

Lord of His Pack - James Waugh

BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT

# Genn Greymane: Lord of His Pack

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James Waugh

"Never take a man's hand, Son..." King Archibald Greymane said, his strong frame now a muddied silhouette against the fading glow of twilight. "'Tis always better to stand tall on your own. It is what separates the great from the meek."

His son, Genn, all of seven years old, pulled his outstretched hand back. He was sitting cross-legged on the cool stones of the recently built fortifications. The ramparts were impressive testaments to the power of the nation, but to Genn, perhaps not nearly as impressive as the man standing in front of him.

"Do you think all of this was built by asking the other kingdoms to lift us up?"

The industrial towers of Gilneas City loomed below. It was a magnificent sight, for sure: large tiled roofs poised over cobblestone streets; shops, factories, and billowing smoke; it was truly a city with an eye toward the future, toward the potential of its people.

"When I was a young prince, as you are today, my father would not have dreamed of this! But I did dream, and I struck out on my own, and look at us now.... All of it done without taking the hands of those in Stormwind or begging for aid from those in Lordaeron. And we certainly did not grovel to the long-eared arrogance of those demi-humans in Quel'Thalas."

Genn had heard the stories of Gilneas in the time before Archibald had taken the crown. It certainly was a nation of nowhere near the power it would rise to.

"Now get up, boy. Get up, and don't ask me to help you again. Because all of this will be yours, and when it is, you must be ready."

"'Tis yours, Father. Gilneas will always be yours."

Archibald smiled, his tone softening. "No, Son. Princes grow into kings, and days fade into nights. This is the way of things.... Come now, I daresay I can feel a chill in the air. We should feast. I do believe it is roast boar tonight."

Genn quickly pulled himself to his feet. Succulent swiftthistle boar, made by who Genn believed was the finest chef in all of Azeroth, was his favorite thing beneath the two moons.

"Do you think there'll be sauced apples with dinner, Father?"

"If you want sauced apples, boy, you can have them. Such is also the way of kings and their progeny."

With that, the two made their way down the ramparts. The last hues of daylight screamed across the bruised sky.

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The night elven transport ship rocked in the increasingly rough seas. With each nauseating sway the ancient wooden boards that first formed the ship's imposing hull millennia ago let out warping creaks.

In a musty cabin within, King Genn Greymane opened his eyes. The memory of his youth was still festering, still haunting him for reasons he did not quite understand. It wasn't the only one: streams of memory flowed into his mind these days, drowning his waking thoughts as if trying to convey some message he could not grasp. Memory was mysterious that way, its own kind of magic, perhaps stranger and more powerful than the mighty arcane powers the hooded magi of Dalaran were so adept at wielding.

He started to sit up, but pain forced him to ease back down onto the bedding. His body ached from the recent battle. The battle for his kingdom, the battle he had lost.

He breathed into the discomfort and closed his eyes. Images came rushing back. *A goblet clanking across a stone floor; Gilnean banners hanging proudly from a wall; his now-dead son, Liam, bleeding from his mouth and cradled in Genn's arms.*

"Let me assist you, Lord Greymane. You have been through much these troubled days."

Genn's eyes sprung open. Before him was a night elf's purple hand reaching out. Talar Oaktalon's words were spoken softly, but Genn knew better than to mistake their gentility for weakness.

He was tall and adorned with ornate leather armor and robes made of silken cloth of a color Genn hadn't ever seen before: a blue or maybe a green, he couldn't tell which. Beautiful plumage hung in tassels from the large staff in his other hand.

Genn stared at the hand offered to him for the briefest of moments.

"This old king needs not your help or anyone else's to leave a bed, Talar Oaktalon. Of that I am still capable." He brought himself to his feet, embracing the wave of agony that splashed his back.

Talar noticed Genn's wincing and tried not to show his frustration before he spoke again. "I come with more poor news, honorable king. You are needed on the deck.... Our danger persists!"

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The torchlight flickered, bending shadows across the granite walls of Lordaeron's royal guest quarters. Genn and several of the most influential Gilnean nobles had made the trip to answer King Terenas's emergency summoning of the lords of Azeroth. Now it had only been hours since they'd learned about the orcish Horde's conquering of Stormwind, about the dire times that might lie ahead. After a polite dinner with the various kings, Genn had retired to his quarters to consult with his fellow countrymen. It hadn't taken long for the arguments to begin.

"These cursed green mongrels could very well be at our doorstep if we do not act, Lord Greymane. We should join this Alliance. We must do what we can before these monsters tear through the other kingdoms' lands and into our own." Lord Crowley was a smart man, younger than Genn, and a bit less polished in the finer points of politics, but many believed he was a noble with a bright future. He made his plea to the lords seated at the table with a fervor not often seen except from Greymane himself.

"Indeed, Crowley. I do understand your fears here. I do. But these... orcs,... as they're called, have come nowhere near our lands. Not a drop of Gilnean blood has been shed. My heart bleeds for Stormwind, for young Prince Varian and this hero, Lothar. It truly does. But should I commit my people to a similar fate? Is even one Gilnean life worth sacrificing for a cause that does not affect him?" Genn was passionate. This orc menace was something new and strange, but he wasn't altogether certain that this was a threat that his industrious people would have a problem putting in check on their own. The orcs were just brutes, after all. Demi-beings. Monsters.

"Lord, as you've described, the other nations seem eager to assist. If Trollbane, Perenolde, and the rest partake, I do not know how we can rightfully call ourselves neighbors or friends if we do not join with them," Crowley continued. Genn understood why he was so beloved. His words were spoken with acute vigor. There were no political angles at play—just a man concerned for his fellow men. Genn respected him no matter how misguided he was. Crowley couldn't possibly understand the folly of his sympathy, what it could actually lead to. He did not see that his own people, above all else, needed to be accounted for first. He was young and newer among the nobility.

"My father never thought that the future of our people was bound to which way Lordaeron, Stromgarde, and Alterac leaned. Some are strong, Lord Crowley, and some are weak. It is the way of things. We Gilneans are strong, and Gilneans must watch over our own pack first and foremost." Genn had them now. He could see the nodding heads. He could see the nobles imagining the first reports back from the front lines, the cries of mothers who had lost sons. He could see them actually weighing the cost in life that Terenas and Lothar's request would bear.

But then, a measured voice arose from the back.

"On the other hand, my lord. Perhaps to stay in the good graces of our sister kingdoms, ensuring that future trade and tariffs remain stable, we should send a small force. One to show them what even the slightest addition of the Gilnean military can do. We have our standing militia prepared to assault peripheral enemies. Let us use it."

His name was Godfrey. Genn trusted his counsel but was always suspicious about his ambitions. Godfrey's notion was not motivated by empathy as Crowley's was. It was a smart political play that ensured notoriety for Godfrey, the commander of that standing militia. But he had a point: trade and tariffs did provide the kingdom with much revenue, and endangering those boons wouldn't be prudent.

"It is a path that does have merit, my lord," Baron Ashbury added. Ashbury was one of Genn's most trusted friends. Genn had grown up with him; his father, Lord Ashbury the 1<sup>st</sup>, had helped Archibald build the nation up, and Archibald had always told Genn to trust in the Ashburys' fidelity to the crown.

"I will consider this course, Godfrey."

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Genn and Talar hurried up the winding staircase to the deck. A sense of urgency was in the air. Even so, Genn was amazed with how ornate these elven vessels were. So much artisanry crafted into every functional detail. The sheer size of the ship and its multiple levels was beyond even the ingenuity of his own people.

"It seems Gilneans are quite stubborn, Lord Greymane." Talar's frustrations had increased over the last day or so.

"It is a quality we have always admired about ourselves, good druid."

"Yes. I see that."

"You have been indeed courteous, Talar, but I would rather you speak as you truly feel. There has been a sense of great suspicion from you since we first met. Please do me the honor of being out with it."

"I apologize if I seem so. I... Azeroth is in dire peril, Your Majesty. It is a time that I fear we may not see through unless we stay truly bound.... You are a ruler who chose to segregate your entire kingdom from the rest of your continent. You are a king who refused requests for

aid over the years. You see, I am a druid. I believe in the interconnectivity of all things. It is the way nature is shaped. An ecosystem. These choices are... foreign to me."

"I owe much to you and your people, Talar. Perhaps our differences are great. But do not let them divide us."

Talar bowed his head gently. "They certainly shall not. Archdruid Stormrage believes that you and your people will be an important asset to the Alliance. I would not question his wisdom."

"An asset to the Alliance?" Genn was taken aback. "We owe your people a great debt, this is true... but I cannot offer you or your leader any assurances as to whether or not we can rightfully participate in the business of your noble Alliance as an asset of any import."

"This is unfortunate to hear. But these are political matters. Our business is to survive this day."

The daylight outside was scarce. Shards of dulled illumination peeked through the clouds only to be devoured by the dark horizon. The fresh salt air filled Genn's nose, and loud gulls squawked dreadfully in the distance.

Dozens of violet humanoids busied themselves about, doing all they could to prepare their ship for what certainly appeared to be a massive storm. But among the purple he could see his own people. Pink skin and then, of course, the worgen: lupine beast-men and women unwilling to adhere to the requests of their saviors.

"As you can see, King, they intend to partake in preparations and ignore the orders given. They have refused my call for all non-deckhands to go below."

Near the bow, Genn could see two Sentinels, beautiful warrior women, trying to pull a worgen away from working on the sail lines. It was not going well. The wolf-man was pushing a third night elf sailor back, infuriated at being yanked away.

"You must understand that the mission we were sent on was not originally to bring the remaining populace of a nation back to Darnassus. It was to assist with the worgen. We are already stretched thin. Look out there. This is no mere squall. We may be facing our greatest obstacle yet," Talar continued.

"Fair enough, Talar."

There were several more night elven ships in the ocean surrounding the vessel. Genn knew that on one of them, the *Elune's Radiance*, were his wife, Mia, and his daughter, Tess: his

family. It was strange for him, now, to think about family and not include his son. It hurt more than any physical pain he'd endured his entire life. It hurt more than losing a kingdom.

"The scouts return!" a lookout in the crow's nest shouted, pointing toward the bleak sky.

Three black smudges veered away from the storm-ridden gloom ahead. They came into focus slowly, no longer smudges, but giant storm crows flying at breakneck speeds toward Talar, their loud squawking a cacophony of urgency and, it seemed to Genn, fear.

Then the massive crows morphed. Genn was still getting used to seeing this transformation. He had heard that druidism was practiced among some of Gilneas's agrarian folk, but he hadn't been exposed to it until recently. The bird shapes twisted and jerked, wrenching their anatomies into their more natural forms—those of kaldorei druids, two males and one female.

Panic was written across each of their faces.

"We must order the ships to take immediate action!" the female druid said.

"The storm... it... it is like none I have ever seen. Waves three times the size of giants come with it.... The sea boils with the frames of broken ships," one of the males said. He was trying with all of his will to maintain composure, but his terror was apparent.

"It is as I had feared," Talar said. "Go now, hurry, warn the captains. A ship on its own will not survive. Tell them that we must form a flotilla immediately!"

Without hesitation the druids contorted into their storm crow forms before scattering out toward the other vessels. Genn could see the ocean roiling and black rain clouds smothering the sky not far ahead. He was not from seafaring stock, but the situation, even to his limited nautical knowledge, looked severe.

"This cursed black dragon still haunts us," Talar said. It was the most emotional Genn had seen him in the days since they had barely escaped from Gilneas. "This Cataclysm... the world still shakes; these storms have ripped apart the seas...."

"Deathwing the Destroyer is a monster, no doubt... but to imagine that beast caused this great Cataclysm... that the aftershocks are still lingering because of him... I just—"

"Believe it, Genn Greymane. As I have said, we find ourselves in the most bleak of times. If we survive this, the worries of Gilneas are only the start. Now, get your people below decks. My crew must work with precision, no distractions. Send orders for your people to comply

on all vessels." Talar had already begun waving his arm to the sailors perched on the bridge above.

"We can assist, Talar. My people are capable.... They will want to take part in the saving of their own hides."

"There is no time to argue! I would prefer for their hides, as you say, not to end up on the Great Sea's floor as food for naga! In this affair, on our vessels, Gilneas must cooperate."

Sheets of rain skated in. Tethers of liquid now bore down hard on the struggling crew. The sea began to rise. Genn realized that this was no moment or place for his people to dispute. This was a situation where they would have to give their destinies over to the kaldorei.

The winds howled, as seemingly out of nowhere a massive wave crashed into the hull, tipping the strong vessel and sending the humans, night elves, and worgen teetering across the deck. Genn slipped, then gripped one of the mast lines hard, doing everything in his power to stay on his toes. This storm, this tsunami, had hit faster than even the scouts had predicted.

It was hard to see much in front of him now; he saw just the slush of rain. He could hear the shouts of his people. He could hear them arguing with the night elves.

Thrusting his body forward, Genn began to bark his own orders to his people.

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"You want to do what, again?" Godfrey glared at him through ice-cube thick spectacles. The implications of what he had just heard were indeed heavy. It was fitting for them to be in the war room.

"You heard me, Godfrey."

"You want to wall off our entire nation? Close our borders and end trade with the rest of the Alliance? I... it is a rather large decision, would you not say?"

"I listened to you and Crowley before, and look where it has gotten us! Dead Gilneans, torn apart by those green scoundrels, and now the Alliance, oh, this 'Alliance' you were so certain would be a boon to our people... they want more and more every day. They take and take, but what do we receive in return? Where is the great reciprocity you both were so certain of? Now they want us to send them gold for that keep... Nethergarde.... What does that outpost have to do with Gilneas...with my people?" Genn wasn't in the mood to be challenged.



Godfrey looked at the scuffed map of the nation lying out across the ancient oak table. He lifted his goblet of wine and knew better than to press the matter further. Genn was a decisive king, like his father.

Godfrey took a large gulp of his wine. It was Kul Tiras red. He realized, swishing the spirits over his tongue, that these may be the last sips of wine from that island nation he'd ever have. Finally he spoke.

"I am not suggesting it is a bad course. I do believe, however, that—"

"We took the hand of the Alliance. We gave it our support, and look what it gave us. As a nation we are poorer, while it reaps the benefits of our contributions.... There were orcs... bloody, savage beasts. You saw them, what they are capable of.... Now Terenas wants more of our gold. Perhaps more of our blood. Nay, I say!" Genn's words were spoken with the clarity of a man who had been given a vision.

"The wall will have to cut through a noble's land. You must see that. None of our natural borders will do. They are all rather pliable."

"Of course I do, man! Whoever it is will be compensated, and so will the farmers and citizens of his domain."

Godfrey took another sip of his wine, mind racing, calculating his options, and studying the map. He leaned back in his chair.

"On this map it seems you are suggesting the possibility of Lord Marley's realm.... But look at the terrain, my liege.... We have this mountainous region right here. What a grand hold that would make, with mountains on either side that would create a secure natural barrier."

"What you say is true."

"Of course, to attain it, we'd have to cut off some of Lord Crowley's lands. Cut off Pyrewood and Ambermill."

"I had thought of this before as well. It is a fair direction. But... Crowley is powerful. He has much influence, as much as even you, Godfrey. He may not take this lightly."

"No... that is true. However, he'd have to see reason in this choice. It is what is best for Gilneas. Anyone can see that it would make an impenetrable barrier," Godfrey pressed, gulping his wine while he waited for Genn's reaction.

"Indeed it would, Godfrey. And, of course, it would make your realm the most strategically valuable, as it would become our buffer to the outside. You would have the realm nearest to the wall."

"My lord, it has everything to do with the location, with Gilneas. I would hope you are not inferring—"

"Stop it, Godfrey. You are right in this matter. I see that... whatever your motives may be, old friend."

"Sire, I—"

"Building the wall through those mountains, with the Northgate lands as our buffer, does insure our safety. I concede to your logic. Lord Crowley... Darius will have to understand."

Godfrey finished his goblet and quickly poured himself another. He'd need his share of wines and ales in the years to come, and he knew it. But today, as they said in the tropical climes near Booty Bay, he had turned "lemons into lemonade." He fought the urge to smile.

"We must call a council of the nobles immediately, then." Godfrey stood up. "This is the right path, my lord, though mayhap a precarious one."

"That, I know..." Genn seemed entranced by the flickering candlelight. He stared longingly as if dreaming of a future that was somehow in those flames. "But imagine... just imagine how bright our future will be without any interference. Just imagine."

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The ships fought against the crashing waves, heaving toward one another in an orchestrated formation. Night elf sailors huddled toward the starboard and port sides of the ships, tossing rope to crewmembers on the adjacent vessels.

The thinking was clear: if the ships could form a massive flotilla, bound closely together, they all had a better shot of fending off the brutal storm than each ship would have on its own.

"The rear group has taken severe damage to their masts, sir!" one of the deckhands yelled. Talar rushed toward the back of the bridge to look.

"Ho, Talar.... Where is the *Elune's Radiance*? Is she not with the rear group?" Genn asked, charging up the rain-soaked steps to the ship's bridge.

Talar hesitated. "You are correct. She is still unaccounted for." Talar pointed his long lavender finger toward his right. Genn squinted. Through the gray downpour he could see the vague outlines of two vessels. One of them was crippled, being pulled along by the other.

"Night elf, your spyglass. Now!" Without waiting, Genn yanked it from the sailor.

Peering through the glass, Genn could see the shapes leaping toward him. His fears were confirmed. The *Elune's Radiance* was guiding a damaged ship with a broken mast and jagged sails unfurled across its bow.

"All hands, make haste and brace yourselves!" the lookout in the crow's nest screamed.

But it was too late. The world was yanked out from under Genn, and he and those around him were left drifting in the space between. The spyglass flew from his hand, clanking its way down the deck, which was now tipping upward.

Then there was just the cool salty wash of ocean... and the thumping, dull pain of head to wood and body sliding backward before the drop.

The pain brought back the images. *A goblet clanking down the stone floor. Liam's face.*

BOOM! The ship left the air and hit the sea with such force that Genn's ears rang.

He heard a crack, and by the time he looked up he could see that the mizzenmast had snapped in half from the impact and collided into the deck. He heard the nervous yells of scurrying sailors doing what they could to make sure the increasing flood of water was shunted off of the ship.

"That wave must have been eighty feet high. We cannot take much more of this punishment, sir!" the deckhand yelled, scooping up his battered frame. Genn also yanked himself to his feet, trying to regain balance. His ears were still being drilled with hollow ringing. The wave was now heading right toward the vessels on the horizon... toward the *Elune's Radiance* and her wrecked charge.

"Mia! Tess!"

Before anything could be done, the surge crashed into the lumbering vessels. To Genn it felt as if time had wound to a standstill.

The two transport ships collided into each other, wooden boards flying like splinters from a sawed tree. It was as if the sea had opened up its great gullet and was trying to swallow all

debris around it, inhaling the crumbling vessel and sending the *Elune's Radiance* damaged and adrift.

"By the Light!" Genn exhaled, his words little more than a whisper like a soft, helpless prayer.

The other ship was gone before Genn could even blink, leaving the *Elune's Radiance* alone with the ocean starting to tug her slowly down.

"Get the skiffs.... Deploy the lifeboats. We must attempt a rescue!!!" Talar was yelling now in a concentrated frenzy of action.

"But the storm swells keep coming, Talar! Wave after wave!" a sailor shouted. The words burrowed into Genn's ringing ears.

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"They keep coming, my lord, wave after wave! They just keep... coming! I... there is but little we can do." The captain of the guard couldn't hide his terror, mouth agape, eyes focused below. Genn, a teenage Liam, the captain, and the infamous royal archmage known as Arugal were standing on the ramparts high above the Greymane Wall.

Below them was a sea of shambling undead bodies, countless charging arachnid creatures, and massive monstrosities whose bodies seemed to be stitched together from the skins of rotted corpses. The root of this evil necromancy was unclear, but its origins were not—Lordaeron. Lordaeron, who weeks before had begged Gilneas for help and had been refused.

"By the Light, look at them. There are just... just so many." Genn was startled by what he could see. Moonlight shimmered off the skeletal figures' tattered armor. Their moans echoed up, persistent and unrelenting. The undead moved as one with a clear goal: the breaching of the wall.

Gilnean soldiers outside the wall below held the line, futilely launching fire-tipped arrows into the throng, their trails streaking across the darkness until they found their marks. But as soon as one among the undead was set aflame, another stood in its place.

"There is no end in sight, sire. We have been at this for days now. I... I do not believe we can hold out much longer. Even our great wall will give against countless numbers." The captain was rattled. He'd seen much horror over the last few days, things no man should ever see—things no man could ever forget.

"Calm yourself! You are a Gilnean. Where is your sense of pride? Of course the wall will hold, and of course we will outlast even this." Genn was stern. He had to show leadership, no matter what. He had to be the lord of his pack, Gilneas's beating heart.

He looked out, listening to the cries below, seeing his men losing ground, scrambling back to his wall. He wondered what his father would have done at a time like this. There had to be a solution.

"Father, you should have... you should have listened to me."

Genn turned to the voice. He couldn't believe what he was hearing. His own son, Liam, his own boy, questioning him again and here, in front of the others while Genn was doing all he could to instill faith.

"Now is not the time, boy! Not now." Genn's eyes burned with fury.

Genn looked to the archmage who stood silently with him. Arugal, always a bit of a mystery, that one. Even here he showed no discernable emotion, no fear, instead just the calm, calculated gaze of one who was analyzing the living corpses below, intrigued. But such was the way of those who dedicated their lives to the arcane. Genn had never met one whom he would have called empathetic.

"Master mage..."

"Yes, my liege?" Arugal's words were cold and breathy, and his eyes were devouring the sight below.

"Do what we discussed. Just do it already!"

Arugal bowed his head slightly, a strange smirk on his face as if he were a child given a new toy. "It will be done, my lord."

And he was off, leaving Genn, Liam, and the captain to the horrific sounds below—the clanging of steel on armor, the cascading groans of the undead, and the shrieks of dying Gilnean soldiers. For the briefest of moments, Genn considered what he had just done. He had seen the wolf-men, the worgen, that Arugal had summoned. They were dangerous beasts, and more of them could be a liability. But these were desperate times; perhaps it took monsters to defeat monsters.

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The flotilla was taking the brunt of the storm, gargantuan waves pounding down on the ships, but the combined might of the hardy lumber and steel rivets of an entire fleet was holding firm. Any damage taken by one ship was addressed instantly by the members of the others.

The flotilla wasn't helping the *Elune's Radiance*, however. It wasn't helping Mia and Tess. The ship, or what was left of her, was slipping farther underwater.

Four lifeboats splashed into the ocean, white and frothy from churning waves and pelting rain, its color a stark contrast to the onyx-clouded sky. Several Sentinels made their way down rope ladders into the skiffs, the night elves' sharp glaives strapped to their backs. Genn followed Talar toward the starboard side of the ship.

"Talar... I must go with you," he pleaded.

"King Greymane, my duty is to get you and your people to Darnassus safely." He was shouting over the crackling thunder and whipping winds. "I cannot in good conscience risk your life as well. This is a dangerous task, which is why, as the leader of this expedition, I must be the one to embark on it. I refuse to risk any but a handful of my own people.... I promise you I will do all within my power to bring your wife and child back."

"They are all I have, Talar. I must—"

"You must stay!" Talar made his way down the rope ladder and dropped into the boat. Quickly the lifeboats pushed off, heading toward the *Elune's Radiance* and the tiny purple and pink specks that floated in the sea, their arms waving.

Genn watched the skiffs bouncing in the choppy waves. No. He could not stay. He could not. This was his family. He owed them much. Even now, with their world shattered to pieces, even accounting for every foolish choice he had made, Mia and Tess still believed in him and supported him. He took a deep breath and let out a roar. He could feel the change, his body expanding, his hair rapidly growing, his face extending into a grizzled muzzle.

With a loud howl, arching his back and reaching his arms out to the sky, he completed his transformation. He was a worgen, one of the wolf-men whom he had asked Arugal to summon all those years ago—one of the wolf-men who, with the Forsaken, had inevitably destroyed his nation. But in this form, he was faster and stronger. The curse that he had become afflicted with had its advantages.

He ran toward the starboard side of the ship, full speed. The wet deck didn't affect his balance: he was singularly focused. The animal instinct inside him coursed through his veins.

His mind was hell-bent on the act alone, nothing else, just the doing. And then, as he reached the railing, he jumped!

Talar turned sharply as he heard the howl. Above him, dropping down into his lifeboat, a hulk against the rain, was Greymane.

Greymane had landed perfectly on his feet, standing eye to eye with the druid. The Sentinels to his right and left instinctively pulled out their glaives to strike.

"In matters of my own family, I must act." Genn's voice was feral now, frightening.

Talar waved the Sentinels back. "Such a stubborn man." But after a moment, Talar nodded.

The lifeboats bore toward the sinking ship. The *Elune's Radiance* groaned, its wood slivering, its hull shattering, its bow now pointing into the sky.

"Ho there! Help!"

"By the Light, please, please save me!"

"Brother druid, help!"

Arms flailing, legs frantically paddling, Gilnean and kaldorei figures were trying with all of their might to keep their heads above the churning water.

The Sentinels on the boats grabbed clinging arms and yanked survivors out of the water. Talar and Genn's lifeboat charged toward the broken transport ship. There were survivors high above on the upturned bow. Their screams faded into the whirling sounds all around them—rain, whipping winds, the teetering vessel. There weren't many of them, or as many as there should have been... and Genn recognized that fact right away. The others must have been taken by the Great Sea or the beasts that lingered in her eternal belly.

"Mia! Tess!" Genn called out. His eyesight was better in his worgen form, and through the rain he could not see his family on the bow. "They must be inside still! They must."

"Advance onto the ship. Get the lines up there. Now!"

The Sentinels aboard the skiff flung their glaives high, now with sturdy rope attached. The ancient weapons embedded themselves into the bow, and the ropes uncoiled, dangling down into the strong hands of the female warriors.

"They are not up there. If they live, they must be inside." Without waiting for a response, Genn leaped from the lifeboat and clung to the rivets jutting out of the ship's hull. He climbed up to one of the portholes whose glass had been broken.

"Greymane! Stop. Survivors are always ordered to the bow or stern! If they live, they will be—" But it was too late. Genn had already ripped out the wooden frame around the porthole and disappeared inside the sinking ship.

"Fool... he'll drown. If he wishes to be on his own, then so be it," Talar whispered. With that, he shifted forms into that of a massive storm crow and soared high into the gray sky toward the bow and the survivors atop it.

Inside the ship a fire roared. Clouds of deep-gray smoke billowed. Genn could barely see. The heat was sweltering, and breathing was a labored affair. Everything was at an angle, tipped on its ear. The halls were crooked and riddled with fractured boards and charred furnishings. Above Genn, outside of the cabin, he could hear the desperate shouts of survivors.

"Mia?"

With a committed breath, he let the rage that was natural to this feral form consume him, and he was off, rushing out of the cabin into the sideways hall, through the flames and crumbling ship frame.

"Tess?!"

Gravity weighed down on him; each movement upward was a struggle. Bodies littered the tipped halls. Several were once proud kaldorei Sentinel warriors, some impaled by wooden stakes, others ashen and looking as if they had been caught unawares, with gazes of dignified shock: this wasn't how they had ever expected to die. He was walking on the overturned walls now. The floor was to his left.

The smoke wafted toward him, the smell of burning flesh hugging his nostrils. It was a scent that was familiar.

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Gilneas City burned. Smoke slithered through the side streets, and cannon fire echoed into the sky. Genn stood on the ramparts, looking out below. They were the same ramparts where he'd watched tangerine sunsets with his father as a boy, where he'd admired the great city and nation he was to rule over.



But now that city was in peril. Crowley had marched his men, these Northgate rebels, as they were called, through the gates. They were terrorists, as Genn saw it, and their treason had to be dealt with.

Crowley had not accepted the wall with grace. He had defied Greymane and had even aided the Alliance during what was now known as the Third War by sending the "Gilneas Brigade" to Lady Jaina Proudmoore.

Genn had tried to reason with the prideful noble. He had tried to make it clear that this wall was the way forward. He had tried to explain why assisting the Alliance was so wrong, even if his own son disagreed with him. But Crowley didn't see the truth of it. Crowley insisted that he was doing what was best for the future of Gilneas and that he would end Genn's "tyranny."

Civil war was gripping the nation. The capital was ablaze, attacked by Gilneas's own people. Archibald Greymane's great dream was fading.

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Genn turned sharply and began climbing up a hallway that should have been horizontal. He hurried toward shouts for help.

Above him, he could see purple arms reaching through tumbled-over wreckage that was blocking a doorframe. Hands were exploring the debris that trapped them within, desperately looking for a way out. They must have belonged to sailors barricaded in a cabin in the bow.

Genn wasted no time. With his right arm swinging him forward, he reached out and grabbed the net-covered wooden frame with his left hand, ripping the rubble downward. Through the bent wood of the heavy debris he could now see a male night elf face peering down at him, elated.

"By Elune's light, where did you come from?" a voice exclaimed.

"We have come to rescue you." He pulled hard on the wreckage, but it wasn't budging. He couldn't do this alone.

"Push with all your strength. If we can combine forces, I can get you out!"

"As you say, worgen."

Genn focused, trying to keep the memories out of his jumbled mind. *A tumbling goblet. Wine spilling on a stone floor, like blood.* Not again. They could not distract him now. They couldn't weaken him here. Finally, he yanked hard on the bulk as the night elves pushed.

Crack! The debris crashed down. Genn tossed his body to the doorframe. A night elf sailor began to fall, but then he was able to find a grip. They were free!

"Thank you. We had begun to accept our deaths."

"Never be so accepting of things uncertain, night elf. Follow me."

Quickly several of the sailors scurried downward with him. Thick plumes of smoke churned from below.

"Where are my wife and daughter?"

"Your who?" a bloody-faced sailor asked.

"You... are King Greymane?" another night elf added.

Greymane nodded.

"Their quarters are below, but we have not seen them. Sentinels were charged with bringing them to the bow, but—"

"But what?"

"No one has seen them or heard from them.... They were in the starboard cabins."

Genn's mind raced to the tattered Sentinel bodies he'd seen when he first entered the ship. The image was quickly replaced by another flash of seething memory: *a group of Sentinels lying in a pool of gore at Keel Harbor in Gilneas.* The Sentinels had been slain by Forsaken Deathguard. Those undead monsters that served the Banshee Queen had been in league with a renegade worgen cult focused on the absorption of Genn's lands.

Genn and the sailors hurried through disintegrating hallways. They could feel the ship slipping more and more. It was happening rapidly now in long, gut-tugging jerks. Climbing downward, they passed the bodies of the dead Sentinels.

"Below and to the left. Rescue boats will be waiting out the window. Go now!" Genn pointed down the smoke-stuffed hall to the cabin he had entered from.

"Your wife's cabin is lower, near the stern decks. Good luck, and thank you," the sailor said.

With that, Genn released his grip and let himself drop down, through the hall, through the smoke. It was a bizarre feeling to drop through the ship. He could see water rising below, up the hallway.

"Help us!" It was a woman's voice. It was Mia's voice. Genn knew it instantly. He reached out his hand, clasping a doorframe, stopping his fall.

"I am coming, my love!"

Genn scrambled down a soaked corridor. White wash splashed in through portholes. He could barely see through the thick layer of smoke and ash that choked his view.

"Husband!" Mia shouted. She was ahead of him. He just had to keep pressing on.

"Hold on! I will not lose you!" The memories were invading faster now, once again, shattered images of *Liam's wounded body in his arms, a goblet cascading down the floor in the war room, spilled wine*. He fought them back—*no, not now!*

As the memories dissipated, he smashed down a door and pushed his way into a cabin.

"Father!" Tess, his beautiful daughter, grabbed him tightly. Behind her lay Mia. Her leg was bent at a sideways angle, swollen and purple: clearly broken. "Mother... her... her leg is shattered! I couldn't leave her.... When the ship was hit, the dresser smashed into her and—"

"Go, both of you. Go, my loves... go while there is still time. Please just leave me here!" Mia was struggling to remain coherent despite the pain.

"I will not leave you, Mother!"

"We will not leave you. Not ever!" Genn rushed to Mia's side and scooped her tenderly into his arms. She cried out from the pain, and the sound tore at Genn's heart. Her leg dangled limply.

"Shhh... there now, my love. I will get you out of here. You must hold on." Through her pain, she gave him the wide-eyed smile that always brightened up her entire face and crinkled her button nose. It was the smile that had made him fall in love with her all those years ago when they had first met at the Royal Aderic Banquet. She was going into shock from the pain, but her smile was still radiant. "Grab onto my back, Daughter. We must make haste!"

Tess wrapped her arms around his burly frame, and with a focus he had not felt in days, Genn charged into the smog, holding onto Mia with every fiber of his being. The decks were virtually flooded, and the hallway leading toward the bow was submerged. With one arm he pulled himself forward, lumbering upward, with Tess helping to hold onto her mother. Slowly but surely Genn willed himself and his family onward.

"Hurry, Father: the water is rising!"

Genn didn't look down. He could hear the urgency of her tone and knew the water would be upon them soon. Seeing it would not help.

Turning down a corridor, they passed the Sentinel corpses and bolted toward the cabin he had entered from. But before Genn could take another step, his stomach dropped. His wife and child's screams ripped into his ears but were muffled by the loud crackling whine of the *Elune's Radiance* plunging deeper. Time was not on his side, and with one last burst of energy he raced as fast as he could toward the exit.

Outside of the porthole he could see the lifeboats huddled close together, receiving the final few survivors. The currents knocked the skiffs into one another, and Talar maintained a delicate balancing act as he received the saved. Genn could see the sailors he had previously rescued now on the skiffs, alive.

"Talar! The queen is injured. You must help her and the princess!" Genn yelled, his voice bullying its way through the winds.

"Drop them down. I will retrieve them! We can heal her!" Talar shouted back, impressed with what he was seeing.

Genn looked to his left and right. These two women were what he had to live for now. No nation, no son. They were his everything. "My love, it's going to hurt terribly when you fall. If I could stop this pain, I would. You must be strong."

"I can endure any pain if you are near me, husband. I love you... always. Now let me go."

Genn smiled, then he let her drop through the porthole, and she splashed into the ocean. "Tess, you must go. Help your mother!"

Tess gave him a crooked smile, tears starting to well up, and then she pulled herself through the porthole and leaped into the sea.

Both women quickly breached the surface, gasping for air, arms flapping. Talar's skiff moved alongside them while Sentinels reached down to pull them up.

Relieved and proud of what he had just done, Genn began to pull himself through the porthole, but before he could find his way through...

Whoooooosh!

Talar felt a vacuum pulling from below. The skiffs buckled and bashed into one another. As if yanked by some great force beneath, the *Elune's Radiance* jetted downward.

Genn's eyes went wide as he was knocked back instantly, tumbling down the cabin into the flooded hallway, a suction pulling him down, down into the guts of the drowned ship.

"Genn!" Mia shouted. The ship was gone. All that was left were frothy concentric circles rippling outward like a giant target.

Water filled Genn's lungs, causing him to cough out all of his remaining air. He pumped his arms, trying to swim up, fighting the strong pull from below.

He was panicking, his heart racing, throbbing in his throat. He realized he did not have long to live.

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Genn was panicking. He could hear Godfrey, Ashbury, and a few other nobles calling for him in the woods. He knew it wouldn't be long before he was found. On the ground before him was one of the beasts, one of the worgen that haunted the Blackwald, terrible reminders of Arugal's failure years before, terrible reminders of Genn's orders to use those beasts to combat the Scourge, worse reminders of how the monsters had turned on Genn's own people. It had been shot dead; blunderbuss bursts were now holes in its chest. Heat rose off the body, and pools of blood began to coagulate.

It was a noble secret that the citizenry could never be told about. Every full moons, Genn, Godfrey, Ashbury, Marley, and others would go out into the Blackwald, armed to the teeth and searching for creatures that most of his people thought were nothing more than a myth, exaggerated war stories told by soldiers returning from the Greymane Wall. The nobles would hunt them for sport and for vengeance—exterminating the pests.

He reached up to the warm dampness on his shoulder, where his skin throbbed and stung. His hands were smeared with sticky and thick crimson blood. He had been bitten. The beast had ambushed him, clamping down on his shoulder before Genn could unload his shot. Fear rushed through him. He felt sick. Was he going to become one of the very monsters he despised? He knew if Godfrey, Ashbury, and Marley saw the bite, they would do what he'd

expect them to. What he'd do if he were in their shoes. They'd shoot him dead. The curse would not spread any further. He scrambled, wiping the blood from his shoulder, pulling up his collar.

"Sire, how do you fare?" It was Marley shouting through the foliage.

Hands fumbling, Genn ripped off a piece of his satchel and stuffed it underneath the shoulder lining of his jacket. He yanked the coat's collar up more and held back a groan.

"Lord Greymane. Where are you?" Godfrey called through the forest.

Genn pulled the collar up as high as he could. His wound burned, and he gasped from the pain.

"Yes... I'm... I'm over here. I got the beast!" Genn shouted in return, hoping he could deceive them. He backed away from the body slowly, exhaling in short, nervous breaths, and stumbled to the ground to wipe his bloody hands on the wet grass.

The worgen's tongue was hanging out to the side like a sagging pink ribbon, and the beast's glazed-over eyes bore into him judgmentally.

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"Father!" Tess shrieked, watching the ship vanish beneath the sea.

"Get back to the flotilla. Do it now. I will go after him. Go!" Talar barked his orders as he stood on the bow of the lifeboat.

"Please... please bring my husband back," Mia begged.

"I will do what I can, Queen Greymane." With that, Talar dove into the water. Beneath the surface he transformed himself into a smooth-skinned sea lion, a form that he had perfected over the millennia. It was a form that served his life as a sailor. He could see the *Elune's Radiance* sliding away into the depths, enveloped by the darkness below.

Genn swam hard, kicking out. The pressure in his lungs was unbearable. He could feel his mind slipping away, begging for sweet release, begging not to feel the burning in his chest or the pressure in his ears any longer. His mind was racing, breaking down, strobe memory images dancing on the cusp of unconsciousness. The pain they induced was perhaps the only thing that kept him moving forward.

He saw the day the worgen had attacked Gilneas City. He saw the silhouette of the mysterious night elf priestess who had first appeared to him, warning of the danger he faced. He could see his son proudly urging his people on to fight the Forsaken. He could see his people rallying behind the young prince, their faces full of inspiration. He remembered thinking very clearly how proud he was of the young man he had raised.

But he was weakening fast. His grip was slipping from the doorframe he had latched onto. He could feel the currents yanking him down.

*Stand on your own two feet, boy. You can do whatever you want if you have the guts and the drive to stand on your own feet.* It was his father's voice tumbling around the back of his mind.

*I know, Father. I know.* As if Genn had been given one of the red potions that the apothecaries made, his father's voice gave him a resurgence of life. He pushed himself forward, eyes fluttering, mind nearly blank.

*You can push yourself in ways you do not even know!*

He was almost at the porthole. Outside he could see the shape of a creature coming toward the opening. It was a sea lion contorting its body with the currents.

Genn fought the pull behind him that was trying to drag him into the depths. He fought the blackness in his mind that was trying to draw him under with equal force as the water, closing his eyes. When he opened his eyes again, he could see an extended violet hand reaching through the window. It was Talar, his other hand holding the window frame tight as the currents tried to yank him inside.

Genn looked right into the glowing eyes of the night elf, then down at the outstretched hand. Talar had come for him. He had risked his life to rescue a man he barely knew and barely liked.

With one final act of exertion, summoning every ounce of strength he could, Genn launched himself forward, his own hand reaching until it clasped Talar's tight grip.

And then everything went black.

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The missive was unrolled on the table. Liam slammed his hand down onto it, trying hard to make his point. He was only a teenager, but he wasn't going to be too afraid to voice his opinion anymore. He was scared and angry, and he flat-out disagreed with his father.

"You may take your leave now, Liam. I have heard your thoughts on this matter and do not appreciate this display." Genn took another sip of his wine.

"What if this plague comes here? What then?" Liam pressed.

"That is why the wall divides our great nation from the others," Genn snapped back. He was starting to feel a tad drunk, and this conversation was giving him a headache.

"And what if these creatures get through your wall? What then, Father? Moreover, what if we could have done something to stop it beforehand?"

In one rushed motion Genn stood up and threw his goblet, still full of wine, hard across the stone floor. "How dare you question your father, boy? Take your leave!"

The goblet tumbled and clanked, spilling wine across the floor like blood from a freshly opened wound. Liam stared at it, startled, before he spoke again.

"No, sir. I will not, until you have heard me out. Truly heard. Truly listened for once. They are pleading here, Father. Lordaeron only asks for our aid in a most desperate time. They are dying by the moment. These are not requests for tariffs or—..."

"They are requests of weakness! Do you want to go out there? Do you want to face these monstrosities? Is that it? No. I will not risk the life of my son or any son of Gilneas. My father would not have, and neither will his son!"

"Always with Grandfather. Always. It's as if you yourself are not king, just some steward keeping the chair warm until he returns."

"How dare you, boy?!"

"There are other ways to consider.... This son would make different choices than his father."

"When I was your age, all I wanted was to be like my father. That is a prince's duty."

"And I thought it was a prince's duty to one day be a great king." Liam turned away. He knew this argument was lost; his father would do as he always did.



"Get out of my sight! Go, go far away!... The wall will protect us, boy," Genn called out, stumbling into his chair. "It will hold, and Gilneas will always be great... always!"

His words echoed off the empty chamber's walls.

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Genn's eyes fluttered. When they opened, he was blinded by sharp rays of sunlight. He quickly shaded his view. He was alive. He didn't hear or feel rainfall. Above him was a canopy of puffy white clouds set against an azure sky.

"You are awake," a familiar voice said cheerfully.

"Talar," Genn whispered with a smile. "You saved my life."

"You were dreaming, good king, talking aloud."

"I was dreaming about my boy.... My son would have made a fine king, a better one than this stubborn old man."

"Genn... Lord Greymane, do not do this to yourself. You are—"

"Oh, no, Talar, this is far from sadness.... Indeed, there will be times when this loss will hit me like a stone thrown to the chest, but I can take comfort now...."

"I do not understand."

"Liam understood that there are always other ways to consider, that different times call for different actions. I am a proud father to know that my son was a wiser man than me."

"Perhaps we all can consider other ways.... Your people are stubborn, and so are you, but without that trait many of the sailors would not be alive today. I am honored to ferry you to Teldrassil."

"Ah, yes, Teldrassil. I hear it is a sight to behold."

"Come, your wife and daughter await. The queen's leg has been healed." Talar reached his hand out to lift Genn from the deck.

Genn stared at the hand for a moment.

"This old king needs not your help or anyone else's to stand up, Talar Oaktalon. Tell me you did not forget this," and he pulled himself up, wearing a sly grin.

Talar broke into hearty laughter. "As you would have it, my friend." Talar was still chuckling. It was the first time Genn had heard the night elf laugh or seen him smile.

Standing, Genn watched the sunlight flicker on the calm ocean. His whole body hurt, but his mind was clearer than it had been in weeks. He waited a moment, certain that his thoughts would soon become filled with memories he'd rather forget. But none haunted him now. The ships were separating from the flotilla. With the trouble averted, each unraveled its own bright sail and glided out farther over the sun-speckled sea.

"You said to me that this Archdruid Stormrage believes my people will be an important asset to the Alliance."

"That I did."

"Perhaps he is right, then.... Perhaps he is right."

**END**