

# **Valandrian Legends:**

## *The Fall of King Anduin*

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Deep in the heart of the plains, the human army rested, preparing their weapons, and caring for the wounded. They had settled at the end of the river, one they named after their king and leader, King Anduin Reignlyn. Nearly half a million men had begun the campaign; less than half of that remained in their current site. If it had not been for the mysterious heroine in silver, there would be far less standing to fight.

On the edge of the war camp, the king called his council to his tent. The tent was the largest on the plains: a white cloth decorated in golden embroidery strung up to stand fifteen feet high. Inside, the grass was still visible, with furniture, chests, and weapons littered about the edges. At the center, a large circular table made of pine from the mountains was adorned with a map of the plains. Statues were arranged about to show the vast armies, or at least what was left of them. There were far fewer statues on the table now than when the campaign had begun.

It pained Anduin to see the table and his men so cut through. He pushed aside his matted brown hair, sighing heavily as saddened brown eyes stared about the room. His council had not passed through the trials of war unscathed. There were fewer now than when they had left Eastwood. Though they had recently added Elysaer, the mysterious hero at the battle on the river, and Dordin, a mercenary turned loyal paladin, they were down four members. Six of the king's trusted advisors had fallen to disease or the battlefield. Only four of the original ten council members now stood: Jorgen, the blacksmith and master of arms; Flynt, a bard and brilliant strategist; Miranda, Anduin's wife and captain of the cavalry; and Aldian, Anduin's younger brother, captain of the guard, and Anduin's most accomplished general.

Anduin was the only one with a seat at the table. He had pulled his chest of armor up to rest upon, his bones and body weary from months of endless fighting. He wore his armor, once white and shining, now grey, stained from the dirt, sweat, and blood of the battlefield. His hair had grown long, his brown locks falling just below his shoulder. His beard was still trimmed close to his jaw, though more streaks of silver appeared every time he got glimpse of his reflection.

His council shared his burdens, the weariness clear in everyone's eyes. They tried to stand tall, but the scars and bruises along their bodies were impossible to hide. Only Elysaer seemed unphased, standing vigilant and glowing as she had since she first appeared.

"I think your plan is wise, my king," Flynt spoke in his light little voice. He wore no armor, instead donning simple traveler's clothes and a green hat to hide the burns atop his head. He had been captured and only recently rejoined the ranks, but the treatment he was given as a prisoner had left him scarred and hollow inside. "We have been here too long; in a land we can hardly call our own. Let us lay rest to this campaign and return home. We have an empire to build; we can build little while fighting a war."

"But how can one build an empire when the threat is ever looming?" Aldian retorted. He was larger than Anduin, though half as smart. While Anduin held himself with calm thoughtfulness, his younger brother was an inferno of brash rage. It led to many grand victories on the battlefield but was near impossible to manage during real diplomatic conversations. "The orcs are just as tired as we are, but they are outnumbered seven to one! Let us lead one final charge and end this, lest we have them knocking on our doorstep for centuries more!"

“Aldian, for once, think with your head,” Jorgen growled. Except for Elysaer, whose age was a mystery, Jorgen was the oldest member of the council. “You wish for a fight that will send more men and women under piles of dirt than is worth the effort!”

“Come now old man, you’ve seen how they fight more than any of us,” Aldian yelled back. “Surely you understand we are better armed and could easily break their ranks! Sacrifice is not new to war; it is better to sacrifice willing combatants than lose civilians at the hand of their uncultured brutality!”

The bickering continued, and Alduin sighed. The council meeting was a mere formality, for Alduin was not seeking guidance today. He looked over to Miranda, his heart heavy.

Miranda was looking at him with her ever knowing eyes. They were a gentle green that sparkled in the light, always thoughtful, always kind. She wore her blonde hair behind her, a ponytail falling to the small of her back. She dressed in simple leather armor with her trusted bow over her shoulder. She had been the one to free him from the slave farms along the mountains. She had been by his side when he was named a king, a title he had never asked for. Now, in what he prayed would be his final moments on the plain, she was there again, strong and smiling.

“I believe that’s enough of our discussion,” Miranda said. When she spoke, the room took notice and fell silent. It was a gift she had, captivating an audience and commanding respect. It was the real reason there was any kingdom at all. “Anduin has made his decision prior to the meeting. If you remember, we were called to bear witness, not to give council. I suggest we let our king speak.”

The council members were silent, their eyes turning to their king. He looked at his council and sighed before rising from the chest. He placed two hands down to steady himself as

he looked over the war map, scanning the picture of the plains. They seemed small now: tame and calm, like the winds and small rain that swept over the land. Looking at the map with its small statues made him feel small, just a toy piece in a massive region that was only a sliver of the wider continent. That feeling of insignificance made him realize no life was worth this place, not anymore.

“I have thought long and hard about our options,” Anduin began. “We have been fighting for nearly a year, all over this wild land that was never ours. Yes, we have liberated many during our journey. But we have lost many more. The orcs are desperate, and we outnumber them, this is true. However, now is not the time to continue this slaughter.

“My friends, I have released Todok,” Anduin looked to his council to see looks of surprise and dismay. “I sent him out an hour prior to head to the war camps of Helder bearing a message: a request for peace negotiations. I will go forth with six of my men, and he will come with six of his own. Together, we shall focus our efforts on a permanent truce between our armies. During this time, I will discuss equitable sharing of the land and its resources, as well as establishing our new city of Elysium as a haven for all life- whether orc, troll, human, dwarf, or any others- seeking knowledge. Elysaer has already agreed to oversee the development of the city; for that I am grateful.

“I understand the doubt and concerns that beset some of you, but I will not hear them. Not today. Know my decision on the matter is final. I head out at the sun’s peak, to meet Helder at the Seat of Ord’Lak. I will bring with me Aldian, Dordin, and four other king’s guard. The rest will wait here and prepare the camp for departure. One way or another, this conflict on the plains draws to its conclusion. It is time we return home and usher in a new era of peace.”

Around the room, there were mixed emotions. Elysaer, Flynt, and Dordin nodded in agreement. Jorgen who had championed for peace moments before, seemed unconvinced yet supportive. Miranda smiled with her infectious glow, an encouraging look to say the least. But Aldian gripped the table tightly, his knuckles turning white. His jaw was clenched, and he did not meet Anduin's eyes. Still, Anduin believed his brother would come around and see the wisdom in this decision, despite his clear dismay.

“My king,” Aldian finally nodded, then gave a small bow. “I must voice my disagreement to you, but I understand the predicament we have been placed in. I shall prepare my men to ride out on the hour. We will meet you at the edge of the camp. While I object, I defer to your judgement.”

“Thank you, brother,” Anduin nodded and returned a low bow of his own. “Your support and guidance are appreciated in these troubling times. As for the rest of you, you may take your leave as you see fit.”

The other members bowed and departed, leaving Anduin alone with Miranda and Elysaer. Elysaer walked towards the edge of the tent and whispered softly. As she did, she held up her hand and released a glow of blue that encompassed the tent. As the magic spread, all sound from the camp faded to nothingness, the tent completely sound-proof.

“Is something troubling you?” Miranda asked Elysaer.

“Yes. I am troubled by our king's brother, Aldian.” Elysaer walked slowly to stand before Anduin and Miranda, who had moved towards each other and now held hands. “I believe there is treachery in his heart.”

“My brother is objectional, but he is no traitor,” Anduin disagreed. “I have seen him on the battlefield and been saved more than once by his steel. He is dismayed and missed the thrill

of the battlefield, but he is no traitor. His loyalties will not falter now when he is so close to the end.”

“I wish I believed you, but I saw it deep within his heart,” Elysaer shook her head, a sadness crossing over her. “You must be careful, my king. Should you fail, there is little hope for the empire we have left.”

“Men always come and go, Elysaer,” Anduin shrugged. “Should I not return others, maybe even that of my own blood will rise and continue to expand the empire. That being said, I assure you I do not plan on failing this day.”

“Just promise to use caution. I pray for your safe return, though your fate may already be decided. I believe you are in the hands of the gods now.”

“Well let’s pray I’ve kept their favor.”

“Indeed.” With those words of caution, Elysaer turned and parted, closing the tent flap and releasing the magic that had been cast.

“She is right you know,” Miranda said as she kissed Anduin gently on the cheek. “Your brother has been loyal, but our past does not always determine our future.”

“I understand,” Anduin sighed. “But fear not: I am brining Dordin for that very reason. Should anyone try and cause trouble, I believe his skill with that spear of his will end more than a few arguments.”

“Just promise to be careful,” Miranda kissed him gently on the cheek. “I’d hate for our girl to grow up without knowing her father.”

Anduin placed his hand on Miranda’s stomach and pulled her in close, kissing her passionately, their lips locked together. Miranda grabbed his face and pulled him close. For a

moment, the world about them vanished. They were alone, dreams of family and futures floating about their heads.

“I promise to give our girl a father,” Anduin kissed Miranda again then released her. “But first, I have to head to the plains and finish what we’ve started. For her safety, I will guarantee she lives a better life than us, not doomed to watch her shoulders or be at war. Let her grow in a world of prosperity, not animosity.”

“I’d trade it all away so our daughter could meet you someday,” Miranda’s voice croaked, tears rolling down her face.

Anduin pulled her close and hugged her, arms wrapping her up, protecting her from the world outside. He kissed her gently on the forehead, then whispered softly to her.

“Have faith, love. Like I said, one way or another, this will all come to an end.”

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The sun was nearly at its peak, beating down on the riders as they parted the camp. A few soldiers had made their way over to watch the little procession. These men and women stank of sweat and blood, bandages and torn cloth covering wounds of the lucky ones.

The procession of seven was on horseback with Anduin taking the lead. Behind him rode Aldian, four guards he had chosen to accompany the journey, and Dordin at the rear. All seven men were dressed in recently cleansed armor and green tabards adorned with silver lace the shape of an eagle: Anduin’s sigil. Anduin turned and waved to his people, then gave a knowing smile to Miranda who waved him goodbye from the very edge of the little crowd.

The seven riders parted the sea of tents and entered the Storm Plains, surrounded now by an ocean of green. The grass rolled on for miles, moving like waves in the afternoon breeze. The land stretched on for miles, meeting the desert to the south and mountains to the north and west.

These landmarks were hundreds of miles away, well beyond the vision of any mortal eyes. From where the rider's moved to the edge of the horizon, was nothing by the green grass growing tall and untamed.

The riders wasted little time and entered a gallop, flying southeast with the sun high overhead. Anduin wished he could ride like this forever and just run away atop his horse. Leave all the kingdoms and political woes behind and simply disappear with Miranda and their unborn child to a new world. The more people had believed in him, the greater the burden of king had become, but out here, it all went away. The whistling wind passing by was the only whisper he need concern himself with. The steady thunder of the horse's hooves the only percussion he required. He felt the sun's heat and reveled in its light, free atop his horse and only true friend.

But as with all good things, the ride was all too brief.

The seven riders came to the proclaimed meeting point, a spot specifically chosen for such peace talks. Anduin had learned much about orc culture and history in his talks with Tordok. Through those lessons, he realized the two sides were not so different and could indeed coexist in a world created for all life to thrive.

Anduin had selected the Seat of Ord'Lak because of its place in orcish history. It was an anomaly, a bowl-shaped valley lined with seven jagged rocks of black and purple that rose towards the sky. No grass ever grew in the ring, no sunlight or wind ever reached the smooth stone floor. For this reason, the orcs had deemed it a holy site. It was meant as a place of peace, a place where the outside world had no bearing. History had seen many orc chiefs and tribes joined as one within the sanctity of the ring; Anduin hoped to join such history with Helder.

"Remember men," Anduin pulled his horse up and turned to his six riders as they came to the edge of the seat. "This place is more than just a meeting spot. This is a holy place among the



orcs. Treat it with the same respect you would in our own church and speak to the orcs as you would a paladin.”

“Surely it’s not too late to reconsider, my king?” Aldian responded, riding up close to Anduin so no others could hear.

“My decision is final brother,” Alduin shook his head. Then he turned to address all who had followed him. “Today is not about us, but about all those who follow us into this world. Today, we have the opportunity to break history and create a brighter future for our children and all generations who follow. Be brave. Be vigilant. Be kind. When our time here as ended, we shall return to songs and glory that will pass into the stories of legend.”

His men did not yell out but saluted before dismounting. Anduin did the same and walked forward, Dordin on his left, Aldian on his right. The other four guards were close behind, a single row in their gleaming green and silver armor. Together, the small procession entered the Seat of Ord’Lak.

The shadows immediately engulfed them, blocking out the sun. Daylight barely breached the crater, illuminating the cavernous opening. The shallow decline from the edges led to a perfectly level center: smooth and white like marble, but harder than diamonds. Above, the sky was the same rich blue, though the long stones about the perimeter seemed to devour the clouds as they rolled passed, like the teeth of massive beast lying dormant for centuries.

Anduin noted the orcs had already arrived. They stood together awaiting the humans, seven fierce warriors armed in traditional battlegear. Six of the orcs were dressed in leather garments with black plate covering their shoulders, chest, and legs. They wore black helmets that reflected no light, twisted into a single horn that protruded from their foreheads. These orcs were

the malak-kai, equivalent to a king's guard, sworn to protect their lord in a blood pack upon the chieftain's birth.

Their chieftain stood a full head above them, wearing no leather armor under his plate. His helm was by his feet, his head clear for the humans to see. His tusks were painted red, warpaint spread across the entire right side of the orc's face. His eyes were black and fierce, watching in contemplative silence. His face was stern and expressionless, his head bald of any hairs. In his right hand was his war axe, a fierce two-sided blade that Anduin has witnessed first-hand butchering all who opposed the orc. He was a formidable opponent, one who could rival the power of any warrior in all Valandria.

Anduin was not here to speak with the warrior, but to speak with the chieftain and father.

"Hail Heldor," Anduin spoke calmly and gave the orcish salute: a right fist moving from the forehead to the heart, then down to his right. He stood on the edge of the circle, remembering that all who arrive after the first party must wait and be granted entry. Anduin had deliberately delayed his departure to arrive second and demonstrate his understanding of this custom. "I am here to speak of peace, Heldor. I ask permission to enter the center of Ord'Lak and discuss such terms of cooperation and coexistence."

"You listen well human," Heldor grunted from his half of the inner circle. "I would not expect such courtesy from my enemies."

"I have fought long and wish to end such violence," Anduin continued. "I believe Todok has brought my message?"

"He has indeed, and I must say it was... intriguing," Heldor called back. "Come good king; join me and my brethren in the circle and speak freely. No harm shall befall you while you remain in the Seat of Ord'Lak."

Anduin bowed, as he had been instructed, and entered the circle. The men took his lead, bowing before following Anduin into the stone center.

There, Helder signaled to his men. Three of them reached behind their backs, causing Anduin's men to brashly raise their weapons in defense. The other three orcs raised their own weapons and stepped forward around Helder, tension rising in the air.

"Lower your damned weapons you idiots!" Anduin yelled abruptly turning towards his men. "This is a custom you dolts!"

Helder stifled a laugh behind his smirk. Indeed, his men meant no harm, drawing out three large tankards, a customary peace offering during such negotiations. In it was an orcish brew, a scent of wheat, honey, and frosted pear filling the air as the orcs removed the corks and handed them to the humans.

"These are tankards of frostlings," Helder explained as the humans each drank the sweet ale. "This is a special recipe among my people used only for occasions of peace or celebration. Should we manage to find an understanding this day, then it is fitting we brough such beverage."

"I agree," Anduin nodded and thanked the orcs as he drank the customary beverage. "I believe the fighting has dragged on long enough to see neither side wins in such conflict."

"It is unfortunate, but I must agree. My men love the fight, but none love the bitter ends we have met. The plains are rich enough we may share the land. May the grand river you so boldly named mark the end of your land, and the beginning of orcish lands."

"You suggest we split the plains in two?" Anduin acted pleasantly surprised, though he himself had hoped for such an agreement himself. The plains were expansive and lush, covered in empty fields and rich soil. Two worlds could easily thrive with such abundance. "And what of

the city my people have begun, Elysium? Surely you understand that such territory is beyond the river and may be protruding into your own territories?”

“Yes, I have thought long over such dilemma,” Helder said. “While it is now merely tents that would be easily removed, I recognize many of those people were once slaves or refugees, with little where else to go. Thus, my conditions of peace require you surrender the walls as a neutral site in which both orcs and humans may reside. Let us help construct the walls, then let us call it a haven for all residents of the plains.”

“This would be quite a culture shock for our people,” Anduin stated. Though he feigned hesitation, he thoroughly liked the idea. “Are we sure we can make peace and assume all bad blood and violence will simply be forgotten so easily? I believe we should prepare for potential backlash and rebellion from our people.”

“Come now human, we both know there will be bad blood for months, maybe years after this little talk,” Helder laughed. “But should we make such negotiations, we begin small. You remove your most troubled citizens and ease the military presence. I will send my craftsmen and chefs to join the ranks among the tents. Start small, united under crafts and art, and let that blossom into a great city of peace and power.”

Anduin nodded, pretending to contemplate the idea. It was perfect, and the outcome of the “negotiations” was already much better than he had anticipated. He had expected harsh words and passionate resistance. Instead, he found a grand leader watching over his people, choosing them over pride. Anduin saw in Helder the same sag of the soldiers, the sunken eyes and bags marring sleepless nights. Yes, they were two of the same: simple kings worn down and ready for an end, eager to begin resting and healing.

“I agree to such terms,” Anduin reached out his right hand, which Heldor shook vigorously. “I believe I requested you bring a scribe so we may write up official rules to bring back to our people?”

“Indeed,” Heldor smiled, then waved over one of his men. The orcs lowered their weapons as one stepped forward with a crude writing charcoal and parchment, two copies, in which he began to transcribe all the happenings.

Unfortunately, things were going too well for Anduin. All the while, the soldiers about had been sweating, their grips tighter on the blades. Aldian had slowly been working about behind Anduin, until his men were in perfect alignment. As soon as the orcs lowered their weapons, Aldian signaled. The guards attacked.

Four men lunged forward, spears drawn, and attacked Heldor while the Malak-kai had their weapons lowered. Three spears hit home, skewering the orc chief before he had time to react. Then they moved on to attacking the orc guards, though they were too slow now. Three orcs fell immediately, but the other three proved greater foes and lashed out with pure rage at such treachery, slaying two of Aldian’s men.

“What the hell are you all doing!?” Anduin roared with rage, drew his sword, and cut two of the guards down himself. The bodies fell, leaving Anduin and three orcs standing opposite Aldian who stood alone, his own weapons readied. “Why Aldian?”

“Your peace was cowardice!” Aldian screamed. “We were on the verge of victory! We could have wiped out every orc from the gods be damned world. We were on the verge of greatness! We were so close, and you threw it away to grovel about forgiveness with these dogs! I swear, I’m going to make sure we don’t make the same mistakes! Not again, not ev-”

Aldian's speech was cut off as Dordin slammed his own spear through Aldian's chest. It went through and struck the stone, shattering its tip against the floor. Aldian stared in confusion and amazement at Dordin, then collapsed, dead before his body hit the ground.

All around, blood pooled from the fallen soldiers. Three Malak-kai, Heldor, and five men, including Anduin's own brother, now lay dead or dying. The pools grew thick and spread, rising about the stone, creating a gelatinous mass that began to submerge the remaining survivors.

"What is happening?" Anduin asked, turning to the three orcs he stood with. The three orcs were silent, their weapons dropped and lost in the mass that was surrounding them, tears welling in their eyes. "Please, answer me!"

"It is the curse of this land," one of the orcs whispered. "The Ord'Lak seat was a seal, placed in a time before time to stem the purge that once plagued Valandria. But with blood spilled, the seal is broken. We have released the end of the plains forever. You stupid humans..."

Above, the sky vanished as a cloud of purple and grey began to swirl together, the seven stone pillars glowing with sparks of lightning that lunged up towards its center.

"There has to be a way to prevent this!" Anduin roared, pleading with the orcs. "Come tell me what can be done!"

"Nothing..." One orc cried, falling to his knees as the gelatinous blood pooled higher.

"No, there is one way, though you may not like it." One orc laughed. "Sacrifice your soul, human. Sacrifice your soul to reconcile the loss of our orc chief. Maybe the darkness will take pity and subside, or at least give you a fighting chance."

"Dordin," Anduin turned, tears welling in his own eyes as he realized what he must do.

"Dordin, run to the horses. Take mine and fly! Rush to Elysium and speak of what has happened!"

Then take my wife and run far from this land, to a place of haven! I fear I will not be there to see the birth of our child, but I can try to ensure there is still a world for that child to enter. Please, hurry!”

Dordin was too loyal to argue. He ripped his legs from the pool and ran for the edge of Ord’Lak. It was a laborious journey, but he made it to the edge of the circle and rushed out. He found Anduin’s horse and mounted in one quick leap, then thundered back to the northwest, heading for the camp.

Back in the crater, Anduin waited to see Dordin pass out of view before attempting to commune with whatever was surrounding him. He could feel some presence growing, enraged and hungry, weighing down upon them. The air itself felt thicker, a hot cloud of nothing engulfing them, making them sweat. The three orcs had already fallen in despair, lying flat and allowing the blood overtake them. Anduin felt his own despair rising but refused to give in to such brash emotion.

“Alright, I’m here!” Anduin roared. “I am the king of Eastwood, command of all humans, and lord of the west! I am here to speak with you, begging forgiveness for the treachery that has befallen this sacred site! I don’t know what hell you’ve come from, but I will send you back!”

*Bold words for one so young*, a voice echoed about the crater. It was not so much heard as felt in Anduin’s bones, echoing deep in his mind. *You wish to submerge me in darkness?*

“I do not wish for anything, not anymore,” Anduin shouted back defiantly. The pressure had increased as the voice spoke, erupting in a headache that filled his brain and caused his nose to bleed. Still, he stood tall, despite the rising blood, feeling the weight of all men in the plains, of his wife and unborn child, all counting on him. “I know you were sealed in darkness, and I will seal you there once again!”

*The gods could barely hold me at bay you worthless mortal. What power do you have that could possibly stem the tide of my rage? What could you do before the infinite powers of seven hells? Nay, the gods could do little before me, and you shall do less. Enjoy damnation!*

“I will not fall!” Anduin cried out. The pressure had spread from his head to the rest of his body, pain like every bone in his body shattering, every ligament torn to shreds, filling his physical being. Yet he stood tall, praying to the gods for strength.

*You come to this world alone, and so shall you part this world! Behold, your reward, oh self-proclaimed king!*

The voice peaked its crescendo with a massive explosion, an eruption of purple lightning cracking through the sky and falling upon Anduin. In a single moment, his body and mind shattered. He felt himself falling away as the darkness spread around him, swallowing him into nothingness.

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Anduin stopped falling, rooted in place. He opened his eyes and saw the lightning frozen, a still image of purple heat sizzling inches from his face. Around him, the pressure had alleviated, the pool of blood frozen.

“I am sorry Anduin. I was too late in arriving,” a soft voice spoke beside him. The voice was calm and welcoming, the sweetest sound Anduin had ever heard. He did not wonder to whom the voice belonged, for he somehow knew as the first words were spoken. It was a voice he had heard before, decades ago, standing in those fields, shocked into action.

His god, the creator of Humans, Vorrian, was standing beside him. A real god had come to Anduin, answering his prayers.



“Why now?” Anduin managed to ask as the shock began to wear off. “I’m dying, aren’t I?”

“You are dying. But you accepted that fate when you agreed to wear a crown. Heavy is the head that wears the crown, especially when the crown is worn by someone who understands the burden he carries,” Vorrian seemed to be smiling through the glowing form of a human man. He wore a simple white robe over his perfect body, black like desert pearls. His hair glowed a bright gold and fell long and smooth, unwavering. “When you demonstrated that strength, I could not let you go in vain. There is a welcoming awaiting you with us. I have come to take you home.”

“Thank you, my lord,” Anduin smiled, then peered up at the lightning that came towards him. “But what of this storm?”

“The seal was mended by my presence, though not completely repaired.” The voice was solemn, a sadness behind his words. “We will not be able to stop the storm from terrorizing the plain, but we may build against it. Elysaer has been told what to do long ago. I’m sure she remembers well Aelandria’s words.”

“So that’s it then,” Anduin sighed, tears welling in his eyes. “Not how I intended all of this to go you know. This was to be the end of the war, a triumphant moment. Instead, I’ve released chaos.”

“Nay, you have released nothing,” Vorrian placed a hand on Anduin’s shoulder, the divine glow spreading about the man’s mortal form. “Your brother was corrupted long ago, called here by this very force. He was destined to strike down Helder and release old wounds. But no force expected a human to stand in defiance with such strength and resolve. For that, I thank you, as you have fulfilled your duty as king.

“Now be at peace, my child. Be at peace and rest. We shall be home soon.”

Anduin felt his body fading. The pain subsided; the pool of blood and the rocky formation seemed to vanish. Standing in the center, the golden light encapsulated him, sparkling in the wind as he felt like floating in air.

*Be safe, Miranda. Look after our daughter. I will await you on the other side.*

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In the war camps, far to the north, Elysaer watched in solemn resignation. The strike had been delivered. Though she had prayed it was not to befall Anduin, the prophecy laid out by the goddess, Aelandria, had come to pass. She shed a single tear as she watched the great storm brew in the horizon and grow stronger.

“He won’t be returning,” Miranda whispered beside Elysaer. “I knew you spoke truth earlier, yet still I prayed you were wrong.”

“He was destined to meet this end, though his journey has proven even the gods can be wrong,” Elysaer whispered, placing a comforting hand around Miranda. “But now we have not the time to mourn. You must be away. Dordin is riding swiftly, but I fear he will not outrun the storm. However, I have a friend who shall take you away.”

“I appreciate your words, Elysaer,” Miranda smiled and removed Elysaer’s hand from her shoulder. “But I cannot go. My daughter will be the heir of an empire.”

“An empire that will shatter, my queen,” Elysear spoke with a gentle smile. “No, your daughter will be a queen, but one with a higher calling. To the south west, on the edge of the sea, there lays a tomb of a fallen hero, Leroy. When you reach the tomb, you will find your destiny and the purpose your daughter will be born for. A dragon is coming now to take you away on wings swifter than my own.”

“But surely-“

“Blessings follow you and forgive my brashness.” With those words, Elysaer placed her hand on Miranda’s forehead and sent in her into slumber, one that sent the unborn child to sleep as well.

As she did, a woman that mirrored Elysaer in appearance, only with bronze hair, appeared from the shadow of the tents.

“I will take it from here, SilverLady,” the woman lifted Miranda gently from the ground and held her upon her back.

“Take care little one,” Elysaer smiled. “It may be many centuries before we meet again. Be good and watch over her people.”

The women of bronze bowed, then transformed before Elysaer’s very eyes. The hair wrapped around the woman like a cocoon, then glowed a soft bronze that would have blinded all eyes save Elysaer’s. When the light faded, the woman was gone, replaced with a bronze dragon standing over all the camp. Without a sound, the dragon’s wings began to beat, and it took off, heading towards the sea and fading in the distance well before any man or woman in the camps realized what happened.

Elysaer watched the dragon as it flew away, then turned to face the storm, her duty as bestowed upon her by Aelandria herself only just begun.