, the trick is to let the meeting take you where it will, while learning from the experience. That’s what happened between Muley and me. Muley liked to eat regularly, and I needed a companion who could help me bring the books across the lands.

We both had our issues, but we worked them out to our mutual satisfaction. I tried hard to keep him happy and in great health, and he prided himself on what he could accomplish. He was a good judge of the time needed to get to each destination. He set his own pace, and I, trusting in his sure-footedness, would watch our surroundings and use my time as a passenger to write down anything I observed along the way or needed to remember from town to town. He accomplished wonders, keeping me safe by braying when I needed to be alert and aware.

I also learned that he was smart; he would let me know when he needed help. I could not have gotten all those books across the country without him, and I am grateful to call him a friend.



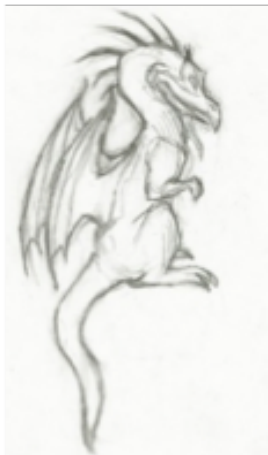
It was late in the day and I was tired. Turvin, as you know, is situated between the Wild Woods and the Hotlands. It would be the last stop with mild weather, before the weather changed to hot, and then really, really hot. I hoped to arrive home before the worst of it.

It had been a long but profitable day, a fitting end to our trek. All the junior scribes would sing my praise when I returned. But, by the end of the day, I was not at my best. My social skills were pathetic and I didn’t pay enough attention to the people around me. I was more interested in racing through the last few signings so I could get a nice meal, a glass of wine, a bath, and an early tucking in. The next day I would start home to the University.

A young lady stepped forward with a soft smile and a twinkle in her eyes. She asked me to write something to her great-grandmother, Maga, as the book was a gift for her. Normally, the lingering touch of her hand would make me smile, perhaps even blush, and remind me of my younger days. But at that moment, I only heard “blah, blah, blah.”

I kept thinking about the kidney and ale pie waiting for me. I had a sneak preview of the inn’s menu and I was hungry, thirsty, tired, and ready to settle in for the night. I was about to ask her for the name again, but when I looked up, to my chagrin, she was backing away quickly, staring wide-eyed over my shoulder. I could see she was rattled, and that spooked me.

I looked around, wondering what had changed her attitude so quickly, and noted that the rest of the line was also panicking and scattering in all directions. Frowning, I turned to see what was causing the commotion, but saw nothing out of the ordinary. Puzzled, I looked up into the massive tree and noticed a small blue creature sitting on a low branch. As I slipped my glasses on,



realization dawned and my jaw dropped. A little—and I mean *very* little—blue dragon sat on the lowest branch, not 10 paces away. I became worried until I saw Feebee wagging her tail furiously and jumping up on two legs.

I should have noticed the clues and paid attention to the buzzing around me only moments before, but the growling in my stomach seemed to override everything else. Who can blame me? It had been a long day.

She spoke, “Greetings Sir Scribe. I would like to have a few moments of your time, if you can spare them.” The little dragon was very polite, and she almost seemed to have a smile on her face.

Everyone had fled back, so I was alone, as rigid as the old oak tree, staring speechlessly at the little blue dragon. I’m sure you can understand why. How could I refuse? Did I dare say anything other than yes? I was a bit (okay, *a lot*) worried and confused. What was she doing here? What did she want of me?

In horror, I thought, “What if she was going to point out mistakes in my book, in front of all these people?” The damage to my reputation would force me to leave the Thoth Circle. I know there were other things I probably should have been worried about, standing in front of a dragon. But I’m a scribe who wrote a book about dragons, and here was a live one, asking to talk to *me*.

I began to get more and more worried, and less able to think clearly. Was she in the book? What if she was in the book and I had called her a lesser dragon? What if she wasn’t in the book at all and was miffed at the omission? What if she felt that calling any dragon “lesser” or “greater” was an insult to all dragons?

I swallowed, hoping enough moisture would return to my mouth so I could speak. Remembering my manners, I mumbled, “Good evening. What can I do for you?”

I needn’t have worried. Of course I had written about her, and accurately, at that! Months later she used the red ribbon to mark where I needed to make a few changes about her in the second edition. She complimented me on my choice of dragons



to write about, which I didn't understand then, but do now, based on our work together. Overall, she seemed pleased with me and my work, which was a great relief.

“I would be honored to talk to you, perhaps getting some pointers for a revision, if you think it's needed?”

She chuckled. It turns out being humble is a good way to start a conversation with a dragon.

She spoke in a sweet hissing sound. “It was well done, and as complete and accurate as a non-dragon could write.”

I stood up much straighter from that moment on.

“I'm not here to talk about your book.” She continued. “I would like you to work with me on a task I must complete. I know where ancient scrolls and paintings have been hidden for a few thousand years. They need a gentle and careful hand to read, catalogue, and compile their stories. Would you be interested in seeing the paintings, reading the scrolls, and documenting what happened with me?”

Being a scribe, there was never any doubt—I was hooked! “Sure” I managed to blurt out, hoping not to seem too interested. She just smiled. I began to notice that people slowly started to move closer, with puzzled looks on their faces, as nothing dangerous seemed to be happening.

Suddenly I realized her chuckling hiss was the last thing I'd heard, but she had asked me to work with her. No sound—she'd used telepathy! No wonder most of the onlookers seemed confused. I on the other hand, was thrilled, as it confirmed one of my most contentious theories,

one that had subjected me to intense scorn and ridicule. She had pushed her thoughts into my mind and *only* my mind, without speaking. I was vindicated!

Again, without a sound, she responded, “Yes, I just spoke to you through our minds. I normally don’t do that without permission, as it violates my sense of privacy. I would have liked to let you know first, but what I just said has to be kept secret. If we are going to work together, you need to get used to it. There will be times when what I say should only be heard by you.”



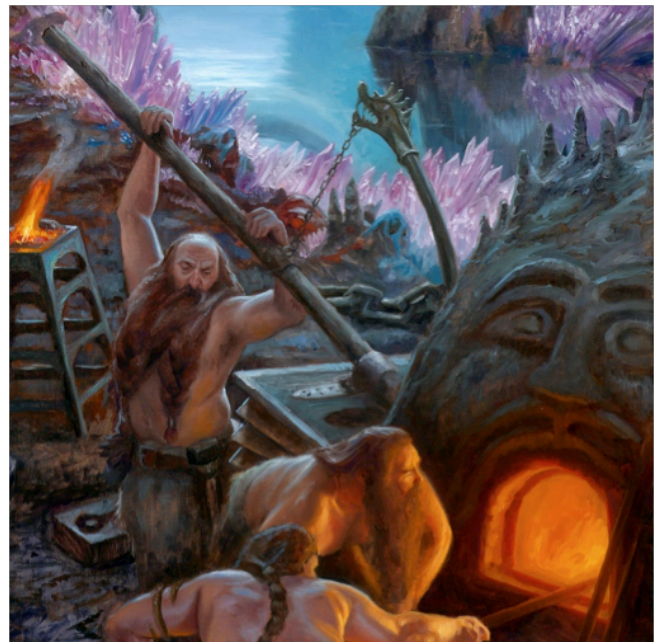
I nodded, excused myself politely, turned back to the crowd, and hurriedly thanked them for coming. “I will be back in the morning. If you haven’t yet gotten a book, or if you want additional books, come from mid-morning until midday, when I will be leaving.” I smiled at the young lady, apologized profusely, finished signing her book with a flourish, and turned back to R’ya.

R’ya asked, “Would you like to have dinner with me this evening? It would be good for us to talk.” She pointed to the dwarf oven at the end of the gardens, and told me to come when the sun sets. I looked over and saw an oven that was a work of art.

R’ya smiled. “Look closely. Yes, it is the fabled oven known as Fire Mouth. It was crafted by the dwarves in the Caverns of Yarul. I can tell you about it later, if you want.”

I was a bit puzzled by her statement, but still remembered to politely ask, “Can I bring anything?”

“Some wine perhaps, one that goes well



with venison. I don't drink much anymore. I find it too embarrassing, and sometimes too dangerous, if I accidentally burp up a fireball.”

Wow, was I incredibly lucky! I was going to get a meal cooked by a dragon. And that dragon was going to tell me about an incredible literary and artistic find, inviting me to work with her. Venison, my favorite Malbec, and ancient scrolls! It just couldn't get any better!

Was it too good to be true? Should I be more wary? I laughed nervously, reminding myself to be brave. After all, I wouldn't be dinner. She was so small I could win a fight if I had to. How hot and far could she spew flames, given her age and her diminutive size? My confidence started to return until I saw the slow smile spreading across her face; she could understand what I was thinking. She let it go though, not taking offense; in fact, she was clearly amused.

Perhaps I shouldn't have admitted that I actually thought that, but as you will see, there are far too many instances when I show how dumb I really am. You might as well know now, so you don't have expectations of me that I cannot live up to.

3. Dinner: Chef R'ya A'Blaze

Scribe's Note: *There are only a few of us left who have had a meal cooked by a dragon. I am afraid that I might be the last human to enjoy that pleasure. It's sad, really, as dragons could perform culinary magic far beyond us mere mortals. No human who reads this will ever have the privilege of food grilled or smoked by dragons. It's a travesty.*

I found her in my book; she was THE Indigo Dragon, and was here to talk to me. I was astonished and somewhat worried, so I arrived early for dinner, not wanting to anger her. Smart thinking for a change, eh? It was also the right thing to do. She deserved respect because of her reputation, not out of fear. Some creatures merit respect simply because of who they are, like your mother, even if her most notable accomplishment is bringing you into this world.

R'ya had just finished heating up the stones in the oven as I arrived. She said, "Put some hickory logs in there. It will taste better. Then get behind me, just to be safe," she added with a playful smirk.

Her smile was so kind! And that made me anxious for a moment. I quickly pointed to the sweet potatoes in my hand and asked if I could put them in the oven. She nodded yes. As soon as I laid them down, I surrounded them with hickory logs and stepped behind her. With a roar, she flamed the logs into life, searing and caramelizing the sweet potatoes.

"I'm an entertainer; the roar is just for show." She grinned and turned back to the fire, waiting for the coals to settle. In the meantime, I put venison, onions, and mushrooms into a pan, covering them with sprigs of rosemary and sage.

R'ya poured some wine over it, and I moved the pan into the oven.

She let it braise for a while before telling me remove it. It was ready. She pointed to the wine bottle and told me to help myself. I pulled the sweet potatoes out of the coals, noting that the skins were almost peeling themselves. They smelled so sweet! R’ya smiled, turning her attention to the food.



I poured some wine, and put the bottle on the picnic table. Not forgetting my manners, I awkwardly offered her the goblet. To my consternation, as I had only poured a small tasting, she stood up, grasped the handle of the bottle, and tipped it towards her face. Was she going to down it all?

Instead, she breathed in its aroma, swirled a dragon-sized tasting in her mouth, and turned the bottle, looking long and carefully at the label. “Tirelton Malbec, Year of the Dove, my favorite. To answer your worry, no, I won’t imbibe any more. I must be clear and focused, as we have much to talk about. The time to celebrate is yet far off.”

She asked for a piece of the venison, which I cut off and gave her. Tender, juicy, aromatic, and cooked perfectly. She thanked me for the sweet potatoes, and for picking and bringing wild blackberries. I took my knife, hewed off a piece of the hind, and placed it into my stew bowl. I sat down and began eating, and for a while, neither of us spoke. I watched in awe at the strength of her claws and jaws, as she sliced off another piece. We hungrily ate the most delectable venison I have ever had the pleasure to eat.

R’ya could spout fire in very hot bursts like a blowtorch, a potent weapon that some discovered the hard way. It dawned on me how appropriate one of her names was, Chef A’Blaze, known across the lands for her cooking. No one expected her to roast a mammoth or a gourd large

enough to crush a wagon. She understood how to focus flames where needed, and how to delicately pair vegetables, herbs, and spices with onions, mushrooms, and meat.

“This will keep me satisfied until the next full moon,” she smiled. R’ya, surprised by my puzzled expression, straightened up. “Yes, dragons can last an entire moon without eating. We often tie our feasts to full moons, as it gives us light to hunt by. Water, though, is another matter; it’s as important to us as it is to everything else on Urth. ‘Protect the water to protect your life’ is an ancient dragon saying. Dragons can, in fact, go several moons without a meal—not that we like to, of course—but we must have clean water regularly. Everyone deserves a good meal and clean water to drink. It’s the key to a thriving life.”

While we ate and talked, others wandered in and joined us, sometimes alone and sometimes in bunches. Most came forward carefully but gratefully, thanking the dragon for sharing the food. Many brought treats or whatever offerings they could. Music was as welcome as conversation. Some were too afraid to come forward, so others shared what they received with them. Most were still nervous, so they darted in, grabbed food, and ran away. As with all species, hunger overcomes fear, but not necessarily caution.

“There must be something in your fire that makes it so tasty,” I thought to R’ya. Speaking aloud, she said, “No, it’s knowing how to apply fire to the exact right places for a precise amount of time. In other words, you need to know how to cook.”

“Oh, but you must have a secret,” I said. “The food you cook tastes much better than when I cook it.” She held back a laugh, barely, but there was no such restraint in her eyes. Clearly, it was time to pay full attention to what I was eating. The wine had loosened my tongue more than was wise.

Now that I'd decided to pay attention to the food instead of talking, R'ya obliged the crowd's request for a story. Her shrill whistle got everyone's attention, and quiet descended over the gathering. Feebee stealthily began walking among the crowd, undoubtedly looking for dropped bits of food.

R'ya began, "I will tell you the story of Tirel the Wingless, a dragon that some thought was a cripple. How wrong they proved to be."

Insert sketch of people eagerly gathered around a fire for story time & Feebee the dog looking for food scraps.

4. Cooking Lessons

Scribe's Note: *Being different isn't bad; it simply means you're not the same. Tirel's story teaches us that you get to decide what you will become, others shouldn't make that choice for you. You can become more than anyone thinks you can be, except perhaps, you.*

As R'ya so wisely pointed out, the message here is: "Believe in yourself, even if no one else does, and good things will happen."

Tirel the Wingless was her given name. She had many other names: Lightening Worm, First Chef, and K'hail deFromp Au'jus, the name of her most famous dish. As usual, some nicknames were less than flattering, but she ignored those.

She hatched in northern Pang, on a plateau overlooking the grasslands and the Bay of Stones, at the side of the Moyeu Mountains. Without wings, no one expected Tirel to be able to hunt for herself. Drofu of the Orange Crest fed her until she learned to hunt on her own. Drofu refused to let her hatchling sit and mope, and she wasn't going to be her servant. Her aim was to teach her to survive, but Tirel surprised everyone and thrived.



The rocky terrain around the prairie gave Tirel many opportunities to wait for her meals to come by, and she was seldom hungry. Hunting by scent, sight, hearing, and stealth, she would sit

high on the plateau, still as stone, and watch. Once she sighted her prey, she would slither quietly to a place where she could strike. Not how winged dragons hunted, but effective nonetheless.

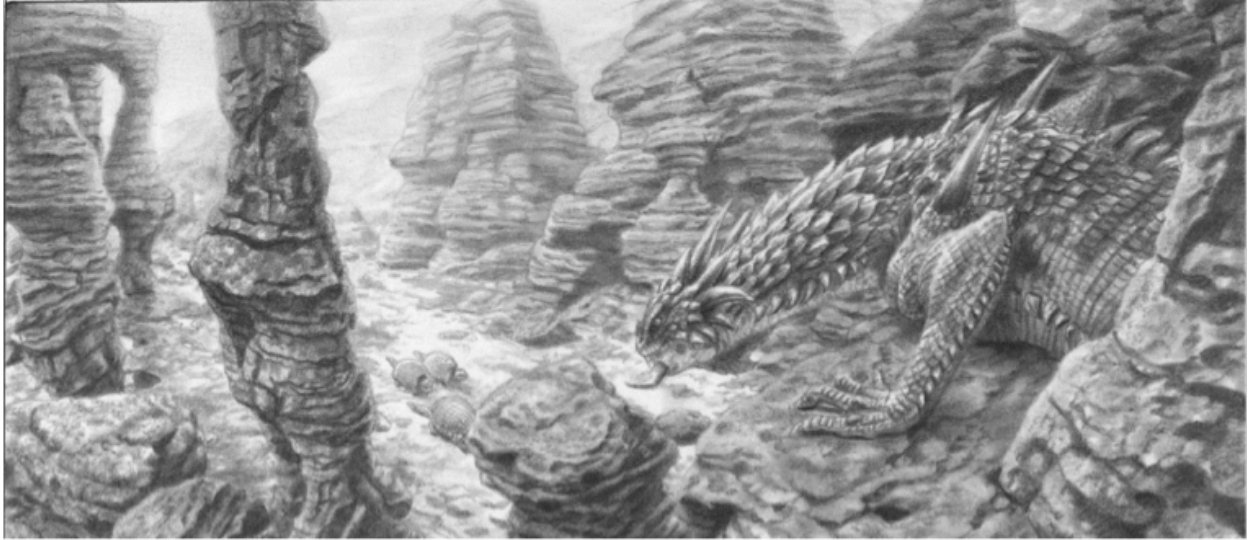
She hunted from many different locations, all close to home. Back then, many dinosaurs thrived on the palm leaves that grew in the foothills by the prairie, and those fattened giants became her primary food source. She found an underground maze of interconnected caves and explored them. Through them, she was able to move unseen and unheard to new locations when she needed to. She knew every boulder and reed along the coast and every place to wait and spring her trap.

On one fateful hunt, Tirel accidentally dropped her catch into a patch of grape vines and fragrant plants. Hungry and impatient, she burned away the plants instead of trying to disentangle the underbrush. The aroma was so different that she was intrigued, and had to taste it. Tirel traced her love of cooking back to that day. The hills and meadows provided so many different plants that she could experiment and add different flavors to her meals, from sweet to savory to spicy. She also learned which ones not to include in her cooking.

And so, Tirel was reborn. Drofu's tireless teaching and Tirel's determination and curiosity were all she needed to excel. She became the most renowned dragon chef of all time, known as Chef Tirel.

Glyptodons were plentiful in those days, and a favorite snack for large dragons like Tirel, so she experimented with cooking them many different ways. The day she thought to use their shells as a soup pot was the beginning of a new era in dragon cuisine. Mixing herbs and honey into the broth, she brought out both the subtle and complex flavors of the stewed meat and vegetables. Before Tirel, dragons only flame-broiled their catch, but Tirel experimented, combining herbs and spices with the meat before cooking, along with various tubers and mushrooms. Soon, her talents

were in such demand that she no longer had to hunt for herself. Dragons brought their catch to her, and in exchange for her cooking it, she ate what she needed.



She saw humans from afar occasionally, and developed a special fondness for them. And no, not as food, but as creative beings who surprised her with their ingenuity. She saw their tragedies and triumphs, but avoided speaking with them, since humans at that time were afraid of all large carnivorous animals. Tirel was not aggressive towards humans, although there were a few times when they met unexpectedly, and both were startled. Each showed restraint though, and nothing untoward occurred.

As Tirel's fascination with humans grew, she realized that they were dying needlessly from eating uncooked and undercooked food. All dragons knew there were mal humors too small to see in raw meats, and destroyed these by fire. A dragon is well-protected on the outside by tough skin and scales, but their insides can be quite sensitive, especially after spewing battlefire.

Recently, the atmosphere between dragons and humans had been changing from conflict to coexistence in a tenuous state of peace. Ro'Mar the Healer had cured the young dragon Ulak,

and from that act, both species began to rethink the possibilities of an alliance. Humans, elves, and dwarves had learned to cooperate with each other, so why not dragons and humans?

Drofu suggested to the dragon council that teaching humans about cooking could improve relations. “That will help save lives, and who better to send than Tirel?”

The council agreed. Tirel would find a way to approach and talk to humans, and offer to teach them how to cook. It had worked for dragons, and might do so for humans; it was time to share that knowledge. Drofu talked to Tirel and she agreed.

4.2 Tirel and Kunene

A few days later, while on a hunting trip, Tirel spied Kunene of the Mibia Tribe. Kunene was obviously hurt and unable to walk, having injured herself in a fall. She had lain there for 2



days, alone and injured, terrified, but resigned to what she thought would be her fate. When she saw Tirel approaching, Kunene knew she had no way to escape, and was sure she would die that very day. She put on a bold face; resigned to meet her end as bravely as she could.

Tirel slowly raised herself up as she approached, and to Kunene's surprise, she dropped a piece of blackened meat next to Kunene. Thinking the dragon was dropping a small snack to eat her instead, Kunene shrank back, pointing her spear towards Tirel.

Tirel stopped her approach, and nodded toward the offering. Two days on the prairie without food made Kunene especially hungry, and she looked back and forth between the meat and the dragon. With minimal hesitation, she snatched up the meat, eating voraciously. Tirel introduced herself, and began to talk, cautiously at first, but more animatedly as Kunene relaxed. Fear changed slowly to wonder, as Tirel slowly lowered herself down next to Kunene.

They learned that they had many things in common: family relationships, the need to do things differently than their peers, and their personal determination and curiosity. They realized they were both outsiders in some ways, which often resulted in strange looks and comments from their peers. Both sought refuge on long solitary journeys where they didn't have to explain themselves to anyone else.

Tirel offered to carry Kunene back home, and knowing she couldn't walk, she gratefully accepted. Kunene pictured the astonishing spectacle of her arrival at the village: Kunene riding on the back of a dragon through the center of town. She had a feeling it would draw even more interest than Xelamon's walking machine they rode across the prairie. And it did. Everyone came out to see Kunene riding the dragon.

Kunene painfully slid off Tirel's back, with help from her daughters, Ovatwa and Eanda, and then spent the rest of the day explaining to all how Tirel had helped her. She couldn't help but rave, to a very skeptical crowd, about the food Tirel had given her.

Tirel soon tired of the conversation, and decided to go back to her hunting. But before leaving, she invited the entire village to come to the large stone formation in the meadow near the outskirts of town and share a meal she would cook.

The entire village agreed to come, but only Kunene, Ovatwa, and Eanda had the courage to do so. Two days later, they cautiously ventured into the same meadow where they had met. Even though the villagers stayed home, Kunene's pack would not. Kunene knew there was no way to keep them from following, as they often seemed to have more courage than wisdom. Once the cooking odors began wafting through the air, the dogs' instinctive caution disappeared in a pool of drool. They were ready to run at a moment's notice if Tafari, the pack leader, deemed it necessary, but they were all hoping to eat.

Eanda looked on in astonishment as Tirel cradled the Glyptodon shell in her hand, flames searing the meat and steaming the vegetables quickly in the broth. Ovatwa looked ready to bolt and push Tafari away, but even she could not look away. Kunene leaned on her spear, relaxed, and began to smile. "I wonder how that will taste?" she thought. "It smells awfully good."

Tirel tasted the food, and offered it to Kunene. "The things that make you sick are no longer there; try it."

Kunene took a slow sip of the broth and then began to eat with gusto. The taste was so unique and delicious that Eanda and Ovatwa soon grabbed spoons and joined Kunene. Within a few months the dish became famous all over Pang. Humans named it K'hail deFromp Au'jus. That stew may have single-handedly convinced humans of the benefits of cooking, as humans had never been able to eat Glyptodon before without getting sick. It even led to the Mibia Tribe eating wild boar, cooked slowly in a spicy sauce, something that tradition said should never be done.

After her grand success, Tirel was asked to repeat the performance so the villagers could observe more closely. Her reputation became known far and wide, and her demonstrations became more and more crowded. She was asked to stay in the village and open a culinary school to teach all who wanted to learn. The people renamed the village, Tirelton, in honor of her and her school.

The demand for her cooking services became so great, Tirel finally decided she needed set aside some quiet time for herself. She would disappear for a few months in the hot weather and reopen her culinary school in autumn. Those months of solitude were sacred to her. She went back to her birthplace, wandered the cool caves and breezy hills, and got inspiration from hunting and cooking her own food.

Tirelton is where Tirel first heard that there were other dragons in the world without wings, the most famous of all being Imoogi of the Red Ripple Clan. That changed her life. But Imoogi's story is for another time.



The hush of the crowd began to lift slowly, as if they had all begun to wake from a shared dream. Once the crowd began to disperse, R'ya turned and asked me a question, staring intensely into my eyes. "Nubbins, do you know where you are? Do you know who Urth and Pang are?"

I always considered myself smart and "learned," but the question puzzled me.

"All those who wonder are not befuddled, despite what some may think," I told her, proud of myself for remembering this ancient dragon proverb.

R'ya chortled and gave me the stink eye. It was clear she knew something I didn't.

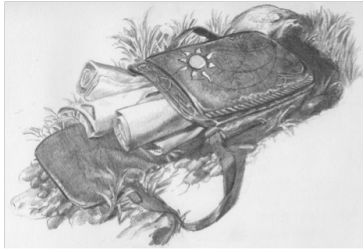
I thought I knew what I needed to about Urth and Pang. In my defense, the only maps I had ever seen were of our lands. Naturally, I thought the land we lived on was Pang. It turns out we lived on only a small part of her.

"Okay," R'ya sighed. "You are *mostly* correct in what you assume about Urth." I had showed her that I understood how special Urth was, and she rewarded me with telepathic images from the ancient past. These images showed a blue ball far away in space, an image of Urth from the dragons' previous home, the asteroids. The images continued to change, as they approached Urth. In several of the images she shared, there was one huge landmass that was much bigger than our lands could possibly be.

Insert sketch of the planet from space.

"Are these images of Urth? Is this Pang? If so, what happened to Pang? Why is it so small today?" I was so confused.

R'ya pointed to a pouch sitting on the ground nearby. "See the maps I brought? Look first at the big one, not the little one. Tell me what you see."



“The map is marked Pang. Oh, so this must be Urth” I was visibly startled, then I stared, and finally, I went quiet. “What in Thoth’s name is going on?”

Surprisingly, at least to me, I began to think instead of talk. As I often do, I grabbed my beard and gently pulled it straight, over and over. To my delight, I found a small piece of venison in it, and R’ya didn’t seem to mind as I ate it.

Insert 2 maps, 1 of all of Pang, and 1 of Nubbins piece of Pang.

“There are so many unknown places on this map. It is so much bigger than I thought it would be. What are all these strange places?” I asked aloud.

“This is Pang, as she was before she allowed herself to be torn apart. Despite the pain to her, she knew that doing so would give us all a better chance to have a future. Grab the second map,” she said. “Look more familiar?”

It did. It was my lands, and it covered the entire map. I saw familiar places: towns, villages, and cities, including Turvin. I was familiar with the names of the mountains, valleys, rivers, and lakes, as only a weary traveler could be.

I smiled then blurted out, “Where is the rest of the land? We are on the big map, but the rest of the lands have disappeared. Have the oceans swallowed them up?”

She snorted. “Oh my, no. That story is what I am inviting you to help me with.”

5. The Journey

Scribe’s Note: *Results are usually better when you can make a plan, but you don’t always have that luxury. Sometimes you just get carried along like flotsam washing down the river. Even if you expect to wind up in the ocean, you can branch off into tributaries that take you to the unknown. A quagmire, perhaps? When you’re on the river of life, you cannot see where your journey will end. It’s what you do with opportunities that present themselves that makes your life a tale worth telling.*

The maps R’ya showed me opened my eyes and made me think. If I went on this adventure, I could write the true stories behind our modern-day legends. Despite all my hesitation, in that moment, I knew which river my life would take.

I must have been staring at those maps for a long time, pondering the implications of everything I was wrong about, because when I finally looked up, I was surprised to notice that R’ya, Feebee, and I were alone. R’ya asked me telepathically, “Have you heard of the Conclave in the Valley of the Giants or the treasures of the Caves of Da’Nath?”

I nodded and tried to recall them. “My friends and I were told those stories by our parents, but we thought they were just children’s stories designed to make us sit still.”

R’ya’s eyes narrowed. “Both stories are true. History became legends, which humans have mostly forgotten. I have not forgotten, but my time is short. The Conclave prepared the world for Pang splitting apart. Many caves were carved out by dragons, dwarves, humans, and yes, even elves, to store as much food and water as possible—to protect as many creatures as possible. But the Caves of Da’Nath were different, built to house and protect artifacts until future generations needed them. They held a small amount of food stores, enough for a small staff of scribes, if they were frugal. Fairies would replenish them from time to time. This was the beginning of the Archives.”

Her eyes stared right through me. “Someone needs to study, index, and document the artifacts, compiling the complete stories of what they stand for. Would you like to do that? You would be the first human to set foot in those caves in generations, and perhaps the first human in thousands of years to see the artifacts that are protected there.”



She continued. “Many of the paintings and scrolls were created before, at, and after the Conclave, and they are the source for the legends of old. The artists who captured the event were there, as were many scribes, storytellers, poets, and songwriters.”

At first, I thought she was making up the story – it was too fantastic! But then I remembered several scrolls attributed to unknown scribes, that were required reading at the university.

Confused, I asked, “But how could those scrolls have survived? Or the paintings? The Conclave would have been thousands and thousands of years ago.”

She smiled. “Someone has to find out, eh? Our fate is to go there and document their stories. If we do our jobs correctly, what happened then will always be remembered as it was, not as some want it to have been.”

“The journey will be dangerous and long; definitely not for the faint of heart. If you go, you will need wisdom and patience to understand and act on what you see. You will likely face great perils in bringing this truth to light, but if you are worthy, you will behold Urth’s greatest art and literature and bring forth knowledge the likes of which has not been seen since I was a hatchling. Our task is to create a profound artistic gift from the past and the present to the future—a future which will certainly be in need of these truths.”

R’ya spoke quietly, but earnestly, “Nubbins, I need you to be my scribe. My time is short and this story must be told. We are the ones who must do this. I am the only witness left, and I need you for reasons you do not yet understand. History will judge us by how we proceed.”

I listened and thought, beginning to understand the importance of this mission. My decision was never really in doubt. I was a scribe, a historian, a writer of words, and I was going to go no matter what. Opportunities like that almost never come, but if they do, only a fool passes them up. My mother didn’t raise a fool.

“I will tell you the stories of those who were there. You will read the scrolls and see the paintings and sketches. You will hear the songs and study the poems. And then you’ll tie together all of these and write their stories for present and future generations to read. We must honor their efforts and record what happened.” R’ya paused and looked into my eyes, “They hoped to leave a guide for the future, and we must ensure that happens.”

At that time, I did not understand what I was getting into, but it didn't matter. I paid rapt attention as she telepathically sent me story after story, image after image. I was dazed, as tantalizing glimpses of the past raced by. "Those who have come before will lead us safely to the future," she said, as the visions slowed, then stopped.

Without meaning to, I yawned; almost afraid to turn in for the night, fearing it might all be a dream.

"Go to sleep my young scribe," she said, and then flew off, leaving me stunned, stuck in thought, and grateful that no large predator was nearby and hungry. I climbed down from the tree and Feebee and I headed back to the inn for the night. I doubted I would get much sleep.

5.1 The Lute

Scribe's Note: *Things happen in your life that seem to be unimportant at the time. But they can play a major part in shaping events when you least expect it. So take each challenge as it occurs, and do your best; that is all anyone—including yourself—can ask you to do. Take for instance, childhood music lessons.*



As you will hear, I received a gift of a wonderful lute, whose origins were unknown to me. It was rumored to be the very lute played by Guan-yin when she and her two sisters charmed the Dragon Imoogi of the Red Ripple Clan. You will hear their stories later. I would never have thought my failed attempt at being a musician in childhood would benefit my later years, but it did. Learn whatever you can when given the opportunity. You never know what the future holds.

When I was barely able to walk, my Mom insisted I learn to play a musical instrument. I wanted to pound on something and make loud noises, so drums seemed a natural fit. To my dismay, that lasted for only a

short while, as I was apparently either too loud or too awful. I suspect the former; but it might just be the latter. It didn’t take a seer to convince Mom that drums should not play a big part in my future.

As a compromise, Mom bought me a lute and asked Sir Émile Zoltán to teach me. He was renowned throughout the lands for his patience in training young musicians. He came for 3 lessons and walked out, recommending I become a soldier, a doctor, a painter—anything other than a musician. It turned out he was right; I was not suited for music. I do love it though.

For a long time it bothered me that I failed. Eventually I learned that failure is the price you pay to become successful. Those lessons can then give you clues to the future, as long as you understand them and follow their guidance. I have recorded song verses as a scribe and continue to practice the lute. I cannot say I am a great musician, but I never gave up on it.

The morning we planned to leave Turvin was bright and clear. I only sold a few more books, so I began packing the remaining books into the wagon. All I could think about was R’ya and her story. Suddenly, she dropped onto my cart, almost giving me a heart attack. With my head in the duffle bag looking for who knows what, I almost strangled myself getting out. Imagine how you would react if a dragon unexpectedly landed two feet from you!

Still, I recovered nicely. She politely ignored my embarrassment and said, “I need you to accompany me to the market to get something we’ll need for our journey.” I had planned to go there anyway to get supplies for my return to the University, so I didn’t ask what she needed; I just said “Okay” and got into my wagon. R’ya settled into the seat next to me, and Muley started walking.

I don’t like to be taken for granted, so a moment later, when it sunk in that she had said “*our* journey,” I sputtered. “What journey? I haven’t agreed to go yet.” She just looked at me,

shaking her head gently side to side. I blurted out “Well, okay... I am coming, but it would have been nice if you let me say so first. What if I had another obligation?”

She smirked, stood, and flew off towards the market, ending the conversation. I shook the reins for more speed, but Muley followed after her at his same easy pace. It didn't dawn on me until later that Muley wasn't even slightly nervous about being so close to a dragon. I was, but I let Muley take charge. And so a mule decided my fate.



R'ya took me to Zoltán's Music Shop, and asked me to go inside and pick up her package. I joked with her, asking if she was getting a horn I could use to call for help, in case she decided to eat me. But, really, I was just stalling, embarrassed that Sir Zoltán might remember me. To my relief, he didn't appear to, and that was okay with me. "I'm here to pick up a package for R'ya," I said.

He pulled a package off the shelf, opened it, and held up an eight stringed lute made from rosewood, mahogany, and basswood. It was in immaculate condition despite clearly being ancient. "Beautiful, isn't she? Truly, one of a kind," Sir Zoltán said, handing it to me.

I gently plucked the strings, and even to my uneducated ear, my song sounded perfectly in tune. The harp had a deep, resonant, sweet sound, and I was entranced.

Émile tilted back his head and murmured to himself in amazement. "Who would have guessed?" Maybe he did remember me, as bad as I was, and was now impressed by my skill, or maybe he was just surprised that the lute was in tune after sitting on the shelf for so long. Either way, I didn't want to stay and talk about my past failings.

I thanked him, left the store, and stepped over to the wagon, offering the lute to R'ya. Perhaps a wiser person would have wondered what she was going to do with something twice her size; but not me. I was unprepared for what happened. She said, "It's yours, for the journey. Take care of her, for we will have great need of her if we get there. You will have time to learn how she plays as we travel." It was a strange way to say it, but to my chagrin, I didn't question her then.

Even now, decades after that fateful day, I still play R'ya's gift. I later learned the lute was named Harfa the Sweet. I keep her on my desk, in my wagon, or anywhere close at hand. She reminds me both of my dear friend and my own need for humility.

Harfa creates the sweetest sounds, which I initially, and foolishly, attributed to my own skill. I began to think that I finally found an instrument I could master! It was somewhat disheartening when I realized how special the lute really was. Understanding began to dawn when I was able to flawlessly play very complex songs I had never heard before. It was the instrument, not me. It turns out that anyone can play her perfectly, just by plucking away. It's a humbling day when you discover that you are not the skilled player you thought you were.

R'ya confirmed it. "The lute can play any song. Whenever a skilled musician touches her, Harfa allows the minstrel to play unaided, as a courtesy." It was always possible that he or she had a unique or unknown variation that Harfa would enjoy. Sometimes she learned new songs, rhythms, or tempos, and that made it worthwhile for her. But, given how long she had existed, that was pretty rare; she knew just about every song and every variation.

When I looked up, all I could see was R'ya's powerful wings pushing air behind her. She wasn't wasting any time. "Coming?" she asked without a sound as she flew off down the road.

I hustled over to the cart, placed the lute carefully in its case, and then wrapped the case in another blanket, gently storing it in the (now) mostly empty book box. This was starting out as a great day, I thought, though I was already falling behind. I screamed out, "Muley, we need to move! Follow the dragon; start draggin' the wagon!" Muley looked back at me, snorted, released some gas, and slowly ambled off just like he usually did. I had no idea what was ahead of us, but I was going.

5.2 The Journey Begins

We left town late, so we didn't go far that first day. It wasn't like the stories of old, where heroes ran on two legs night and day, covering leagues by the score. That night, after about 5 hours of travel, we camped by a stream, near a rock overhang for shelter. The water ran clear and cold,

straight from Pointy Crag through the Wild Woods, past our chosen campsite. There was even a nice perch on a tree to sit and talk.

Feebee went off and checked the surroundings to ensure we were safe, and she came back satisfied that there was no immediate danger nearby. She would remain alert and on guard throughout the night, and catch up on sleep tomorrow in the wagon.



R'ya treated us to a hare roast, catching and cooking them. I cleaned and prepared them like a good sous chef, then gratefully stretched the skins and fur to use as linings for a new cape and hat. Even the bones were accounted for as we boiled them to make a nice broth. Nothing was wasted. I even managed to refrain from making an idiotic comment when R'ya reminded me to not give cooked bones to Feebee. As if I didn't know that cooked bones can splinter and cause a dog to choke!

Each night thereafter, I prepped the food and she cooked; teaching me her techniques. I gathered greens, herbs, berries, and nuts wherever I could find them on our travels. Over the years I learned to keep my eyes open for treats along the way, gathering as I went whenever there was time. You wouldn't want to settle down for the night where you find food. If you selected a spot close to berry bushes, for example, you might have an uninvited, large, and hungry guest come around while you sleep. Not a welcome thought. We wanted to be relatively close to water though, since it was so critical to survival. The most important thing in selecting a campsite is a rock wall

behind your back and a good escape route. We still kept a watchful eye though, despite the comfort of knowing we were with a dragon.

It was easy to set up camp with R’ya. We didn’t need to break out the cooking gear or gather wood and set up a spit. She just held dinner in her hands and breathed on it, cooking it according to our tastes. I had a bunch of yams left over from last night, and with the greens, herbs, and fruits I’d found, we had another great feast. “I could get used to having a dragon cook for me,” I thought.

R’ya gave me an amused glance, so I knew she heard my thought, but I was heartened. It wasn’t her stink eye, so I figured she must be getting used to my inane thoughts. It’s not really fair to have to monitor your thoughts all day long—I believe that takes more work than most humans can actually do. If I stopped myself from saying stupid things aloud, that in itself was progress. Thankfully, R’ya understood that.

She talked about the Caves of Da’Nath. “It is not really very far, only about a week’s journey from Turvin. Once we get there, we go in and begin our work.” R’ya explained she’d waited for me in Turvin, because it was the closest city to the Caves. “You now have what you need to find the door and get in.”

I didn’t think to ask for clarification, which I was sorry about later on. Suffice it to say, all great adventures include dark and stormy days, and ours was no exception. It started pretty nicely though. The days were warming, in that lazy way when spring turns to summer, and we mostly found ourselves alone as we trod onward, through Thoughtful Gorge, skirting the Dun Mountains.

We met a few travelers on the road, and when we did, R’ya usually flew off, not wanting to draw undue attention to our quest. I asked her why she did this, after letting so many people see

her in Turvin, but even she wasn't quite sure why. "It's just a feeling I get that we should be cautious," she finally answered. I pressed her for more, but she was as tight-lipped as if she caught a mouse.

Mostly, people left us alone—Muley's frequent spells of gas ensured that—but one traveler latched on, overstaying his welcome. Clemsu joined us on the third day, explaining that a gort attacked his camp a few days ago, and he was the only survivor. Such attacks are rare these days, but gorts are terrifying, formidable foes for all but the fiercest dragons. Their hides are covered with thick, metal-like plates. On four legs, they stand as high as a large mule, and they can attack on four legs, or two legs, head down, sharp horns delivering a usually fatal goring. Their only vulnerability is a soft underbelly, but you have to avoid their charging horns, claws, and massive teeth to deliver a blow.

I acquiesced and welcomed Clemsu to our camp, thinking it would be nice to have some human company, but I soon regretted that decision. R'ya had left earlier to scout out the surroundings, so she wasn't there when he arrived.

The man stunk from his long days in the wild. It was clear he hadn't bathed in weeks, and even the smell of the squirrels roasting over the fire weren't enough to disguise his odor. He wore layers of travelling cloaks, each one dirtier than the one before. I honestly couldn't tell if the stink came from him or from the grime he had seemingly been rolling around in.

I had thought it would be good to have another person with us if gorts were attacking camps nearby, but when we discussed it later, R'ya disagreed. She rolled her eyes at me, reminding me that I could not have a better traveling companion than a dragon, and she impressed upon me the need for secrecy; the less who knew of our journey, the better. If only I had thought that through before I welcomed Clemsu.

He was relentless with his questions, and incapable (or unwilling) to take a hint when I didn't want to explain the purpose of our journey. After a time, I began to question the veracity of his story. His eyes kept darting to the wagon, and his fingers twitched as if he was practicing opening a lock. Also, I had the strangest feeling that we were being watched, although I could not pinpoint why or from where. Clemsu seemed to think the same thing. His eyes searched the shadows constantly, whilst attempting to remain jovial and unconcerned, but it was clear he was nervous.

By the end of our meal, I was anxious to get away from Clemsu. Feebee stiffened and began to bark, facing towards the direction that Clemsu had come from. He got up, gave thanks for the meal, mounted his horse, and left without further explanation. R'ya came back a few moments later, which instantly calmed my worries. It must have been her that spooked Clemsu. She looked around and asked who else had been there. I told her about Clemsu, and she seemed satisfied. She ate the rest of the meal and we settled in for the night. Being tired, I didn't build a shelter; which I regretted when a storm rolled in just before dawn.

We started the last leg of our journey soaking wet.

I was breaking down our camp when the worst of the deluge hit. I was able to sit under the wagon's canopy later on, so after changing into fresh clothes, I kept mostly dry. Not so for Muley, though, as the road quickly became muddy and slippery. R'ya and I sat together and we talked while poor Muley plod on.

Insert sketch of Muley bedraggled and mud-covered, with big sloppy raindrops splashing everywhere; landscape - bleak... lowlands between dark forest and forbidding mountain range.
View from the seat of the wagon, without being able to see the mule's face.

Muley received the worst of it, and was not happy. I promised him plenty of alfalfa, carrots, and apples if he persevered, which he did, though grumpily. That night, I had to dig deep into our food reserves to keep that promise.

Once, to get him to cross a swollen stream, I tied a carrot on a string, and jiggled it in front of him. As soon as he crossed the stream, he sat down, turned, and looked at me. He wouldn't move until I got off the wagon and fed him the carrot, plus an additional apple as a peace offering. I had to hand feed him in the rain while stroking his head and scratching his ears. He looked me right in the eyes with such disdain; I knew I wouldn't get away with that again. I thought it best to promise, right then and there, not to do it again, in exchange for him not kicking his way out of the harness. He finally perked up when R'ya said we would arrive the next day.

It dawned clear and sunny. After a hasty breakfast, we set out, anxious to finally get there. But the road began to narrow and steepen, until Muley balked about going further. Trying to motivate a stubborn mule is not easy, but R'ya intervened. "Just over the next rise is our journey's end. As soon as we reach the top, you'll see a nice meadow with lots of fresh grass, clover, and ripe apples to munch on." At that, Muley's step quickened, despite it being a muddy climb with treacherous footing. I had to get out and help Muley pull the cart forward at one point, just before the top. He thanked me by releasing an especially noxious gas as I walked by, heading back towards the wagon seat.

R'ya was flying quite a distance in front of us when she sent me a message that the caves were just ahead, around the next bend. She would be back soon, but I was to look for the door and enter carefully. As R'ya disappeared Feebee started to run to catch up with her, but I called her back so at least we two could go together. I wondered whether we would see a huge cave opening or a small one with ancient symbols carved upon the door. When we reached the turn in the road

however, to my surprise and dismay, no cave opening was in sight, just a solid wall of rock. To make it worse, R'ya was nowhere to be seen. I called out to her, but there was no answer, not even telepathically. Where in the name of Thoth had she gone?

I smiled and turned to Feebee. "Let's figure out how to get in before she gets back."