

“Quill, watch my back for those two pats,” Trevor spoke urgently into his headset.

“No prob, Obi, gotcha covered,” Shawn, aka Quill, a gnome warlock, responded in Trevor’s ear. The Alliance was deep in Blade’s Edge Mountains, fighting ogres in their villages and towns to complete several quests needed by each member.

In a black Metallica t-shirt and pajamas, Trevor was up later than usual because he needed to work out his frustration and anger. He was grouped with a couple of Guildies and two new toons he had never played with before. Gunther, as Urgot, had played with this healer and tank before and said they worked well together. So far Gunther had been right. They had a relatively easy time of getting close to the boss mob and completion of this quest.

It was 2:00 a.m. and Trevor didn’t want to wake his mother so he kept his voice low just in case she had forgotten her meds. She didn’t get *World of Warcraft* at all, and had threatened to confiscate the computer if she caught him playing in the middle of the night again. Good thing she took medication to help her sleep. They left her comatose for the night, and Trevor free to play. His dad was the one who introduced him to the game and didn’t care how late Trevor played, as long as he was up and ready for school without bitching about it. He was the easy going one and it took a lot to get a raise out of him. His mom was a neurotic control freak and didn’t like any deviation from The Plan. Not that any of that mattered anymore.

Last week Trevor had turned fifteen. Both of his parents forgot. Instead they sat him down and told him they were separating. Some birthday present. Four days after the parental oversight, his mom remembered. *What kind of mother forgets your birthday* he thought as his anger flared again at the memory.

Not above working his mum’s guilt over the lapse in motherly love, Trevor glanced happily at his new phone that did just about everything but wipe his nose. His dad had moved out, and that really sucked, but he would probably be able to get the newest expansion of *World of Warcraft* and a year’s subscription out of that guilt trip. They were pretty close. Trevor was going to see about staying with him.

Voices in his ear brought him back to the game. He realized they might have more trouble than they could handle as the group warned of mob locations and advised which to take out first. Trevor’s character, a Gnome Mage named Obiwank, sprang into action. First he frost-bolted several foes and sheeped one of the casters as the group concentrated on the ogre mages first. Bigglewiz was the main tank and took aggro from two mobs, Quill DoT’d the two mobs several times and then they all concentrated their efforts on the first of Big’s mobs while Lexie, a night elf druid known as Healingbabe4u, kept the tank alive. It was a very close and difficult fight, but they avoided getting wiped as each

one did their job. Once the fight was over, Trevor said, “nice job all. Good work Big and Babe.”

Trevor keyed in afk ggp, (away from keyboard, gotta go pee), took off his headphones, and went to the loo, stepping over a pile of clothes that hadn't made it as far as the hamper. On his way back, he kicked his muddy trainers and sweats out of the way and looked out his bedroom window. Their London flat was in the residential area of Knightsbridge and his room looked out on an enclosed garden area at the back. The rain had ended around dusk. A rising autumn moon was throwing ghostly illumination over the garden through the bare branches of the sycamore tree at its center. Surprised, Trevor noticed someone sitting on one of the benches as a chill snaked up his spine. *That's weird. Who would be out sitting on a bench at 2:00 a.m.?* He glanced around the rest of the square garden, but when his eyes came back to the bench it was empty. “I must be more tired than I thought,” he said out loud to the empty room. The only light was the glow of the screen of his gaming computer. Placing the headset back on, Trevor said “back.”

They were about ready to take on the boss mob and his two lackeys. “Everyone ~ buff up, get your mana and we'll go over this fight.” Trevor chuckled to himself. He had been their leader for a while now. *What would they think if they knew they were following a five-foot-nine geeky fifteen year old.* “Okay everyone ~ last fight ~ and here's our game plan.” The group discussed their strategy back and forth then sprang into action.

As they engaged the mobs all seemed to be going smoothly, and Trevor's mind wandered back to the stranger on the bench. It was such an odd occurrence that he couldn't stop thinking about it. Who was he and why was he sitting outside in the middle of the night? Was he even real or part of Trevor's imagination? Distracted, Trevor set his headset down and quickly went to look out the window again. There was no sign of the stranger. Trevor quickly slipped his headset back on and joined in again with the action just as the boss died.

Inspecting the corpse of the boss mob, Obi saw the quest item, its head, a green chest item and a nice blue 2H sword. Displaying the items to the group, he said “go loot the boss for the head and then we'll roll on the other two items, green first, then blue.” Everyone looted the quest item and then they rolled on the green. Urgot won and got a “Gratz” from the rest of the group. It wasn't an upgrade for him, but he could sell it at the Auction House for some gold. Then they all rolled on the blue item, won by Bigglewiz. A definite upgrade for him. “Gratz”, “Nice Upgrade” and “Sweet” were the responses. Big equipped it for all to see. It really was a pretty cool looking sword with some nice stats.

“I'm tired and need to log folks,” Trevor said into the headset. “I'll do my turn-ins next time I log on. Port for Shattrath coming up, use it if you need it.” Just before he ported to Shattrath, Obiwank typed in “/moon” and “/laugh”, and chuckled as his character dropped his pants, mooned everyone, laughed ~ then ported.

Trevor knew he was addicted to the game and didn't care. At least it kept him from thinking too much about what happened with Becca and his parents. *Getting dumped by your girlfriend and your parents in the same week must be a record* he thought as he closed the computer. He did need to get some sleep so he wouldn't drift off in class again. He stood up and moved towards his bed. "I wish I could just go into the game and disappear..." he said to the empty room.

"Funny you should say that," a deep voice said from the shadows. Trevor whipped his head to the right. The man in the hooded black cloak stood by his window, perfectly still. Lurching backwards, the teen tripped over his schoolbooks and went sprawling onto the hardwood floor. The impact stifled a scream as the air whooshed out of his lungs. He considered bolting for the door then ruled that out. The stranger was closer. With his father out of the house and his mother drugged into oblivion, Trevor was on his own. Vomiting was imminent as his stomach curdled with fear.

Shakily getting to his feet again and trying to catch his breath, the teenager rasped, "Who are you? What are you doing in my room? How did you get in here?"

"One question at a time, please. I am your guardian, actually. Well, one of them." As the man spoke, he slipped his hood back, revealing pointed ears lined with silver and gold hoops and ornate tattoos edging thick black hair. His eyes were as black as onyx, intense, and oddly familiar. It wasn't an unfriendly face.

"What the?" Trevor trailed off into silence, as he stood, paralyzed.

"I have been watching you from a distance since your birth."

"What are you, some creepy stalker?" the boy said.

Smiling, the stranger responded, "No. An old friend."

Trevor could feel his blood quicken, pulsing hot and erratic through his veins. His temples were throbbing and he wasn't far away from going dead mental on this guy and taking his chances, possibly upchucking on him at the same time. At this moment, he was very thankful for all of the martial arts training his dad had insisted he take. Instinctively, the teen moved into a defensive stance, ready to attack. "You've been watching me? Why?"

As if he had read his thoughts, the stranger chuckled and said, "I mean you no harm."

"Let's just say I don't believe that," Trevor said warily.

"If my intention had been to harm you, you would be dead by now." The stranger's voice was soft, contradicting the menace found in the words he had spoken. It was as if he was enjoying a private joke.

Trevor froze at these words. His mind raced, considering several possibilities. He may only be fifteen, but wasn't without skills. Glancing at the sword hanging on the wall that his father had given him for his birthday last year, he mentally calculated if he could get to it in time. All of those lessons were about to pay off.

With only a heartbeat between his thoughts and the words "May I?" the stranger lifted his right hand, and an instant later the sword was in the man's possession. He made a few sweeping movements with the weapon, judging its weight and balance. "28 inch blade. Fine workmanship. Well balanced with a perfectly weighted hilt. This is a fine sword, forged by the master craftsman, Brychan. The quality of his work is known to all." The stranger then wrapped his cloak around the blade end and handed the hilt to the teen.

As Trevor took the sword, he began to feel a little foolish. Granted, he was right to freak out, but all the same he felt better when the man gave him the sword. How the stranger got it off the wall was another matter and how did he know who made it? "Again, who are you?"

With a sly smile, the stranger asked, "Ah, where to begin. Will you at least allow me to state my case before you engage?"

Trevor's curiosity was getting the better of his fear at the moment. With the sword comfortably in his right hand, the teen nodded and laughed nervously, relaxing his position. "Was that you on the bench?"

"Yes. A portentous glimpse would have begun your awakening. From the moment you saw me, deep within you, old memories were stirring."

"I don't understand."

"You will."

Unhappy with the answer, Trevor decided to try a different question. "Why are you dressed like an elf?"

The stranger raised an eyebrow and stifled a smirk. "Well, I am not from around here."

With these words, Trevor's heartbeat quickened, and anticipation pulsed through his body. Instinctively, on some level, he knew that the stranger was not talking about being from California.

"You and I have known each other a very long time, Trevor. We had an agreement. You chose to come to this realm and we were to wait until you turned fifteen to begin crossing you."

“How did you know my name?” Trevor said, suddenly confused.

“I told you, we are old friends.”

His confusion obvious, Trevor then said, “*We?* Who is this *we* you are talking about?”

“I was supposed to cross you with another companion. He must have been delayed. Our time is growing short, I had to come alone.”

“Crossing? To where?”

“My realm. Our realm.”

“And what would that be?” Trevor asked as he began to detect a soft chiming in his head awakening threads of another lifetime hidden deep within his consciousness.

“I am a Mage from the Land of Anara. As you once were.”

Dazed, Trevor’s mind started to spin as fleeting memories from another life hurtled around in his head. The sword clattered to the wood floor as the teen’s knees buckled and he crumpled into the dirty clothes. From the floor, he asked incredulously, “I was a Mage?”

“You **are** a Mage.”

Trevor laughed out loud at the absurdity of what the stranger had said. “That is total crap. I only play one in this game.”

“Indeed.” The man simply smiled and waited quietly as the boy picked up the sword and shakily got to his feet. “An interesting coincidence, don’t you think?”

“I don’t know what to think,” Trevor stated simply. Then as an afterthought, he said, “What if I don’t want to go?”

“The invitation has been extended but the choice is yours to accept or decline.”

The stranger raised his right hand and conjured up an orb of light. Small at first, it continued to vibrate and expand until it filled his hand. Illuminating the room, the man sent it to hang suspended near the ceiling. “It seemed a bit dark in here,” was all he said. Trevor was speechless as he watched the floating light, shimmering and spinning. The orb made no sound but the teenager could feel the pulsing orb as well as he could feel his pounding heart. Trevor stood quietly as the Mage looked around, taking in his room. He supposed it looked like any fifteen-year-olds room. Clothes everywhere, unmade bed. Empty soda cans, candy wrappers, empty pizza box. The stranger paid close attention to all of the fantasy literature that filled the bookshelves. It included everything from space

adventures to travel into other realms, and a journey through Middle Earth. Star Wars figurines happily mixed with the World of Warcraft figures, and the dvd's on display easily fit into the fantasy genre.

Several pictures of the boy with his parents sat in frames on the desk and bookshelves. Trevor continued watching the stranger as he took in his room and lingered on a picture of his father.

Trevor's body had been thrumming with fear since he first saw this man in his room, but now that fear was losing some of its edge. Maybe holding his sword had something to do with that, and the fact that he knew how to use it. Plus, the stranger had kept his distance and certainly wasn't acting in an aggressive manner. Burning curiosity had flared within the teen to rival any fall bonfire and began to override everything else. Starting with basics, the boy asked, "What's your name?"

"Naeeren Starfury."

Trevor could feel another ping ricocheting around in his head, bouncing off a memory. "You say we have known each other?" Trevor asked.

"Yes. For four hundred years."

Trevor visibly tensed. "That's crazy." Stuttering, he then asked, "How old are you?"

"Six hundred years, give or take a few. You won't remember me just yet. Part of coming here is that you lose most of the memories of other lives. The dense energy in this realm changes things. If it is any consolation, you knew this before you made your decision."

Incredulous, Trevor spit out, "Why would I give up that to be here?"

"Of the three of us, you were the only one who had not yet come to this world. Your particular skills were needed. You wanted to help."

"Help with what?"

"Let's just say that there are things that are going on here that need our expertise."

"Our expertise? Like you and me?"

"Yes. And others."

"You mean this other guy who didn't show up?"

"Yes."

“What kinds of things?”

“This world is dying. That fact affects our world as well. It is in our interest to assist.” The Mage looked directly into the boy’s eyes. “It would be easier if I just showed you.”

“Show me what?”

“Who you used to be.” The Mage gestured for the boy to sit at his desk.

Still reluctant, the teenager said, “How can you do that?”

“If you will give me permission to touch your temple, I will be able to activate some deep memories that will reveal more to you than my words. May I?”

With the initial shock wearing off, Trevor no longer felt afraid. This all made perfect sense in some obscure way. He had always felt out-of-sorts with this life, as if he was waiting for something that couldn’t be named. Had he known on some level that this was coming? Why did all of this make sense?

“Will it hurt?”

“No.” The Mage again gestured towards his desk. “You might want to sit down.”

Trevor placed the sword on the desk and sat in the chair. Naeeren moved easily to his side and placed two of his fingers on the boy’s temple. Instantly Trevor felt a pulsing sensation and closed his eyes. All of his own thoughts submerged, and he felt himself hurtling on a golden cord of energy moving at the speed of light.

It felt as if he was in a cinema. The opening credits had finished and the movie was starting. Playing across the inside of his eyes, he saw a fire crackling in a stone hearth. He and Naeeren were in a tavern straight out of *Lord of the Rings*, crowded with patrons. The air was stale, thick with pipe smoke and the room hummed with conversation.

Trevor was sitting at an ornately carved dark wood table sharing a meal with Naeeren. In an oddly voyeuristic way, he watched himself as a full-grown man telling his friend how funny it was going to be that he wouldn’t remember him. The bond between the two men was obvious. They were dressed in ornately stitched brown leather jerkins, leather pants with high riding boots and soft cotton shirts. His senses were so heightened he could smell the scent of horses and animal blood on them both here in his bedroom. Trevor then noticed a third pewter plate at their table with the remnants of a meal. In slow motion, he took in every aspect of the tavern, examining all of the inhabitants, table by table. He was acquainted with everyone. There were no strangers here. A tall man dressed in an elegant cream-colored robe with ornate embroidery turned from the bar with three pints of beer in his hands. As Trevor’s eyes moved up to the man’s face, he

was startled to recognize his father. There was no mistaking those piercing charcoal eyes, although they now sat under an ornately tattooed brow and were framed by pointed ears and thick shoulder length gray hair. He wore an ornate silver circlet on his forehead, the center of which was a six point stag. The tall man made his way back to the table, setting the ale down with the announcement to them both that next time it was Naeeren's turn to buy. He then addressed Trevor directly.

"I will be with you, Trevallius, every step of the way."

"I know, Pascus. Much thought has been given to this, and I am ready."

"To tomorrow," Pascus said as he raised his pewter pint in the air.

The other two men raised their pints as well in a salute to this new adventure. The whole scene played out in the teen's mind in a fraction of the time that the actual event took place.

The fingertips on his temple lifted, but Trevor's mind was heavy with the vision and he could not open his eyes. He was being gently drawn back to the bedroom by the sound of his father's voice. "Trev, can you hear me? Son?"

Slowly opening his eyes, he tried to focus but was seeing double. There were now two men in cloaks in his room with pointy ears and tattoos. His heavy lidded eyes closed again.

A familiar hand grasped his shoulder and squeezed gently. "Trev, try to open your eyes. It's dad. We don't have much time."

It took another minute for the teenager to readjust to his current surroundings and come back to the bedroom. Blinking, he forced his eyes to come into focus looking at this man with long gray hair and his father's eyes and said, "Dad?"

"Yes, it's me. I'm sorry you had to find out this way. I was supposed to have joined Naeeren earlier tonight but there was a complication."

"So, that **was** you in the vision? You are a Mage too?"

"Yes."

The vision clung to the teen and he wore it like a shimmering second skin. "Dad," he said, "I don't really understand what is happening. You know Naeeren?"

"Yes, son. Very well. I would trust him with my life, and yours."

"Why didn't you tell me about all of this?"

“I couldn’t say anything before because there are rules set down by the Council that we have to abide by. I was restricted from discussing the crossing with you until tonight. I was supposed to have joined Naeeren earlier tonight before he approached you but ran into some trouble.”

Looking at the confused boy, Naeeren said, “I do apologize, Trevor, for my abrupt arrival. It could not be helped. I knew something had gone wrong when your father didn’t show up. We travel on The Dragon Matrix and it is only open for a brief time at the apex of the full moon.”

Trevor shook his head, trying to make sense out of all of this. He knew that what Naeeren had shown him was true, and he trusted his father beyond anyone else, but he was having a difficult time assimilating the vision. It was then that he noticed the blood dripping from a deep wound near his father’s left shoulder.

“Dad, you’re bleeding.”

Pascus nodded, then looked at Naeeren. “There were four of them. Took me by surprise. They wore no blazon nor brooch, and they spoke one of the old tongues.” Glancing at his shoulder, he continued, “This was a lucky strike.”

Naeeren’s eyes showed concern but his voice was clear, although he spoke with some urgency. “Pascus, we can deal with that on the other side. Time is short. The moon is almost at fullness. We can’t wait much longer.”

“How does the crossing work?” Trevor asked.

Naeeren hurriedly offered an explanation. “The inhabitants of this realm have some rather quaint ideas about time and the existence of others. Time is malleable, but one has to respect how it works. We cross on the Dragon Matrix at the full moon. It is a matrix of energy lines that connects everything in creation. Commonly referred to as ley lines or energy points in this world, although many here do not believe they exist. Everything is made up of energy. We just know how to work with it better than this world. There are many realms, or dimensions if you like, and because the energy is lighter in these other places, it is easier to transport between those realms. It is more difficult to transport from here. There are rules, as well. That is why we came to cross you.”

Turning to Trevor’s dad, Starfury said, “Pascus, it is urgent that we go now.”

Another thought came to the boy. “Dad, you know it will push mum over the edge if I am not here in the morning.”

“That won’t be a problem, son. There is no division between the past, the present, or the future on The Dragon Matrix. You will be able to return to this dimension when it

is time, to this moment here in our world. You will be different from your experience, but your mother will still be sleeping in the other room. Oblivious.”

“Proper nang, that is,” Trevor said, grinning from ear to ear. A trip to another realm and nobody even knows you are gone.

Naeeren laughed and said, “I didn’t factor in that I would have to deal with you as a teenager and your London slang. This could be very trying.”

Grinning, Trevor said, “This is wicked cool.” Cheekily, he asked, “Don’t you both stick out a bit with the pointy ears and the cloaks?”

His father smiled as Naeeren said, “I travel between our realms frequently. I can step into an identity that I have here that allows me to move around without suspicion. There was no need to show you my London identity as your father was supposed to have been here. I preferred to show myself to you in the form that you knew, to help you remember. As he was detained, he came as he was on the other side.”

“I feel like this is some Hollywood movie,” Trevor said.

“I assure you it is very real.” Naeeren said.

Trevor’s whole world had shifted on its axis. Having been obsessed with fantasy fiction since he was very young, he wanted to believe everything he was being told. Was he dreaming? Had his desire to escape what his life had become caused him to go mental? Is this what crazy felt like? When Becca explained why she wanted to break up, then asked if they could still be friends, the pain shattered his heart, leaving him hollow inside. Book ended by his parent’s news, his life as he had known it didn’t exist anymore. Who wouldn’t want to get away from that?

The way Trevor saw things, he had an opportunity to be saved from the pain and tediousness of his life by two wizards with pointy ears who could time travel. The ultimate adventure was calling him. It was like being able to step into his computer and enter his own version of *World of Warcraft*.

“This feels like a dream, but if it is, it is a right good one.”

Naeeren had allowed the boy as much time as he could afford to think through all of this. He gave an urgent nod of his head to Pascus, who then addressed the teen. “Son, I know this is a lot to take in. I have done my best to prepare you for what was to happen tonight without the luxury of being able to talk about it. We have both watched over you from the day of your birth. It was my privilege to raise you in this realm and ready you for this day.”

Standing speechless, the teenager just stared at his father, as every perception and thought he had about who this man was disintegrated. Trevor saw flash in front of him all

of the times his father had read stories to him as a young boy, the playing at sword fighting, the trips to the cinema to watch movies about other realms, the martial arts training. He flashed on a conversation they had earlier this year about how cool it would be to time travel to other lands. In a convergence of a thousand memories, a million pieces organized themselves into a mosaic in his head that now made perfect sense.

Overwhelmed, Trevor sat back down. “Dad, how well do you know Naeeren?”

“The three of us have been inseparable for four hundred years. He is a most trusted friend and companion. We both have been eagerly awaiting this day.”

Whatever remaining resistance he felt evaporated. “I have so many questions.”

“We will answer them all,” his father said. “But not now. We have to go. Are you ready to do this?” His father asked.

“Abso-bloody-lutely!” the teen said with a grin.