

Magni Bronzebeard awaited them in the Hall of Explorers.

Anduin—who once had looked on, helpless to intervene, as the king was agonizingly transformed into gleaming stone—had thought he would be prepared to meet the awakened Magni.

He was not.

Magni stood beneath the pteradon skeleton with his back to the entrance, deep in conversation with Velen and High Explorer Muninn Magellas. Falstad and Muradin stood beside them, listening intently, their bushy eyebrows drawn together in concern.

High Tinker Gelbin Mekkatorque, the white-bearded leader of the gnomes whose cheerful demeanor belied his deep, quiet wisdom, also had been summoned. Anduin had scheduled a meeting with him for the next day. The gnomes had been invaluable against the Legion, and he wanted to make sure he had a chance to thank the physically smallest but perhaps intellectually greatest members of the Alliance. The presence of the high tinker's adviser, the gruff warrior Captain Tread Sparknozzle, whose black eye patch was testimony to his years of battlefield experience, indicated that this was no mere diplomatic visit on Magni's part.

When the glittering shape turned to Anduin, the young king felt as if he had been punched in the gut. A thing made of stone should not move so gracefully, nor should its diamond beard flutter with that movement. Magni was neither the dwarf he had been nor the statue he had become; he was both and neither, and the juxtaposition struck Anduin on a profound level. A heartbeat later, though, gratitude and joy flooded him at Magni's words.

“Anduin! My, ye've grown!”

The phrase loathed by children everywhere was transformed by the power of nostalgia and the inexorable arrival of adulthood. It was so ordinary a phrase, so real, that the illusion of

“other” was as shattered as Magni’s diamond prison had been. The voice was warm, living, and very definitely Magni’s. Anduin wondered whether the diamond “flesh” would be warm, too, if he were to touch the being who now strode toward him. But the spurs and shards that dotted the dwarf-shaped form precluded the enthusiastic handshakes and crushing hugs that Magni had been so prone to in his former incarnation.

Had Moira or Dagra found a way around that? Did Magni even wish to bestow the gestures he’d been so free with during his life as a being of flesh and blood? For the sake of all of them, Anduin hoped so. Moira had asked Belgrum to take care of Dagra, who had protested that he wanted to meet his grandfather. We’ll see, she said. Her face wasn’t hard, exactly, but it was concerned.

“Magni,” Anduin said. “It is so good to see you.”

“And ye and me daughter.” Magni turned his stone eyes to Moira. “I dare tae hope that once me duty’s done here, I might be able tae meet me grandson. But sadly, a visit’s nae what I’ve come about.”

Of course not. Magni spoke for Azeroth now, and that was a great and solemn duty. Anduin’s gaze flickered to the draenei. Velen was not a maudlin soul. He smiled easily and warmly and often laughed. But he had known so much pain that it was those lines his ancient visage remembered, cutting through his face as if they had been chiseled, and they were set in a grim expression now.

Magni regarded Moira, Anduin, and Velen seriously. “I’ve sought the three o’ ye out nae because all o’ ye are leaders o’ yer people but because ye are priests.”

Moira and Anduin exchanged surprised glances. Anduin was aware of this commonality, of course, but for some reason he hadn’t given much thought to it.

“She’s in terrible pain,” he said, his diamond face, seemingly so hard, furrowing easily into an empathetic wince. Anduin wondered if the rite that had so transformed Magni meant that he could now literally sense Azeroth’s pain. Anduin thought of the destruction of Silithus, of the almost inconceivable size of the sword now towering over the landscape. If Sargeras’s last attempt to destroy Azeroth had come close to succeeding, it was a terrifying thought.

“She needs healin’. An’ that’s what priests do. She made it clear that all must heal her or all will perish.”

Velen and Moira turned to each other. “I believe that the words your father has spoken are true,” the draenei said. “If we do not tend to our wounded world—as many of us as possible—then most assuredly we all will perish. There are others who must hear this message.”

“Aye,” Moira said, “and I think it’s time that the lad met the rest of us.”

And as one, the two turned to look directly at Anduin.

Anduin’s brow furrowed in confusion. “The rest of whom?”

“Other priests,” Moira said. “The Prophet and I have been working with a group you’re long overdue to get to know.”

And then Anduin understood. “The Conclave. In the Netherlight Temple.”

The very name seemed to set calm upon Anduin’s soul, almost in defiance of the temple’s history as the prison for Saraka, a void lord and a fallen naaru, and its location in the heart of the Twisting Nether. For eons, the draenei had studied the creature. Only recently had they been able to purify it. Now, as its true self, Saa’ra, the naaru lingered, embracing its former prison as a sanctuary it offered to others.

Anduin had heard about the struggle that had unfolded in the early days of the Legion’s invasion. And he knew that many who now walked its hallowed halls were, like the naaru itself,

those who had fallen into darkness but had been brought back into the Light. These priests, known as the Conclave, had reached out to others on Azeroth so they would join together to help stand against the onslaught of the Legion. Although the threat had ended, the Conclave still existed, offering help and compassion to all who would seek the Light.

“What the Conclave did and continues to do is so important,” Anduin said. During the war, they had roamed Azeroth, recruiting priests to tend to those who were on the front lines against the Legion. Now they still tended to those courageous fighters as they dealt with lasting injuries to body, mind, and spirit. Not all scars were physical. “I wish I could have assisted their efforts during the war.”

“Dear boy,” Velen said, “you have always been right where you needed to be. We have our own paths, our own struggles. My son’s fate was mine. Moira’s path is overcoming prejudice and championing the Dark Irons who believe in her. Yours was succeeding a great king and governing the people who have loved you since your birth. It is time to let go of regrets. There is no place for them in the Netherlight Temple. It is a site filled with only hope and determination to follow where the Light leads us and bring it into the dark places that so need its blessing.”

“The Prophet, as he usually is, is dead right,” Moira said. “Though I admit I’m pleased to finally be able to share this place with you. Despite the dire nature behind this visit now, I know you’ll find some balm for your soul there. It’s impossible not to.”

She spoke as one who herself had found such a balm. Anduin thought of the strange material safely inside his pocket. He had planned to show it to the Three Hammers after what was supposed to have been a pleasant walk. Now he realized that no one would be better able to identify the stone than Magni, who was still one with the earth.

“We will go, but not yet. I thank you for your message, Magni. And . . . there’s something I need to show you. All of you.” Briefly he summarized what he knew about the amber material, realizing as he spoke that it was precious little.

“We don’t know much,” he finished, “but I believe you can tell us more.”

He withdrew the handkerchief and folded it open. The little gem glowed its warm amber and blue hues.

Magni’s eyes filled with diamond tears. “Azerite,” he breathed.

Azerite. They had a name for it at last. “What is it?” Moira asked.

“Och,” Magni said softly, sadly, “I told ye she was hurtin’. Now ye can see it fer yerselves. This . . . is part o’ her. It’s . . . bah, ’tis so hard tae describe in words. Her essence, I suppose will do. More an’ more o’ it is comin’ tae th’ surface.”

“Can she not heal herself?” Mekkatorque wanted to know.

“Aye, she can and has,” Magni replied. “Ye’ve nae forgotten th’ Cataclysm, have ye? But that fel thing that bastard stuck her wi’ . . .” He shook his head, looking like someone who was losing his beloved. Anduin supposed he was.

“’Tis a good an’ noble effort she’s made, but one that’s destined tae fail. Azeroth canna do it by hersel’. Nae this time. That’s why she’s beggin’ fer our help!”

It all made sense. Perfect, devastating sense. Anduin passed the small sample of Azerite to Moira. As all did, she went wide-eyed with wonder at what she was feeling.

“We hear you,” he said to Magni, looking deep into the diamond eyes. “We will do all we can. But we also need to make sure that this . . . Azerite . . . isn’t used by the Horde.”

The Azerite pebble now rested in Muradin’s hands. He glowered. “Enough o’ this and ye could take down a whole city.”

“Enough o’ this,” Falstad said, “an’ we could shatter th’ Horde.”

“We’re not at war,” Anduin said. “For now, our task is twofold—and it’s clear. We need to heal Azeroth, and we need to keep this”—and he accepted the Azerite—“safely away from the Horde.”