

All will come to ruin. I have seen it in my mind's eye ...

Long ago, when the world was new, and Mogliru was but a word whispered by trees upon a breathless wind, there existed Four Seals that held the world together. Immortal creatures watched over them, and kept the world safe from the terrors hidden within their darkened halls. Undying and wise beyond measure, the mystical denizens of the Immortal Valley swore to protect the world from an unending evil ... but they were not alone in their idyllic world.

Mortals there were also, survivors of the great Collapse that had consumed the rest of the world. They were the Elders, a race of long-lived creatures with silver skin and eyes like molten gold. They worshipped the Dul'aruu, Gods of Light, and lived in harmony with the good creatures of the Immortal Valley, building ornate shrines and small homes in which they could live. The Immortals watched their mortal neighbors with great interest, and with great fear. The mortals grew in number by the day and drew ever closer to the seals ... until they were called away from their homes by the promise of new lands. They were told of new places to explore beyond their home, rich bounties to be had if they could brave the dangers beyond the Golden River. The Elders left behind a small portion of their people and ventured out into the wide world beyond the Golden River, and were never seen again. Those who remained changed over the ages, becoming something new. Their skin took on the tone of the sunlight above, their ears sharpened, and their numbers increased. The Elders of the Sun, the Solgria, expanded their lands from the eastern edge of the Immortal Valley to the marshlands of the Veins in the west. Forests fell, rivers were dammed, and towns surrounded by golden fields appeared all over the Valley. The Immortals watched these strange creatures approach the seals just as their Elder ancestors did, so long ago, and knew that the time was fast approaching. Many of the Immortals fled out into the wilds of Mogliru, eager to be far from the Evils that the simple mortals would inevitably release from their prisons.

Even now, the Evils stir in their prisons, and only a precious few of the old guardians remain in the Immortal Valley to watch over them.

The Seals will be broken.

I have seen it in my mind's eye ... and all will come to ruin.

“Come into the water. Let the flow set you free.”

The city of Glu'lodd slept peacefully beneath the light of a full moon that hung in the starry skies above the Immortal Valley. The Solgria living within had retired for the night, leaving the city empty, devoid of its normal hustle and bustle. The world was silent and serene, enveloped in the comfortable darkness of night. The stone buildings of Glu'lodd, crafted lovingly by artisan hands and reinforced with protective magics by the mages of the First Tide, slumbered without concern. The Second Tide had only just begun, and the people of Glu'lodd had marked the occasion by rebuilding their cathedral. It stood as the tallest and most magnificent building in the Immortal Valley, a physical embodiment of the love that the Solgria had for their Gods, the Holy Dul'aruu. Cobbled streets leading from central cathedral wound through the city like little rivers. They flowed from the cathedral to the homes of its residents, and then into the city beyond.

High upon a hill, in the largest and most elegant of houses, stood a male Solgria named Lord Cruthal. His home was a testament to Glu'lodd's love of water, and to the Solgria's veneration of the sun. Its walls had been designed to mimic the waves of the ocean, ending in a ceiling that extended skyward in a long, swirling arch that appeared to be crafted after the flames of a great fire. Fire and water came together to create a beautiful and imposing manse in which the Lord of Glu'lodd could live in comfort and safety.

Lord Cruthal himself was a tall, willowy man. He had long, pointed ears, wide eyes, an angular face, and golden skin that shimmered in the soft light of the moon. Lord Cruthal looked over his city with pride, taking in the traditional, Solgrian architecture. Far away, along the city's westernmost edge, stood the Pool of Souls. Being that it was the largest inland lake in all of Mogliru, the Pool of Souls was the pride and joy of Glu'lodd, a symbol of the city's influence in the court of Cruthal's peers. It practically glowed in the moonlight, reminding Cruthal that he was in command of the greatest city in the world. He closed the shutters on his estate's windows with a sigh of satisfaction and then slipped into his oversized bed. He closed his eyes and yawned, eager to fall into a slumber that would transition him into yet another day of ruling over his famed city of water.

“Come into the water. Let the flow set you free.”

Lord Cruthal's eyes snapped open. He looked around his room and then he leapt from his bed. The woman's voice had been so close, and yet there wasn't a soul around. He pulled on a thick, blue robe and shoved boots onto his feet with great haste. Cruthal marched through his mansion; he was determined to find the woman, and would be plagued by this mystery no longer! Tonight was the night he would find the source of the voice that had been haunting him in his dreams. No spirit or creature would ruin all he had built. Lord Cruthal left his home and flew down the cobbled streets with as much speed as his long legs could muster. He moved remarkably fast for a Solgria of three hundred and thirty-two, his feet pounding against the stone streets without hesitation.

Cruthal admired his city even as he ran past the empty market, down through the main thoroughfare, and out into the night. Glu'lodd had been one of the first cities founded in the Immortal Valley. Glu'lodd functioned as a sanctuary to thousands, but it served a purpose far more important than housing people who called the Immortal Valley their home.

Glu'lodd had been built along the banks of the Pool of Souls, the largest body of water in the Immortal Valley. The Pool of Souls was a perfect circle of water that acted as a stopping area for all of the waters that flowed throughout the Immortal Valley. From the river-choked marshes of the Veins, to the eastern edge of the Golden River, all of the earth's lifeblood passed through the Pool of Souls at some point in its journey. If the Pool of Souls was the greatest, natural reservoir in the Valley, then Glu'lodd was the perfect filter. Lord Cruthal and his people worked tirelessly each day to ensure that the waters flowing from the Pool of Souls to the east were cleaned and blessed by the holy Light of the Dul'aruu. He would be damned to the Void if he allowed some spirit or creature disrupt their work! Lord Cruthal was responsible for the safety of Glu'lodd and the preservation of the Golden River. If he did not keep the waters clean and flowing from the Pool of Souls to Bai'emor, the capital of the Immortal Valley, he would lose a considerable amount of respect in the courts of his fellow Lords, and he might even lose his lordship all together.

Lord Cruthal came to a shuddering halt at last, his breath coming to him in ragged gasps. The Pool of Souls stretched out in front of him, endless and filled with the clearest water known to mortals. The water within the Pool of Souls was perfectly still, as if the Pool itself was holding its breath. Cruthal frowned at the still water, confused as to why the rivers flowing in and out of the Pool were no longer moving. The water was like glass, reflecting the night sky above in perfect symmetry. The moon and stars twinkled within its darkened depths as if welcoming Cruthal to step into the waters and travel into realms beyond his imagination. Cruthal could finally appreciate the sermons of the Church of the Dul'ruu that spoke of the Pool of Souls as a portal to the world beyond life. Like the mirror of Fia'eaga, Goddess of Death, it reflected the light of the moon and stars above in an immaculate mirage of silver. Cruthal looked into the water of the Pool of Souls and then gasped, stumbling backwards. Tears streamed down his face, and he felt the woman's voice caress his mind once more. The words that it spoke were like beautiful music, a melody that called to his very soul.

"It *is* Fia'eaga's Mirror!" Lord Cruthal yelled into the night, "the Pool of *Souls*, indeed! Rejoice! Rejoice, for the world shall be restored! Death is *not* the end! Life is an *illusion*! I see it now, I see, I see, I see ..."

Cruthal's giddy laughter transformed into a desperate sobbing as the images of those he had lost appeared in the water. His wife, his sister and her husband, and so many others smiled up at him. The souls of Solgria and Elders long lost to time floated amid the reeds, their eyes sullen, their skin sallow and lacking life. Cruthal moaned and wailed, knowing at long last the ultimate fate of his people. Death was the ending, an ending that nobody in their right mind would want. Cruthal shuddered and then closed his eyes. He fell forwards, his body as stiff as

a board. He hit the water with a loud splash that did nothing to disturb the otherwise silent waters. He felt the cold embrace of the Pool envelop his senses as it filled his mouth and nostrils. Lord Cruthal sank into the water with a smile on his face, happy and finally at peace. His body vanished in mere moments and, beneath the light of a full moon, something dark stirred within the Pool of Souls.

TALES FROM MOGLIRU:
THE DEMON'S FOUNTAIN

Chapter One

“To cast a projection of one’s self, one must first pull in the latent, arcane energy from one’s surroundings, and then focus upon pushing the sight from their eyes into the world beyond.”

A gentle breeze passed over the fields of the Immortal Valley. The crops waved to one another, basking in beams of light raining down on them. The early-morning sun gazed down merrily at the farmers and their cattle who were hard at work ploughing, planting and harvesting. The grand city of Bai’emor to the east consumed half of the harvest by themselves each year, but the plentiful fields of Cai’each were more than up to the task of feeding the ravenous people of the golden city. Besides their fields, the villagers of Cai’each had the Golden River in which they could hone their craft and provide their village with the succulent meat swimming in its waters. Tiny rivers flowed from the Golden River itself, spreading its life-giving liquid throughout the fields of the Immortal Valley, bringing precious life to all it touched. The magically-inclined people of Cai’each had, of course, created their *own* rivers using magic in order to direct the flow of water to the farms that needed it most. This was but a taste of the magic wielded by the Solgrian mages who called Cai’each their home.

“Once arcane projection has been accomplished, the mage will be able to communicate and interact with the world around their arcane projection.”

The village itself lay only a short walk south of the Golden River, built near the banks to give its people access the immense, raging river. The land west and south of Cai’each were almost exclusively farmland, growing all manner of produce, grain, and cattle. The eastern edge of Cai’each was covered by an expansive vineyard which produced the finest wine enjoyed by the wealthiest of Solgria. Through trade deals, hard work, and a little touch of arcane might, the village of Cai’each was thriving.

“Note: project your arcane visage only to places which you have visited before, as blind projection can have disastrous results!”

Cai’each had started out as little more than an amalgamation of farmhouses, early in the First Tide. The town had grown not only in size but also in stature; the church in Cai’each was third in size only to those of Bai’emor and Glu’lodd, and their Mage’s College was the most prestigious place of study in all of the Immortal Valley. Scholars and mages from all walks of life travelled for weeks at a time just to spend a few months refining their skills and researching in the College’s vast library. To be trained as a mage by the Mage’s College of Cai’each was an honour given only to the most promising (or wealthiest) of Solgrian magic-users.

The Church of the Dul’aruu within Cai’each was not as large or well-known as the Mage’s College, but it was no less impressive. It was, as decreed by the divine architects of old, a six-sided cathedral built by using equal parts magic, stone, and glass. Its walls twisted and curved in a strange pattern towards the sky, giving the building the appearance of stony flames

bursting out from beneath the ground. The Church was at the center of Cai'each, as was ordained in the sermons of the Elders, with an immense courtyard out front that acted as the meeting place for the population of Cai'each.

"Once the projection has manifested in one's desired location, one can control it as they would their own body. Alright, let's give it a try!"

Raybern Wesha shut the spellbook in his hands with gusto and jumped to his feet. He was short for a Sol'gria, just under six feet tall, and scrawny even by his own people's standard. His long hair was a dark brown which contrasted with the pale, golden skin of his people. His ears were long and pointed, his face thin and filled with an excited energy. His eyes were the colour of molten gold set into white pearls, a physical indicator of his magical attunement; a gift from the Dul'aruu themselves. Raybern smiled confidently and then closed his eyes, focusing upon the energy around him. He felt the touch of air upon his skin and listened to the wind as it rustled through his long, silky robes. The red fabric was soft and soothing, like the air that glided across Raybern's face. He felt his heart beating in tune with the world around him as he breathed in deeply, pulling on the latent, arcane energy of Molgiru, before shifting it forcefully towards his core. He felt the crackling power gather in his torso and then he pushed, willing his sight to go beyond his eyes' limited range.

Raybern's eyes snapped open miles away and he stumbled backwards in surprise. He glanced down at his ethereal hands and felt the wondrous warmth of triumph growing in his heart. A ghostly version of himself was standing in a field, surrounded by labourers who looked at him at first with shock, and then with slight annoyance.

"Why can't you mages let us work?" one of the farmers chuckled, "always poking and prodding at us common folk ..."

"Sorry!" Raybern's translucent projection bowed before farmer Garral with respect, "just trying out a spell! I apologise if I have disturbed you! Please, don't tell Damas!"

"No harm done," Garral laughed, "I won't say a thing, Raybern. Oh, and while you're here, you may as well be useful. Tell your brother that the imps are back in my northernmost field. I need someone to take care of them, and I am willing to pay him double the normal price if he gets rid of 'em before they get into my pumpkins!"

"I'll let him know, Garral!" Raybern's projection turned around and took a few steps before exploding into an array of glittering sparks.

"OW!" Raybern shouted as he ran headlong into the tree he had been standing under. He fell backwards and came crashing to the earth with a resounding smack. He rubbed his bottom as he rose and then leaned over to retrieve his spellbook.

He glanced down at its pages and frowned, “*Note: One’s projection is just that: a projection. The owner of said projection should be aware that one does not teleport to their projection’s location, and therefore any movements taken by the mage in question will be copied by their physical form. Practice projection in spaces devoid of solid and/or dangerous objects.*” Hmm, probably should have read that bit *before* I ran into the damned tree!”

“Or maybe you’d be better to close the spellbook and pick up a hoe like you *should’ve* done years ago!”

Raybern glanced over his fence at the group of young mages that had gathered around his yard as they laughed and pointed at him. He felt heat rush to his cheeks as he leaned against the tree trunk he had slammed into moments before, trying to make it seem as though he had *meant* to collide with it.

“Oh ... oh yeah?” Raybern stammered, “maybe ... maybe *you* should pick up a ... a *rake*!”

“Gladly!” one of the mages flicked his wrist. A nearby rake jumped to attention and then soared through the air, crashing into the tree just above Raybern’s head. He yelped in fear and ducked, his actions met with a chorus of malicious laughter, “oh, look everyone! The Chosen One’s afraid of a *rake*! Whatever will we do when the rake monsters come to destroy our town? We’ll surely perish!”

“Get ... get out of here!” Raybern shouted, biting back tears, “or I-”

“You’ll *what*?” one of the other mages growled, “you’ll summon that crazy hermit to defend you? Why he chose *you* of all people is a mystery I’ll *never* understand, but know this: you are *not* special. You can’t even project yourself without running into a tree! A *child* could have done better! You’re *not* the Chosen One, and you’re *certainly* not a powerful mage ... you’re just a poor, little *idiot* who believes the words of a crazy old man. Go out to the fields and get a job that actually helps the town ... or go dunk your head in the Immortal River and never come back!” the mages laughed as they marched away, leaving Raybern alone with a red face and teary eyes.

Once his tormentors were truly gone, Raybern slid down the trunk of the tree and let out a long, sorrowful sigh. He calmed himself and then glanced around at his backyard. It was a small yet comfortable space with a tiny, wooden fence, a garden where he could grow herbs and alchemical ingredients and, of course, his oak tree. He was surrounded by verdant grass that shuddered in the gentle breezes of the Immortal Valley. Raybern’s heart hung heavily in his chest as he gazed down at the spellbook he had been holding moments before.

“Raybern? Are you alright?”

Raybern looked up and met the eyes of his next door neighbor. Elyssia smiled at him, her golden eyes gleaming in the sunlight. She was taller than Raybern, with tawny hair that reached down her back in a tight braid. She wore a sky blue dress that accentuated her willowy frame. Raybern could feel his eyes attempting to wander, and so he stared at the ground instead. Elyssia approached the stone fence of his backyard and brushed away a loose hair from her eyes.

"Elyssia, er, hi!" Raybern fumbled for words, "it's a, er, it's a lovely day, is it not?"

"It *was*," Elyssia frowned, "until those fools came along. Were they bothering you again, Raybern?"

"Bothering me?" Raybern waved a hand in the air in mock dismissal, "no, they were just having a bit of fun. Having a little laugh, that's all."

Elyssia narrowed her eyes, "you're certain? If you're lying to me, I'll have to come beat *you* up after I'm finished teaching *them* some manners, you know."

"The only one who needs teaching 'round 'ere is that scrawny ab'swart," Elyssia's father poked his head out of a window and growled at his daughter, "leave the fool to his pointless spellcasting, Elyssia. You have *real* studying to do!"

"Yes, father," Elyssia rolled her eyes and waved happily at Raybern, "I'll see you around, Raybern!"

"Y-yes!" Raybern waved back meekly, "be seeing you!"

Raybern sat in silence for a few minutes and then sighed. He reopened his spellbook and continued reading. After several minutes of quiet meditation, he was ready to try something else.

"Okay," Raybern whispered to himself, "You can do this, Ray. You've done it before. Master Will will be proud if you can control it by the time he comes for your lesson. You've got this. You're the Chosen One. You were chosen by the Dul'aruu to save the world. You're going to watch over the entire Immortal Valley one day. You're talking to yourself again. Stop it, or else people will call you crazy. Okay, let's go. Okay!"

Raybern took a deep breath and then drew power from around his body, focusing it into his hands. He concentrated on the hot and chaotic nature of fire and pushed the power building in his heart through his fingertips. A small jet of flame burst forth and he smiled. The flames danced in front of his face merrily, and he began pushing them around with his mind, forcing the fire to roll and weave around in the air like a mass of snakes being charmed into an intricate

dance. Raybern was so focused on controlling the flames he did not notice the armoured Solgria sneaking up behind him.

“Defend yourself!” the armoured Solgria drew a curved sword and rounded shield. He charged straight at Raybern with reckless abandon. He was wearing a light arraignment of iron chainmail, greaves and plated boots. His gold-encrusted helm had been crafted into the image of a dragon’s head, with two slits for his dark, brown eyes. Raybern yelped and shot an arc of flame at the intruder that bounced uselessly off of his raised shield. Raybern ducked under the attacker’s sword and brought his foot up to connect with the man’s back.

“Oh by Ath’hair, that *hurts!*” Raybern cried out as his foot slammed into the iron armour.

“Praying to the Dul’aruu of Life won’t keep you from dying! Keep your feet moving, Ray,” his attacker commanded, “strike quickly. Miss me, and you *will* die!”

Raybern bellowed some choice words of power and unleashed a torrent of lightning into his attacker’s shield, sending the armoured Solgria stumbling backwards. He shot a blast of kinetic energy into his attacker’s chest and then let loose a burst of flames that arched towards the Solgria’s head. The flames fizzled out into nothing before they struck, and Raybern felt his confidence falter. The armoured Solgria lunged forward and tucked his arms against his chest. He fell into a roll and then sprang to his feet, landing within inches of Raybern. He pressed the edge of his blade to Raybern’s throat and chuckled, his mouth twisting into a triumphant grin.

“You’re too slow, brother,” Damas laughed.

“Am I?” Raybern raised his eyebrows and looked upwards.

Above Damas’s head was a long, thin strand of flame poised like a snake about to strike. Damas clicked his tongue and removed the blade from his brother’s neck.

“Shall we call this one a draw, then?” Raybern asked.

“Sure,” Damas removed his helmet and let his long, blonde hair fall down his back, “but if this were a *real* fight, you’d be dead. Let’s see fire magic kill an attacker when you’re not alive to command it, Ray.”

“Oh, come *on!*” Raybern growled, “my flames could have gotten you *long* before your sword landed the killing blow!”

“Keep telling yourself that, brother.”

Damas busied himself with unfastening his armour, removing his dragon helm first. He had the angular face and pointed ears of his people but, unlike his little brother Raybern, Damas was

built for combat. His arms were at least twice as thick as Raybern's, and he was stronger than most of the young men in their village. Years of farmwork, followed by decades of service in their Lord's personal militia, had made Damas' golden skin as tough as leather, his mind disciplined, and his demeanor a bit prickly. Raybern rolled his eyes at his brother's comments and went back to reading his spellbook.

"You're improving," Damas muttered completely out of the blue, "your spells are getting stronger, and you're reacting faster now, Ray. Have you decided if you'll be applying to the College this season?"

"Yes."

"You're going to apply again? Good for you, brother. I'm sure they'll take you this-"

"I meant that I've put thought into it," Raybern snapped the book shut and glared up at his brother, "and I've decided *against* it."

"Oh, come *on*!" Damas groaned, "Ray, you've been blessed with *magic*. Even though I question his ... *mental abilities*, the Elder chose *you* to be his apprentice! Mother and father believed in his visions, so I'm inclined to think that he's right: you're the Chosen One, born under the sign of Beo'tide, and touched by the Divine Light! You were *born* to be a mage!"

"I can't become a mage, not yet. I'm not strong enough," Raybern felt the lump of shame rising in his throat as his thoughts drifted back to the mages who had been harassing him, "I can *barely* keep up with *you* as it is ... what chance do I have against *actual* mages?!"

"Just because you're finding it harder than most to harness your ability, doesn't mean you give up and become a simple farmer!" Damas retorted, "these things take time, brother."

"*You* were a farmer!" Raybern reminded him.

"Yeah, but *you* were the one born with a destiny. You were lucky enough to be born with a gift!" Damas shouted, drawing attention from their neighbors, "do you have *any* idea what I would give to have your life? To be one of the *elites* of our people? You're meant to do something *great*, and here you are *complaining that it's too hard*! Mother and father would be ashamed to see you throw away your divine calling-"

"They're gone, Damas!" Raybern roared, tears welling up in his eyes, "they were powerful mages. They were the siblings of a great Lord. They were strong and talented, and *they died*!"

"Is *that* what you're afraid of?" Damas hushed his voice to avoid the twitching ears of their neighbors, "*illness* took them, Ray, a disease that no one had ever seen before. There was nothing *any* of the mages could have done. You're so worried about failing them that you won't

even *try!*" Damas gathered his things and stormed past Raybern, heading for the door that lead into their modest home. Ray opened his mouth to speak and closed it just as quickly, shaking his head.

"You know what?" Damas stopped as he opened the front door and sighed, "I'm sorry. I know it's hard. You *are* trying, and you *are* getting better. All I ask is that you put some serious effort into your destiny. This 'Master' of yours has obviously helped out a lot, but I don't want you to grow complacent. Just because he said that you'd become powerful doesn't mean that you don't have to *work* for it. I didn't mean to yell at you, it's just ... I worry about you, brother."

"I know," Raybern smiled grudgingly, "I worry about myself a lot too."

"Well, thank goodness for that!" Damas laughed, "come on inside and have something to drink. You must be parched after having your arse handed to you so easily."

"Ha-ha," Raybern rolled his eyes and joined his brother inside their home.

Their house was a small cottage with simple, wooden furniture, a fireplace, a tiny shrine to the Six Dul'aruu, a washroom whose basin and bath were cracked and chipped with age, and a couple of modest bedrooms furnished with a bed and dresser each. Damas grabbed the skin of water strapped to his belt and poured a mug for himself. He raised the mug and shook it slightly, clearing his throat at Raybern with a smirk. Raybern grunted and waved his hand, sending a short blast of freezing air sailing into the side of Damas's mug.

"Ah, nothing like a cold mug of water after a hard day's work!" Damas pressed the mug to his lips and drank heavily.

"You're welcome," Raybern muttered, "so, what did Lord Dareena have you lot doing today? Fighting imps along the Golden River? Oh, that reminds me, Garral's having trouble with imps in his pumpkin patch again and was wondering if you could ... Damas?"

Damas's face was scrunched into an expression of pure disgust. He opened his mouth and spat a mouthful of water across the table, sending the spray careening into Raybern's face.

"If you don't want to do the job," Raybern wiped his damp face on his robe's sleeve with annoyance, "you can just say so! You're disgusting."

"I'll tell you what's disgusting!" Damas coughed and poured water into Raybern's empty mug, "take a swig of *that!*"

"It's water," Raybern grabbed the mug and pressed it to his lips, "I know it's not wine, but we *common* people have to- dear Rom'coth!" Raybern shouted and spat the water out onto the

floor, his mouth burning, “where in the name of the Dul’aruu did you get this *garbage*?! It tastes like ... like rotting meat! Did you not wash out your waterskin again?!”

“This ... this is a brand-new waterskin, Ray,” Damas stared at the water in disbelief, “I bought it *today*.”

“Oh,” Raybern rubbed his temple with frustration, “then what fetid pool did you get the water from? Have you been getting water from the fields again? Elyssia and I have *both* warned you about doing that, they use pig sh-”

“You don’t understand, Ray,” Damas’ voice was barely a whisper, “I got this water from the cleanest, purest source in the world.”

“What?” Raybern blinked.

“I got this water from the Golden River,” Damas made his way towards the front door, his face pale, “I need to go and speak with Lord Dareena right away ... something is *terribly* wrong.”