

## DEDICATION

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This novel is dedicated to Moose, Ferg, and Spike. Without you, this would never have been.

Unconscious thanks to the kitties: Michael, Blink, and Frankie. Your four-legged ways kept me alert.

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## PREFACE: NERVOUS TREMORS

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“Varan?”

At the mention of its name, the reptile-headed humanoid in the black and silver robes stirred from deep thought. Its large, circular eyes regarded the other fantastical beings gathered around the quartzite boulder in the night.

“Friends of this assentage,” said Varan, “the recounting of our success is accurate. Yet my thoughts remain incomplete. On the state of the unknown, I notice a discord we have yet to take seriously.

“Despite our accomplishments, the drought continues. Instead of regaining our strength, we wither past the point of non-existence. Some of us here are now the last, with no recourse to return should Grand-greatest pour her pipkin anew.”

A discomfort moved through the listeners. The translucent humanoid made of fire played with the red-orange opal at the end of its hard, silvery necklace.

Varan said, “Skilla shared with me an alarming knowledge. She heard the ripples of a lost dream say that Talam Island had risen out of the Adraric Sea. How long has that frightful castle lurked above the depths, that we should hear of it now?

“Consider also the testimony of Prosla. She sighted a star-stranger in the Seltan neighborhood of Nerham. Masked like a clown, a ghastly bearing surrounded this figure. She was unable to regard him further, so slippery

was his hiding. What is the star-stranger's message? Is this being a bearer of light...or a creature of destruction?"

The translucent humanoid spoke with a light voice that smelled of wood smoke. "Are you suggesting we attempt to close the Faithless Looking Glass? The Nightmare Stick is worse than ever. Without our labors, what will become of the unknown?"

Varan said, "Assuming we could, the prospects for a discourse remain grim. We are still rejected and their minds have grown dangerously one-sided."

"It's as if the distance between the twins has become an unbridgeable crack in the world. The pursuit of our grudge may have trapped us in a dead-end. I suspect Grand-greatest has already made her move."