



IN MEMORY OF
FRIEDA YONCE "GRANDMAMA" MANCIL
AND
FRANK G. SANDERS SR.

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TO MY PEERS AND EQUALS

Brothers and sister of the land of Barsaive, Mountainshadow, the Far Scholar, Master of the Dragon Mountains, Of the Egg Clutch of All-Wings, Holder of one of her All-Seeing Eyes, Keeper of the Jewel of Memory, and Master Speaker, bids you greetings in the Name of the Hundred Virtues and of the Fifteen Venerations.

My peers, I bid you turn your attention to the documents I have provided. They represent matters of great importance to us and to the future of Barsaive. They relate directly to decisions made at our last two Councils and speak volumes in regard to how intently we must scrutinize our own security in these years to come. The first is a compilation from the Great Library of Throal written by our brother Talespeaker. This treatise on the nature of our race provides much information to the scholars of Throal and anyone else who chooses to peruse it, including information that has long been kept secret.

Talespeaker gave this document to the Library shortly before he died, hoping that it would serve to allay the fears and suspicions of the Young Races of Barsaive. While Talespeaker did not disclose our greatest secrets, he treads far too closely to some for comfort. In other times, some among us would have called for sanction against one who would give so much of our knowledge away. Now, who among us would deny him his legacy? Read his work carefully and keep in mind that this is what the Young Races now know about us. Consider also what they may infer from this knowledge. Perhaps it will do as Talespeaker hoped and enlighten the Young Races about us and our ways, giving some would-be slayers pause before they set out on a fool's errand.

Of greater importance is the second document, which presents grave concerns about our plans in Barsaive. Our actions against the Impertinent Ones have proved to be a success, although not without consequence. We are once again unchallenged as the major power of Barsaive, but we cannot grow comfortable in our status.

Vivane has now become Twiceborn's domain. Horror Clouds roam the fields of Barsaive, sowing fear and destruction wherever they pass. This fear is causing some of the Horror Clouds to grow in size and things have come out from within them that even I find disturbing. Perhaps most troubling of all are the Iopans and their master. He will not be content with their conquest of Jerris and their power grows with each passing day. Further, let us not forget the forces at Bukara and beyond bear watching. The fledgling nation of Caradur still fights its internal struggle for control, one that must be finished before the country as a whole can become a mature player in the game of nations. I also am concerned over the developments in Scythia. While the Name-givers are no doubt doing much good in clearing the land of the taint, their explorations may result in the reawakening of things that we long ago agreed to let lie. The elves of the Blood Wood are no doubt irritated at the small deception used to gain their assistance in the War and I surmise that we shall soon be receiving their riposte, as well.

Of all the issues facing us at this turn of history, one stands paramount. We must protect Aardelea and prevent her from falling into the clutches of others. As useful as you all know she could be to us, she could be equally harmful if taken by the Impertinent Ones. Others may wish to take her without even knowing her true nature. In this matter, we must exercise the most extreme caution. I fear most of all what would occur if the Outcast were to gain the knowledge locked inside her. The power of that knowledge might overwhelm even us.

There is a third in this collection, taken from the hands of the Denairastas Clan of Iopos. The ruling family of Iopos has long wished to rule all of Barsaive. Many Name-giver nations have entertained such dreams, which take entire generations of the Young Races to accomplish. Not so with the long-lived Denairastas, who have the advantage of time in which to plot their conquests. We took steps to correct the balance in permitting Doll-Maker to pass on his gifts to the kings of Throal, giving them the benefit of the long view as well so they could plan the destiny of the dwarf kingdom, much as the Denairastas plan theirs. For a time, it appeared sufficient, but it is no longer.

With the assassination of King Varulus and the successful beginnings of their war of conquest, the Denairastas are now ready to put their long-planned machinations into play. While the fates of nations do not concern us—they rise and fall in the time it takes to hatch out an egg—the violation of our ancient traditions and the breaking of our law most certainly does. Examine the third document and consider, as I have, how the knowledge within may affect the plans of the Denairastas Clan. For while we dealt with the Theran Empire and our wayward children, history began to repeat itself in the form of the Denairastas and their Outcast progenitor. We must not allow that to happen, or a new Empire may rise to replace Thera, or, worse yet, rise to challenge both the Impertinent Ones and us.

We are dragons, the first and most ancient Name-givers, the only ones to Name ourselves. Ours is a heritage of magic, power, and prestige, but it is also a heavy burden of responsibility and guilt—yes, guilt for what we in our 'wisdom' allowed to happen. In our pride and arrogance, we forever changed the fate of the world. That is a fact. We cannot change what is done, we can only change what happens next. We must intervene again to prevent our mistakes from further altering the course of Nature and hope that our interference can undo some of the damage before it is too late.

Consider the documents before you, my peers and equals. They represent the sum total of what the Young Races now know about us. We are the oldest and most powerful creatures of this world and we believe that knowledge and memory are the greatest treasures there are. Consider your actions carefully, because what we do now may decide our fate and that of the Young Races in a future even we find challenging to predict.



CHAPTER ONE CONCERNING THE NATURE OF DRAGONS



The following work is transcribed from the words of Vasdenjas, the Master of Secrets, a most noble and intelligent great dragon with whom it was my privilege to work as a scribe and scholar for these past seven years. It contains the dragon's thoughts and reflections on the nature, culture, and history of his race, the dragons. I have endeavored to leave the great dragon's words untouched, merely organizing his thoughts and dissertations in a logical order for ease of use and reference. Otherwise, I have included all of the information as he relayed it to me.

—by the Hand of Tiabdjin the Knower, Scribe of the Great Library of Throal and First Scholar of the *khavro'am*

THE MASTER OF SECRETS SPEAKS

To the Young Races of Barsaive, Vasdenjas the Master of Secrets extends his most cordial greetings. I have long enjoyed the works of the scholars of the Great Library of Throal and wish to repay the amusement I have gained from reading your various works by contributing some of my own vast knowledge to your collection. I began this task with the masterwork entitled *Creatures of Barsaive*, a tome which corrected a great number of misconceptions and false assumptions on the part of less-informed scholars and scribes about the fauna of this land. (I must say I am quite pleased with the presentation and binding arranged by the Library for that volume, although I believe there are a few improvements that should be incorporated into this new text. I have asked Tiabdjin to draw up the various particulars and enclose them along with this manuscript.)

This latest volume springs from my reading the collection entitled *Denizens of Barsaive*. While I found the descriptions and stories of the various Young Races quite amusing, I was shocked to discover no volume concerning my own ancient and noble kind! After a brief bout of anger (and I apologize once again for the singeing of your beard, noble scribe), I realized that no scholar from the Young Races could possibly have written with authority anything of substance with regard to my kind and the scholars of the Great Library wisely declined even to try, knowing they could not possibly do us justice.

Therefore, I have decided to take it upon myself to once again impart my wisdom to the Young Races, this time concerning my own kind, the dragons of Barsaive. I hope this document will help to clear up many misconceptions and rumors about our noble and ancient race. As a sign of our goodwill towards the Young Races, I have asked for this volume, upon completion, to be placed in the Great Library of Throal alongside the other volumes of *Denizens of Barsaive* so that all of the citizens of Throal can be enlightened about the true nature of dragons. I am sure the scholars of the Great Library will treat it with the reverence and serious attention it deserves.

OF FORM MOST NOBLE

The dragon is the most noble and perfect creature to grace the world since the very beginning of time. We possess many abilities which make us the strongest, wisest, and most graceful beings in existence; one of these is the form and function of our bodies. (Yes, Tiabdjin, if you are patient, I will get to all of the questions I see written on your face.) Dragons are found in different forms and types throughout the world (I will speak more of this later) but we share many traits that define us as dragons. The first is the strength and power of our physical form. Adult dragons grow larger than most

airships, far larger than any of the little folk of the Young Races. A great dragon such as myself dwarfs even the greatest airship of the Throalic fleet (if you will excuse the pun, my dwarf friend).

You small folk are born into the world naked, soft, and helpless. Even the scales of a t'skrang are too soft to turn aside the claws of a wild cat. The obsidimen do have some natural armor of course, but their elemental nature is quite a different matter, coming as they do from a single Liferock they... ah, but I digress.

At birth, we dragons possess sharp teeth and talons, with hides able to turn aside the little injuries that threaten such as you. Why, I've seen newborn hatchlings kill and devour several bears with no more difficulty than a dwarf dispatching a few rabbits. We also recover quickly from any injury we do sustain, using the power of our magic to knit damaged flesh and bone anew. These natural defenses are sorely needed because, as you will see, the life of a dragon can be a harsh one compared to those of the Young Races. We are challenged by Nature in many ways, ensuring that only the strongest and most able of us survive.

The other distinguishing trait of dragonkind is our keen intellect and magical nature. You Young Races call yourselves Name-givers, and rightly so, as you share with us the unique ability to give Names to what you see. We dragons are Name-makers, because we are the only race to choose our own Names, rather than having them bestowed upon us by others.

But what of trolls, Master? They choose their Names upon reaching adulthood.

Oh? Oh, that. You speak of reNaming, my dear Tiabdjin, something any Name-giver can accomplish, given sufficient knowledge. Even then, the reNaming that occurs among trolls is not true reNaming. Nonetheless, I am speaking of knowing your own Name before it is spoken by any other. Did you know your Name before you parents told you what it was? Does a newborn troll know the nature of his Name? I would say not. Now then, our magical nature is born into us as surely as our knowledge of Naming.

Dragons are in touch with the primal forces of what you call astral space, the wellspring of all magic in this world. We can see the astral patterns of things around us, the astral imprints of living things, and the ebb and flow of astral energies around us. Magic is to us like air is to you: It is our natural environment, our very essence. While your people have learned to understand and control a tiny amount of magic, they have only brushed the surface of an ocean deeper and more mysterious than the Selestrean Sea itself. Like our own Names, we know the depths of these mysteries, know the powers of magic, from the very time we are born. Astral space is the pool from which we draw our magic and our very life. Our knowledge of the currents of astral energies allows us to affect the outcome of events, to tip the balance of Fate towards a desired end. For most dragons, this ability is an expression of will and magical power, affecting only our own actions. For the more advanced and capable (such as myself) we can work our wills to change the fates of other creatures as well as ourselves.

ON THE LIFE CYCLE OF DRAGONS

The life of a dragon is not unlike that of one of your people, Tiabdjin, or of any of the Young Races. We are born, we grow, we mate and produce young. These are things all living creatures understand. What you must know is the unique way we dragons follow the path of life and how long our road is compared to your own.

