

Chapter 1: Awakening Evil Sorcerers is Never Wise

Brissend Forest was dark and cursed. No one dared go into it for over a hundred years. At least no one lived to tell about it. Legend told of hideous monsters and dark magic. The sun hardly shone through the thick canopy of twisted trees and an eerie hum hissed through the air.

Despite the horror of the forest, three men walked through it. All three clutched the hilts of their swords, ready to draw them when needed. “Are you sure this is a shortcut?” one of them asked, his terrified voice trembling and barely able to get the words out.

The largest of the men answered, with more confidence, “People avoid this forest from fear. I doubt there are really hideous beasts, but even if there are, I'd rather fight a few firebears than spend the extra two days going around. It will save considerable time.”

They all stopped when they saw a skeleton, and one of the men shrieked in fear.

“It’s not dangerous,” the largest man assured him. “Continue.”

They didn’t. They all stared at the scene around them. In a clearing, in the middle of the forest, were several skeletons and a statue. “Was there a battle here?” one of them asked. “How long ago did they die?”

The largest man walked up to the statue. It was of a human man dressed in pants, a leather jerkin, and a robe that was open and came just past his knees. He looked strong. Perhaps the man the statue was erected to died in battle there. Still, it was odd that a statue to a man would be in such an isolated place. Even odder, there was a sword stuck through his stomach. The statue was stone, but the sword looked fine. The large adventurer chuckled to show the others he was not afraid and exclaimed, "This is a high quality sword!" He grabbed the sword and prepared to pull it out, a difficult feat for sure. To his surprise, the sword did not resist being removed in any way. It slid out as if it was lodged in custard instead of stone.

All three men froze in shock as the statue suddenly turned from stone to flesh. A mysterious man with dark brown hair that came past his shoulders and dark gray eyes stood before them, his eyes narrowing towards the men. "Thank you for releasing me," he hissed as a wicked grin crossed his face. "May I have my sword back?" he asked with his voice sounding threatening, hard, and cold, not polite.

The man who had taken the sword was too terror stricken to say anything, but he nervously gave it back. He realized his mistake when the sword was thrust through him, turning him to stone while the mysterious man laughed. Seeing this, one of his comrades drew his sword and charged. The gray-eyed man calmly raised his hand towards the charging man and muttered "*Fulgur!*" A bolt of lightning shot from his fingers toward the charging man, who fell dead. The mysterious man laughed victoriously as he raised his hand towards the last adventurer, who was staring at him in terror, and commanded "*Ignis!*" Fire shot from his hand, engulfing the terrified man in a burst of

fire. The mysterious man laughed at the cries from the burning man as he died.

He looked around, took a breath of the air, and smiled victoriously. He stretched his arms, then grabbed the petrified man by the neck and removed the sword. The man immediately turned back to flesh, but was being held off the ground by the neck. Through his panic, came the choking words, “Who are you?”

“I am Vledus!” the mysterious man threatened, followed by an eerie laugh. When his face became straight again, he seethed the words, “*Vitam Exhaurire!*”

The large man fell instantly limp. Vledus squeezed his hand around his neck, crushing it, and then dropped the man to the ground. He looked around at the three dead bodies and walked past as if they were no more than insects.

He put the sword on his belt and walked toward the ruins of Anizar, a good day's walk from his stone cage that he'd been trapped in for years.

As he walked, he had plenty of time for his wrath to engulf him. For years, he'd been trapped, turned to stone by his enemy, denied the power that was duly his; but now he would have his chance. His eyes widened in anticipation of finally getting what he wanted most – vengeance!

He made his way through the forest without trouble. The beasts seemed to flee before him, and even the hum of the forest quieted in fear. As he walked to the mountains, the sun set, but he didn't stop. He'd been sleeping for many years, and his hate provided ample energy to continue. He continued

through the night, breathing in the glorious darkness that he hadn't seen for many years.

The city of Anizar had been built into the mountains, a cavernous city where precious ores were mined.

Vledus approached the entrance. It was bright and well-kept, not the broken gate he remembered it being. He walked cautiously up to it. Obviously the world around him had changed during his captivity. Yet, he had to have it, so he reached for the gate. It opened easily for him, without even the utterance of a magic word, so he stepped quietly in.

A short man with a beard and uniform nodded and welcomed him in. Vledus walked past him into the city. "Since when did Dwarves guard this city?" he wondered.

He looked around. The city looked much as it once did when the dark elves lived there. It was bright, and crystals garnished the walls of the large caverns, casting a purplish light throughout the city, which had layer upon layer of shops and homes with bridges between them majestically gracing the massive caverns. Yet, there were no dark elves. Instead, Dwarves were all over, like bugs infesting the grand caverns. They must have moved in after the city was destroyed. Vledus would have to be careful not to stick out, which wouldn't be easy since he was almost two feet taller than most of them.

Yet, he walked through the city with hardly a notice and went straight through the corridors to one of the deepest mines. "*Partem!*" he commanded as the corridors branched off. His magic showed him the way through the labyrinth of caves. He finally approached a secret chamber with a magic barrier. It was invisible, except for a blue glow about it. He laughed

vilely. Finally, vengeance was his. He could finally do what he'd been waiting to for years. He breathed in his success and called out, "*Perdere!*"

Vledus watched in wonder as the entire room shook and the barrier started to break apart from his magic. The chamber nearly collapsed, but when the dust settled... the barrier stood firmly in place. "WHAT!" Vledus seethed, "How did one of them survive?"

Aspela was a beautiful city, especially for one that mostly housed humans. The buildings had tall spiraling towers and plenty of archways. The streets were cobblestone and all curved in beautifully artistic patterns. Someone might guess elves designed the city rather than humans, but humans lived there, not elves. Still, the architecture was majestic. From the main street, people could see the large castle of Zabet, the largest of the human cities. It looked much more traditional, but the massive size still made the grandeur impressive.

That night, the streets of Aspela were quiet. The night was peaceful, at least it seemed to be. A half a dozen thugs stood outside the local Lord's house. One of the thugs, who appeared to be the leader, spoke to the others in a hushed whisper, "Listen up. This job is the best paying one we've had all month. Don't mess this up." The others quickly nodded in agreement, either from respect or fear, as the leader was a large man. His leather tunic showed off his massive arms well. He warned,

“Remember, this is nobility we are dealing with. We can't afford to get caught.”

The fear of being caught hung over them as the thugs carefully started sneaking to the house. When they reached the door one of them pulled out a set of lock picks and prepared to pick the lock, a feat he'd performed many times.

All the thugs were surprised when a crossbow bolt came from nowhere and with pinpoint accuracy knocked the lock picks out of his hand. They all turned and looked around nervously, trying to see where the bolt had come from. The leader called out, “Who's there?” When there was no response he turned to his men and warned, “Get ready for a fight.”

All the thugs drew their weapons and looked fearfully toward where the bolt had come from. There was a long pause as they waited for the next strike, but no more bolts came. One of the men muttered the thought they were all afraid of, “Do you think it's *HIM*?”

Suddenly an intimidating presence appeared behind them in the shadows, and with a quick kick, knocked one of them to the ground. The other five thugs turned to him. Standing there was a man. The man was about six feet tall. He wore light armor, a mask, and had dual swords strapped to his back. One of the thugs swung a sword at the masked man, who easily deflected the swing with his bracer and drew his own swords. His twin blades glowed with a blue light, adding to the fear the thugs already felt toward him. The masked man swung at the thugs who all jumped back to avoid the strikes.

Two of the thugs immediately ran away in terror while the other three attacked the masked man, who confidently engaged

all three at once, with swiftness and precision. Somehow, he was able to parry every blow from all three men. At one point the lead thug was able to get a glancing blow on him, but it bounced right off his armor, and the masked man did not even flinch.

A moment later a bolt suddenly flew toward them, and with pinpoint accuracy hit one of the thugs hands, forcing him to drop his sword. The masked man followed up by knocking him out, along with another thug. The bold leader of the thugs stepped back fearfully as he looked around and realized he had no chance of victory. His trembling hand clutched his sword, but he did not attack. He ran away.

The masked man watched him go and then walked to the shadows where another man was sitting down waiting for him. He was thin, had brown hair and dark eyes, and was wearing all black with a small crossbow strapped to his belt. The masked man faced the man in black and whispered, "Dexter, let's go home."

The masked man began to remove his mask. As he did, he shimmered for a moment as the magic that disguised him disappeared. His features became more distinct. He had tan skin, black hair, blue eyes, and pointed ears. Even his clothing seemed to change appearance so he didn't look so well armored.

The two men walked out into the night streets. As they walked home they looked around at the city. It was a peaceful night. The merchant's square was empty, except for a few stragglers. The buildings were all still and quiet, except for the tavern which never slept. The night was quiet, quiet enough to hear the moonbirds cry.

Dexter finally spoke, “What now, Adran? Are we just going to do this forever?”

Adran looked down, “I don't know. We are needed here. I've always figured I'd just do what I needed to.”

Dexter mumbled, “You don't intend on doing anything else. We could do so much more. You're static, living only in the past, ignoring the future.”

Adran turned to him, “What did you say?”

Dexter sighed and raised his eyebrows as he answered, “Nothing. Don't worry about it.”

They walked for a few more minutes in silence. Adran sighed, shook his head, and explained, “Look, I know you crave adventure and seek action, but I also know you are young and immature. You are not ready to quest, and I don't want you going back to your old life. Be patient.”

Dexter looked down and conceded, “I'll meet you back at the shop in the morning.” He took off down a dark alley and disappeared into the night.

Adran continued walking through the night streets. The darkness was comfortable to him. There weren't crowds that late. Everything seemed simple. As he was walking he found a young woman sitting by the side of the road. She was small, with brown hair and brown eyes, a very innocent look. A lady alone at that time of night? Something had to be wrong, so he walked over to her and asked, “Hello there. What is your name?”

The woman startled – as he'd made no sound as he walked – looked up at him, and replied, "My name is Emily. Who might you be?"

Adran sat down beside her. She scooted slightly away from him as he did.

"I will not harm you," he assured her. "I am Adran, the blacksmith. What are you doing out here in the middle of the night?"

Emily smirked, "I could ask you the same thing."

He chuckled. "I tend to be about during the night. It seems to be the only time quiet enough to relax."

Emily looked out into the night. "It is peaceful," she agreed. Yet, the fear in her eyes made Adran question if she believed it.

He leaned back and pointed out, "You still haven't answered my question."

She laughed awkwardly before she admitted, "I occasionally come out when I'm stressed. It helps me calm down."

Adran raised his eyebrows. "The fear calms you?"

She looked away and mumbled, "It beats the alternative."

He looked up at the starry sky. "Yes. Well, hopefully you are calm now."

She nodded back and admitted, "I'm calm, surprisingly calm, but I still don't know what to do."

He sat up straighter as he asked, "About what? What problem do you have?"

She looked down and sighed. “Money,” she admitted. “My family’s farm failed and we have no money for food.”

Adran shook his head and agreed, “That is a predicament.”

There was a long pause. Emily broke the silence and asked, “How often do you speak to people?”

Adran mumbled, “Not often; can you really tell that easily?”

Emily shrugged and responded, “I’m rather observant. I can also tell that you are an elf, but you mentioned you’re a blacksmith. That is a rather odd combination.”

Adran laughed stiffly. How could she tell he was an elf? His ears were hidden. Yet, he replied calmly, “That is correct. I am the only Elven blacksmith I know.”

She nodded and noted, “I also assume that you like to quest.”

He shook his head and corrected, “Nope, never been on a quest and don't plan on it.”

Emily was shocked and pointed out, “Most people who causally walk around in armor and with weapons are either guards, mercenaries or adventurers. Your armor doesn't match that of a soldier, and it looks designed to be passable for ordinary clothes.”

He shrugged and responded, “You are observant. I’ll admit, I do occasionally fight monsters.”

She chuckled and said, “That explains it.” Then she added, “partly,” under her breath.

He stood up and said, “It was nice meeting you.” He then tossed a few coins to her and wished her good luck before he walked away, headed towards his shop.

It didn’t take long to walk past the beautiful buildings that graced the main streets of the city to reach his shop. He didn’t live right in the middle of the city. He needed to have his shop accessible to people, but he wasn’t a crowd lover, so his shop was more on the outskirts of the main part of the kingdom. Still, it wasn’t far. He walked down the curved cobblestone road almost noiselessly. When he reached his shop he walked around and went in the back door. Dexter was inside, asleep. Adran lit the forge and began to work.

By the time morning came, he had completed an intricately crafted, high quality dagger. After he finished, he placed it carefully on display in his shop. Then he walked back to the back room and sat down.

A little later Dexter woke up. “Good morning,” he said with a yawn. He stood up and stretched. “What did you make last night?”

“I made a dagger,” Adran answered as he stood up. “I’m going to open the shop. Breakfast is in the kitchen.”

Adran walked to the shop in front of his house and flipped the sign. Ten minutes later Dexter showed up and they waited there for half an hour. Their first customer was a large, burly man in leather armor who entered the shop. He looked around for a few minutes and asked, “Do you have any weapons that can kill a bloodskull?” He looked at the dagger Adran had made the previous night and noted “This one looks silver.”

Adran walked over to him, motioned to the dagger, and confirmed, “This is SilverLight. It has been infused with silver.” He picked it up and warned, “It probably also is outside your price range.”

The man pulled out a bag of coins. “Money isn't a problem.”

Adran nodded, put the dagger back, walked over to some swords, and suggested, “If that is the case, I have a few swords that have been infused with silver.” He removed one from the wall. “This one happens to be as strong as steel and infused with silver.”

They talked about a price while Dexter sold some jewelry to another customer. Afterward, Dexter walked up to Adran and commented, “You don't plan on selling that dagger, do you?”

Adran laughed. “No, I don't. It's special.”

Dexter nodded. “I'll keep an eye on it.” He walked over to the door to look out.

Adran fidgeted with a horseshoe for a moment before he put it down and stood up. “I'm going to market,” he decided. “Can you hold down the shop?”

“I will,” Dexter assured him with a nod.

Adran left. He walked down to the market square. He talked to a few vendors and bought some food from them. Money wasn't an issue. He had a fair amount from the metalwork he sold, as he was the best blacksmith in many kingdoms; so he didn't have much trouble buying what he wanted.

He went home through the winding roads by way of Emily's house. She was outside, sitting on the porch, patching a dress. He stopped and waved to her. "Hello again," he greeted as he walked up. He handed her a bag of fresh bread and asked, "Are you still in need of anything?"

She smiled and thanked him.

Adran said no more. He nodded and walked away. When he arrived home he walked past Dexter, put a bag of fruit on the table, sat by the forge, and started making a beautiful bracelet and matching ring.

Dexter walked over to him and noted, "Well, today has been fairly boring."


Adran shrugged. "Tonight probably won't be."

Their conversation turned to the thugs they had stopped the night before and how scared they were as they turned tail and fled. Soon they were laughing together and enjoying a good discussion.

After a half an hour, Dexter got up. "I'm going to prepare dinner," he announced. "I don't know about you, but I'm starving."

Adran acknowledged him and continued forging. As Dexter started to leave the room Adran suddenly collapsed and grabbed his head. Dexter ran over to help him, but what could he do?

As quickly as the pain in his head had started, it was over, leaving Adran sitting on the floor, muttering to himself, "What happened? Was it him? Who awakened him?"



Dexter looked at him on the floor and panicked. “Are you all right? What is happening?”

Adran looked right at him and answered, “Destruction.”