

THE
BONES
OF
PROPHECY

THE ELDER BLADE • BOOK ONE

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DELETED CHAPTER

AN ALTERNATIVE INTRODUCTION TO
SORCERY'S EXISTENCE IN SAI DOMNU



THE HOUSE OF SID

One rather obscure tome Azran had pulled from the library's dusty shelves told of older times, before the Keremdin epos even, when the lake of Sai Domnu wasn't yet there. The author described the God Stones as standing on an elevated plateau. Even earlier still, or so the writer presumed, cons spent at the bottom of a great sea had smoothed down those very same stones.

Another book, seemingly less fact driven, also spoke of times before the lake had arrived. According to the author, its absence explained the meticulous placement of the innumerable wooden poles. With no lake yet present and the bedrock exposed to the sky, people could have easily hacked out postholes for them. The author knew the truth of this simple fact, having sent youngsters down below the waters to check the foundations.

The wooden poles raised other questions. When Azran first estimated the number used, he couldn't fathom why people would build a beehive as sizeable as Sai Domnu on wood that would surely rot away within decades. Even if you rotated their replacement, it would still present a staggeringly large task, not to mention the amount of timber. On the day after his discovery of the two tomes, during his walk back to the library, he decided to take a closer look.

Azran lowered himself onto the walkway and hung upside down

over the railing. Below the walkways and above the waterline stood a multitude of dark wooden posts. He didn't bother counting them. As far as his knowledge of wood as a building material went, the timber looked in finer shape than it had any right to—

Footsteps approached, coming to a halt near him. Azran moved to stand.

A spindly man dressed in clothes that did not entirely fit stood watching him from a short distance. A pair of dark-lensed glass-and-wood goggles rested on the man's forehead. Azran had seen him before, from Sep's barge on the day he arrived at Sai Domnu, and on several occasions since. The man was always in his boat, and always with that contraption on his head. And unlike today, there was always someone with him, wrapped in a dark cloak.

"I've seen you in your boat, wearing those," Azran pointed to the goggles. "You've been underneath Sai Domnu. What's she hiding there?"

The man looked about with bewildered eyes, perhaps surprised Azran knew about him. With no one near enough to eavesdrop, the man's expression lost its tight edge. "I be called Esling. Pleased to meet you."

"I'm Azran." He gave his most encouraging smile. Which wasn't saying much.

"Well Azran," Esling said, stretching his back, "I be doing important work. Every morning I climb into my boat, and every morning I pick up one of them of the House of Sid."

Esling seemed proud of what he did, eager to share his contribution to Sai Domnu.

"The House of—"

"Sid!" Esling whispered with a sharp hiss. He leaned in, his eyes in perpetual motion. "Sorcerers and witches! Intent on imbuing the wooden poles beneath us with a dark sorcery that would shrivel your eyeballs if watched without the proper protection." He straightened and gave an ardent tap on his goggles. "Made them myself. Them

sorcerers be thinking I be addlebrained, but I won't become their ensorcelled puppet."

A tingle spread forth from Azran's chest.

Sorcery. It was here.

Esling continued to speak, and Azran took a deep breath, forcing his attention back on the man.

"... during a time before this lake had formed, a grand Augur told its people to establish Sai Domnu here, and to build it on stilts." Esling's broad gesture took in the Stronghold and its God Stones. "Or so the House of Sid claims. Their sorcery keeps the wood fresh and strong until the world falls apart. That be the reason I row my boat into Sai Domnu's innards, so them lads can cast their spells.

"They even make it so it only burns with difficulty, although the sorcery needs repeating every century or so. These poles been standing here for hunnerds of years. I've heard the same goes for the candle-glass along the walkways."

"Huh." The man might've spoken the truth. Azran had once dropped a glass cylinder during his rounds, and it had bounced off the wood without harm. Could the House of Sid have anything to do with Azran's arrival at the mausoleum, and with losing his memories?

"Where are they located?"

"They occupy a stone tower," Esling said, and he pointed to none of them in particular. "Which is in itself a sign of their incredible power. But you watch your hide, mister!" Esling prodded a finger in Azran's direction. "Better to stay away. Them be Spirit Whisperers, so don't go crawling where you don't belong."

Esling tipped his hat. "I must be off. The missus be waiting at the table." He took off his goggles with both hands and placed them in a thick cloth bag. Esling shoved his hands into his pockets and walked away, whistling an unfamiliar tune.

Azran tapped his fore and middle finger against his temple in return to say thanks and goodbye. He stayed behind, staring out over the lake and towards the distant peaks, fingers drumming on the

wooden railing. He wiped the smile from his face, but it returned the moment he focused on something else.

The House of Sid might have access to his sorcery.



The mention of the House of Sid and their sorcery planted a seed within Azran, which he continued to nurture during the months to follow. He often thought back to his conversation with Esling. Azran was certain he had once possessed sorcery, and now it was confirmed that he could likely find it in Sai Domnu.

He rubbed the skin on the exposed part of his arms. He was so sure of their existence, though he'd yet to see or even feel the lines. Azran longed for them to come alive, but what he needed was very specific, and probably very well guarded. His instincts told him those lines defined him, just as the shapes of the lines children drew on wood or paper determined if they became a cat or a house.

More importantly, Azran was fairly sure he'd arrived at the mausoleum by way of sorcery, and that could mean the House of Sid was responsible for his current predicament. If that was even within their capabilities. Or perhaps they weren't the only ones that dealt in it.

And what exactly did he go to the mausoleum to do for them? Just retrieve a letter meant for him? Then how did he lose his memories? It didn't make much sense, and else they would've contacted him by now.

Azran had since considered approaching the House of Sid, but he hadn't spent any time investigating them, and Esling's warning to steer clear of them didn't come across as merely based on a superstitious belief. That queasy sensation in Azran's gut told him sorcerers were a perilous bunch, best avoided.

This chapter was eventually edited out of ‘The Bones of Prophecy’, due to the principle of Chekhov’s gun: every element in a story must be necessary, and irrelevant elements should be removed. Early readers kept asking about the House of Sid, and their role in the story of Azran.

I’m not an advocate of Chekhov’s gun as irrefutable law, and I figured the story was ideally suited to have Azran pass by elements of this world without necessarily interacting with them (for long), but the readers just wouldn’t leave the House of Sid be.

It was then that the rooftop-hopping Burner found his way onto the pages, alerting Azran to sorcery’s existence in Sai Domnu. In hindsight, it was the better decision, even more so because it was yet another knot in the relationship between the Six Fingers and the Bonded Oath, and a good way of weaving Azran into their story.

Though truth be told, I sometimes miss listening to Esling’s preternatural views on life, views shared by all of Sai Domnu’s inhabitants as well as those that live beyond the God Stones that stand guard over the lake.