

# Prologue: Of Aspirants and Fate

A lot happened to her in the last week. She did not really think about it until now, when she was lying down on the soft dirt, while the twigs and leaves were buried into her brown-blond wavy hair. She was in pain, she knew she was, yet for some reason she did not feel it. With all her strength she pushed herself up with her left arm and dragged herself to a nearby rock. A trail of blood followed behind her.

“So much has happened.” She managed to say through a choked, bloody breath. Through her foggy eyes she gazed down to where her legs ended in crimson, bloody stumps. Her eyes then moved over to her right arm which was in a similar condition.

She knew that she was going to die. The blood poured out slowly, the cuts partially covered with dirt and wet leaves; she did not have enough energy to even scream, or yell for help. As the blood painted the green and brown ground, she lay in a clandestine almost serene place; a forest of great oak trees jutted out of the ground, their trunks massive and reaching far into the clouds, moss covering them like land on a map. In the distance, hares darted around. A stream could be heard slowly, relentlessly moving through the forest.

She closed her eyes, ready to cross into the spirit world; the weight of her breathing began to drain her more as it slowly began to become fainter and more burdensome. Even the smallest of breaths took an enormous amount of effort. A soft flutter noise made her

open her eyes once more; they were heavy, and she could hardly see out of them. Something small and vibrant flew around her. It was quick and luminous. It was quiet and beautiful. It was a fairy.

Although she could not speak, she thought, “I was always told that there were no fairies anymore . . . I was told the story while growing up . . .

Long ago, when magic was still primitive, fairies could be found everywhere. They were beings made completely of magic. They were reckless, bright creatures full of beauty. They would flutter constantly around in the air, coloring the sky in thousands of brilliant, flashing hues.

It was said that they would inspire the birds to sing, the writers to write, and the kings to lead. They showed not only the truth, but magic to people as well.

They would fly around, peaceful and quiet, and would spread their natural magic; making even the driest, darkest lands bear the richest fruits. Farmers toiling land patiently would marvel as overnight their fields flourished.

It was said that they were the guardians of nature; making sure that poisons and death never corrupted the land. The power that the fairies had was very potent. It was said that they could heal any disease, cure any plague, and the fairies always helped a person in need.

However, the fairies had a weakness. One that many races knew and exploited. They had no magic for attacking, for they did not need it. People loved the fairies and would do no harm to them . . .

As wars began and races sought to gain power over each other, a technique of magic was soon found

that involved taking magical power from other creatures to make oneself more powerful; it was called Hirudo. It had some fatal flaws; creatures had a magic potential, and if they used Hirudo to pass it, the body would be destroyed. Another flaw was that a person needed a constant source of magic in order to maintain his or her power.

The fairies, the beautiful beings of pure wonder, were massacred in order to fuel this magic.

The war eventually ended, and a great Magic Council was created. They labeled Hirudo, and several other magics of war as forbidden, warning those who practiced them. However, the damage was done. Within a year, the farms no longer gave such a rich harvest, the forests no longer smelled pure and sweet. The fairies were extinct . . .”

She watched the small little creature fly around, hardly able to distinguish the trees from the ground. Her vision darkened more, and she closed her eyes, unable to keep them open. “Maybe it was just a colorful bird,” she found herself thinking. Darkness surrounded her and drowned her.

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She awoke to her flying over a beautiful island nation. This land was very full of riches and covered in a veil of green and sunshine. “Why am I flying above the island? This isn’t a dream?” She asked herself.

As she looked down, she saw the bright green forest of tall oak trees touching the tops of the clouds, and vines and logs covered the surrounding land. Tall grass is what consisted of the land in the forest, and she could see deer and elk casually going about their day.

The birds were flying high, building nests for their soon to be newborn babies. It was a peaceful environment with no harm done to it. It was as if . . . here at this spot, the fairies had never left.

As she finally flew out of the trees, she came to the mainland. This was nothing but flat grassland. The only thing that made this land stick out was the giant ocean and dock port to the right of her. This was the only port for landing on the island; it was for those who wished to return to the island, for nobody new ever came to it. Many travelers and wizards, along with elves, came to trade riches and goods, and the children would play along the beach under the tall trees that gave them shade during the hot summer.

To her left she saw the barren wastelands of the Wandering Travelers. This was the land that people would try to travel through, but no one would ever make it out alive. It has since had a barrier put around it by the Council to prevent travelers from venturing into it. It was rumored, but never confirmed, that past the barren land was an even more hostile place, a place harboring creatures so perilous that not even the dragons dared go near it. What lay in there for sure, no one knew.

Finally, she came up to the Grand Castle. Surrounded by snowy mountains, and nothing else. Towers raised from every corner into the sky and branched apart into sub towers and from those sub towers branched more towers. From those towers extended long and wide marble bridges that had a stone brick ceiling above them. Here is where the guards of the castle would take patrol and keep an eye on the lower grounds and courtyard. All the bridges centered over the

keep. The keep was massive and consisted of several marble columns that held up the higher tiers. Stained glass pictures depicted various kings and queens of the castle in colorful murals.

Everything was moving so fast she could not keep up with what was happening. “What is going on here?” She asked out loud. “This must be a dream; something must be happening.” She looked down at herself and saw the stumps that were her legs and right arm. Tears poured out of her eyes. “This is the end? This is the spirit world? Where . . . where am I going?”

She finally came up to the tallest tower, directly above the keep on the castle and could see three silhouettes. She could not see anything else, but she heard screaming. A girl was shrieking loudly and tossing her arms through the air.

A man walked up to her and cut her throat and blood splat upon the window. He was wearing dark robes and a crow's head for a mask. “What is going on here?” She screamed yet again. “This has to be a dream! A nightmare! I need to wake up now!”

Looking up, she saw herself getting lost in a blizzard in the mountains. Her vision was getting white and fuzzy. Her body was getting cold. She realized that she was being carried by a stranger. “Hold on little one, you’ll be fine. We’ll patch you up in no time.” A mystical voice said.

With her vision gone white, she said back, “Please, don’t let me die.” Her mind began to fade, as everything went from white to black.

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“You brought me a girl?”

“You must save her, Gorin.”

“What do you mean? Who is she to you, Fable?”

“Someone I found . . .”

“Look at her . . . Whatever happened to her . . .

Well what I mean to say is, I don’t know if she can be saved.”

“Are you telling me that the great Gorin has found something he can’t do? I never thought you would admit such a thing, wait till I tell everyone; the king, the elves, or even perhaps Evadra, and every single person I run across.”

Gorin’s cheeks flushed red and he stammered, “well, I, you . . . you know, I work wi-with metal . . . with machines . . . not-t human-ns.”

“What did you always say when we were kids? ‘The great Gorin can do anything.’ I am asking you to do just that! Fix her! If anyone can, it is you, my small friend.”

Gorin puffed up his chest, only coming as high as the man’s stomach. His long red hair curled to his shoulders but was nicely kept, and his matching beard lightly covered his face like a red leaf bush. “Small friend? Why don’t you just call me what I am? A mere dwarf.”

“I don’t call you a dwarf because you don’t like to be called one; moreover, you are hardly anything like the other ones that I have met. They are greedy, arrogant, and battle-driven.” He stopped for a moment and looked at Gorin, “But you are also similar to them . . . loyal, crafty with metals, and brave.”

Gorin smiled, “for you, I’ll see what I can do.”  
There was a hint of loneliness in his voice as it echoed  
off the walls of the cave.

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“She is . . . dying . . .” A faint voice said.

Her head ached in pain that drowned her in  
agony. Her consciousness faded in and out. There was a  
light, then it was all black. She heard voices, then they  
faded. She felt pain, then it was wiped away with dark  
nightmares. For a moment she could see clearly enough  
to tell that she was either in a cave or a dimly lit room.  
Her back shuttered in agonizing pain as she lay down on  
a flat surface and due to the way it felt, she knew she  
was lying down on something wooden.

“Look . . .”

“. . . I see . . . then . . .”

“Blood . . .”

She fell into the darkness. Unsure of what to  
think. She wondered if she was dead, if this was going to  
be her eternal damnation for what she did. “I crossed the  
boundary.” She repeated over and over in her head till  
everything faded away.

There was a little girl. Everything looked fuzzy,  
but the little girl was clear. She was in a vivid green  
room. Pictures of all of her favorite characters from the  
stories she loved while growing up were expertly painted  
on the walls; Qu-Shreeth the valiant knight who was said  
to have saved his kingdom from one thousand attacking  
Ghost Knights, then there was Nightshade the heroic  
dragon and his five children, the first dragonborn;  
Requiem, Solace, Vexation, Hubris, Cajole. Legends  
credit them with overthrowing the empire of the Frost

Titans, there was also Goruntur Steelbrand, a dwarf, and his followers who aided the elves and created peace between the two races, and there was an unnamed kraken. Nobody knew its name, but it held the continents together during the magic war and died afterward, and finally there was the mysterious cloaked figure, he seemed to be spirit-like as he danced around, his name was Contrition.

“Why do you want Contrition on your wall?” Her father asked lovingly. “He is a bandit who stole knowledge from the Magic Council in order to try to gain immortality.”

The girl looked up at her father and quickly responded, “Because, he isn’t the monster everyone thinks he is.”

“And how would you know that?” He chuckled.

“I know.” She responded never going into any detail on the matter.

The girl sat inside reading, as books spread out across her featherbed and across the simple red-carpet floor. Pages were torn out and folded, and others were marked. Through her window, children could be seen playing in the sunshine.

She did not play with them. She did not want to. This is where her life was. “Why do I need to play outside when I can use my mind to travel through time and across space?” She thought to herself.

The girl was happy and satisfied. This is what she wanted to do . . . forever.

At a young age she could feel the magical power that surged through her. However, she was never taught



how to use it. In her mind she did not need to, the pages were magical enough.

Then one day, a traveling merchant riding a black mare strode quietly into town. He was a regular here. He would always bring the little girl new books and would smile when her eyes lit up.

The girl ran outside when she saw him through her window. She darted down the stairs and opened the tall double doors, to a town with many marble and stone houses. The road was made of bricks, and the trees stood tall as a soft breeze flew in making the girls hair flow into her face. She grew a smile on her face and ran towards the merchant. “What have you got for me today mister?” She asked. This time he handed over a thick, old, black leather book. The pages were fragile, and the cover was dusty and rugged with only a single word ‘Zinla’ inscribed on it.

“Thank you, mister!” The young girl said as cheerful as ever.

He smiled, “you are most welcome. However, beware that I can’t help you if the book changes you.” The same thing he said every time that he gave her a book, and she knew why. Knowledge is power, and the more she learned the more likely it would change her.

She shrugged and skipped back to her room.

The merchant turned quietly and went to her mother and father. “You know you can’t keep it from her forever-”

Meanwhile, the young girl sat on her bed and, as the sun fell behind the horizon, painting the sky in colors similar to Nightshade’s fire - crimson red, sunflower yellow, apricot orange, and a hint of light pink - she

began to read the book. She read the book through the night, the pages coming to life in her mind. She flipped through the last pages as dawn emerged on the horizon.

“Zinla is a magical place!” She yelled as she ran around the house.

“Calm down, dear.” Her mother said.

“Zinla!”

“What are you talking about?” Her father asked, coming around the corner.

“I want to go to Zinla!” She yelled rushing outside. She found all of the kids and told them about the magical place, the place that was said to be impossible to find unless you were guided there, the place that no outsider had been able to reach for thousands of years. The place where nature seemed to be more vibrant and crops more bountiful. The place where magicians were accepted with welcome arms by the kind ruler, no matter race. The place where knowledge was free. The place where history was alive. The place where it is said, the fairies never left.

The rest of her life passed by in a single moment; she told her parents that she wanted to travel to Zinla, they responded that it was simply a fable told to young children and that it didn't exist, she got locked in her room, she broke out and set sail, she hit land, she trained under that woman to learn magic, she found out that the mentor was only using her, she ran away, she lost her limbs, and - she thought - died.

She would cry, but she could not see her body. She saw darkness. She tried to move, but she was either unable to or did not get anywhere. She did not think

anything. She would scream, but she could not. It was dark, it was hopeless. She thought, “this must be death.”

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When she opened her eyes, pain spiked through her head. Her right arm seemed heavy, along with her legs.

“Legs? An arm?” She muttered into the darkness. She tried to move, yet she was not able to. Agonizing pain clawed down her spine and swelled in her body.

“Ah-h-h-h!” She screamed. Part of her was relieved to finally be able to vent out some of the pain. “Ah-h-h-h!” Her shrieks radiated off the dark walls.

A candle quickly entered the room, carried by a small man with a short crimson red beard and his matching long curly hair. He rushed over to her.

In a rough voice he said, “everything will be okay.”

She wanted to ask him who he was, where she was, and many more questions, yet the words did not come out. Instead, only screams could escape from her mouth.

He lifted her head slightly up, only to hear more shrieks. “Drink this.” He brought a cup to her mouth and poured slowly.

After some time, she felt the pain dissolve into numbness. She felt herself drifting off to sleep. She opened her mouth searching desperately for something to say, “who?” She managed in an abrasive, quiet voice.

“Later.” He said.

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The dark quickly became all too familiar with her; she would wake up in its cold embrace, pain surging

through her body, and she would fall into a slumber still being held by it. Time passed. She lost track in it. Her state of mind became that of either pain and consciousness or pain and unconsciousness. When she woke up screaming in pain, the dwarf would come in and give her a potion that helped soothe the pain. She would ask where she was, who he was, what happened, where her legs were, or even something as simple as what time it was. She never got her answer. Either he pushed off the question or she fell out of consciousness.

On occasion, she would try to sit up; however, agony boiled her blood, and she would fall.

She realized that she was in a cave, a dark, cold, but dry cave. She realized that the dwarf was the only one who lived in this cave. She heard part of a conversation from him and someone who claimed that he saved her.

“She’ll live.” The gruff voice said.

“I . . . go . . . King . . . take care of . . .”

“Yes . . . but . . . and . . .”

The bits of the conversation were muffled by the pain that crawled over her.

“Teach . . . her . . .”

The dwarf gasped and began to protest, “No . . . can’t . . .”

She sat trying to listen but drifted into darkness. It seemed to be a bit more blissful than usual; the pain seemed to die down a bit and her muscles eased for a moment.

Slowly she began to get better, until finally she was able to stay awake long enough to hold a conversation with Gorin.

“It is metalwork magic. The finest dwarven craft I can do . . . I apologize ahead of time if it is not perfect. You see, I’m not used to working with humans or living creatures in general.”

She moved her legs slightly and lifted her right arm. It did not hurt. It was cold, yet held a hint of some warmth, and did not feel quite right, but the legs and arm still responded to her commands. “You saved my life.”

“I did what I could, those legs and that arm should work.”

“What happened to the guy who carried me?”

“Fable, well, had to go . . . he is a busy person. Now I have a question for you. Do you remember what happened?”

She shook her head, “it is fuzzy and dark. I was running. I know that. I think I was running for my life. Something happened . . . magic. Someone used . . . magic! Zinla! Her! Her!” Pain drummed on her head.

“Slow down.”

“I wanted to go to Zinla . . . But . . . I . . . magic. I needed . . . learn . . . magic . . .” She breathed heavily as she recalled pieces of the past.

“You are in Zinla now, Fable brought you here.” Gorin affirmed. “What else do you remember?”

“I found a master . . . she taught me magic . . . rather she tried to use me for forbidden magic . . . for demon magic . . .”

Gorin’s eyes flashed at her words. “Demon magic? This is bad. I don’t suppose you remember anything about your master or where she was practicing.”

She shook her head. “No . . .” she said, choking as tears formed in her eyes. “It is too foggy. But I remember fear . . .”

“This is bad . . . I will have to send a message.” He paused as if he did not want to continue speaking, “and I suppose I am going to help you learn magic . . . not that magic though . . . not that magic . . .”

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Merlin sat in a brown-red stained wood chair, his ancient eyes gazing into a crystal orb on the table in front of him. On the floor and table were scattered maps, papers, quills, oils, and chests. The chests that were opened were crammed with papers and leather rolls. He was in a large room that spiraled upward and ending in a stained-glass top. On all the walls were large bookcases overflowing with scrolls, tomes, and massive volumes. Additionally, there were floating shelves that had vials and jars - everything from green iron blood to fairy dust - and floating chairs.

Merlin scratched his large, white beard that flowed to his stomach. He was wearing a deep purple robe with white stars scattered over it - as if it captured the night sky. On his shoulder was a large snowy owl. He investigated the crystal orb which was shrouded with mist and fog. He placed his gnarled hands over the orb, they became blazing with a golden aura.

“I must find the heir,” he said in an ancient raspy voice, “before it is too late.”

As he poured his magic into the crystal, the mists began to shift revealing two small burning orbs - two golden-grey eyes.

“Finally, I have found him.” Merlin smiled.

There was a sharp knock at the door and before Merlin could answer it, the door swung open letting a fierce wind in that disturbed several papers and books.

“Merlin!” A voice boomed. A man in golden armor strode into the room. He had a sword strapped to his side - that gave off a bright, strong aura - he did not have a helmet on - making his well-groomed face visible. He had blonde hair, a small beard, and blue eyes.

“Pendragon.” Merlin spoke, he stood and greeted his friend in a warm embrace.

“How are you, my old friend?”

“You are calling me old?” Merlin laughed.

“Maybe just a little.” Pendragon smiled.

“In that case I am most well, and you? Have you come here to catch up on old times or have you come with some business?”

Pendragon’s face grew solemn and serious, “we must talk.”

Merlin waved his hand and two chairs flew over toward them. They each took a seat and for a while neither talked.

“Merlin,” he finally began, “there is a rumor going around, have you heard about it?”

“You came all this way to talk about a silly rumor?” Merlin tried to be cheerful, but his voice was melancholy.

“It involves you. Are you dying?”

Merlin took a breath, “it is my time.”

Pendragon slammed his fist into the side of the chair, “you are my mentor, my advisor, you gave me this sword! You helped me become king!”

Merlin smiled, “it is time. I don’t want you to worry.”

“You are the most powerful wizard in the world! What will the world do without you?”

“The world doesn’t need me, trust me.”

“Yes, it does!”

“There will be another, anyway.”

“Another?”

Merlin looked around the room, he never wanted to have this conversation. He took a sigh, his reflective yellow-charcoal eyes returned to his friend, “my magic, I haven’t told you much about it, but I suppose I ought to. Listen, I have a unique power, and as far as I am aware this power is passed down through time, with only a single person having it.”

“What is it?”

“True magic. I researched long and hard, trying to find the origin point, yet I could not. I only found a few previous users.”

“So, you are saying that a child will be born with your power?”

“Indeed.”

“When?”

“A bit after I depart.”

“How will he learn to use the magic? You had a hard-enough time.”

“Through difficulties one grows. It will be the same with the next.”

Pendragon looked gloomy and depressed, “and there is no way for you to live?”

Merlin chuckled, “no way that I wish to pursue.”

“I see,” Pendragon said, “I- I- I- ju-just-”



Merlin leapt upward and embraced Pendragon, “I will miss you my friend, but it is my time.”

Pendragon sobbed into Merlin’s robe. “Merlin, I will miss you too.”

For a while Merlin held his friend. When at last he let him go, and when he began to leave, Merlin said in a proud manner, “you have become a great person, and a wonderful, magnanimous king.”

Pendragon left without a response, a few tears trailing from his eyes.

Merlin heaved a hard breath, he wanted to finally be left alone. He wanted to reach some solace prior to his time. “Perhaps I should travel to Zinla. Although it would have to be a secret - nobody outside of Zinla could find out about its hidden shores, not even Pendragon.”

Merlin shrugged, feeling the weight of the world slowly crush him. He took another breath and went over to a small feather bed. He lay and closed his eyes, and, in his peaceful sleep, he drew his last breath.