

Dear Shannara fans:

We are pleased to present you with an original, never-before published Shannara short story by Terry Brooks. Inspired by the new novel, THE VOYAGE OF JERLE SHANNARA: ILSE WITCH, this stand-alone tale features a classic Shannara character in an exciting adventure created exclusively by the author for YOU his online readers.

Enjoy!

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The shade of Allanon did not answer Walker at once, but remained silent and unresponsive, hovering like a dark cloud over the roiling waters of the Hadeshorn, all size and blackness against the starlit sky. Steam sprayed from the lake surface in sharp geysers, as if the dead trapped below were seeking to catch anew the breath of life. The moon was down, hidden behind the peaks that cupped the valley, a wary passerby on its way towards morning. Where he knelt at the water's edge, solitary and motionless, silence cloaked the shattered landscape.

Walker blinked away the droplets that clung to his eyelids. In the midst of ghosts that found blind release in the legendary Valley of Shale, he must remember to see clearly. It occurred to him that coming here was a mistake, that asking for help from the dead was foolish.

What help they offered was forever couched in obscure references and double meanings, words that fostered confusion rather than understanding. Better to know nothing than to be misled by

false interpretation. Yet whom else could he turn to besides the shade?

If

even a tiny glimmering of understanding could come from their meeting

this night, he must not pass it by.

Allanon stirred within his spectral trappings, cowl head inclining slightly towards the supplicant.

-Ask what you would of me-

Walker stared fixedly into the blackness of the cowl, into the void that opened through it. "I have been shown a way to return the Druids to the Four Lands, to rebuild the Council at Paranor, and to bring to pass all that Galaphile hoped to achieve in the rebirth of civilization so many years ago. A map of another land had

disclosed

magic born out of the Old World. The magic is the key. But the way to the magic is uncertain and marked with dangerous twists and turns. It requires a journey to an unknown land. It requires great risk of me and of those who will go with me. I would know more of what to expect."

Wind brushed his face, hot and strangely dry, blown off the surface of the Hadeshorn in a sudden gust. It caught the robes of the shade and caused them to billow like smoke.

-If you would know the future, you would try to change it. If you would try to change it, you would damage your soul. Do you ask me to allow this--

"No. I ask you to better prepare me for the choices I will be asked to make."

-You are a Druid. You cannot be better prepared than you already are-

"Then give me a reason to think that what I do is right!"

Walker heard the desperation in his voice and was displeased with it.

The shade seemed equally so. The waters over which it hovered spat and hissed in sudden fury, boiling up like a hot kettle heated by fresh fuel. Walker felt the familiar uncertainty, the unease of speaking with the dead, of confronting one who even in life had been so much more capable than he, of one who had known no equal and experienced no defeat.

-Take the map and follow it. Follow it as you would a thread unraveled from a cloak of darkness. Wind it about your finger and when you reach its end, weave it back together once more. You will know what to do-

It was an unsatisfying response that told Walker nothing, and in a mix of disappointment and frustration he came to his feet.

"What am I to do with the magic I seek, once it is found?" The Hadeshorn hissed anew, but he ignored it. His voice tightened. "Yours is the collective knowledge of all the Druids. You must know of the magic's potential, of its power. It can destroy everything regained if it is not used well.

-Everything-

"Then tell me how to prevent that from happening! Am I to take everything I find - all of it? What part am I to give to the races?"

What should be held back and what put to use? I can't see far enough into the future to comprehend the answers!"

A booming cough shook the ground beneath his feet, and a growl rose from within the earth.

-A shade has no right to tell the living what they need. Only the

living can make that decision. You must make it for all, because that is what you are given to do. On your shoulders hangs the mantle of responsibility for those with lesser insight, courage, and vision.

Druids are charged with no less, Walker. Be what you have been given to be-

Walker shook his head in dismay. "I am not what you say - not smarter or braver or more insightful. I have never been that. I am simply the bearer of a blood trust bestowed on Brin Ohmsford long before I was born, a trust I carry not because I want to, but because I must and because by doing so I might one day see a time when there is no further need for Druids!"

He leaned towards the dark shape, his voice building. "I am no better than those I seek to help. I am a poor answer to their difficult questions. What are you, then? Where is the vaunted Druid power

that

should give me the insights and understandings I lack? Where is that power, but buried in the pit from which you rise to taunt me! If I am to be the way, then show me something of the path!"

Lightning crackled before him, streaking down into the Hadeshorn from the heavens. It was followed by a thunderclap of such fury that he could feel it reverberated in the air about him. He stepped back from

the brilliance and the sound, shielding his face. In the aftermath, everything went completely black, and he was suddenly alone,

stranded

in an inky void.

He could feel the shade of Allanon draw close to him then. He could

heard the hiss of his anger.

-You travel to secure a treasure, Dark Uncle. You journey to fulfill a dream. What you accomplish will cost you and those with you. For some, it will cost everything. Lives will be lost and dreams shattered. None of those who return will be the same again. Ever-

A slow hissing began to build from somewhere within the invisible black that shrouded them. It came from everywhere at once, slow and steady and terrifying.

-Of the things you seek, you shall find them all. Of what you would know, only some will be revealed. Of what you retrieve, nothing will you take away. The future is fluid and ever changing, and so it will be here. Give yourself over to it. If you would accomplish what you most desire, let go of what most weighs you down. Recognize when you have exceeded your reach. Give heed to what is meant to be and do not question or regret or try to subvert it-

From a collage of images that formed in his mind, Walker caught a glimpse of what he was being told yet the particulars remained just out of reach. He shook his head in confusion.

-One dream, Walker, of those you embrace, is all you are allowed.

The rest, you must release-

Allanon's voice was a dark, sad hiss of warning. Walker caught the inflection and the tone. "Which dream?" he whispered. "Which one?"

But when the suffocating void fell away and the night sky reappeared overhead, the Hadeshorn lay before him as still and empty as dark glass clouded by smoke, and he was alone.

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