

## Binding of the Dreadsteed

by Rainn Farred, Grobbulus - 2020

The Bell tolled as the dreadsteed fell, drowning out the sounds of steel and spell against demonic fire. An ethereal form rose from the corpse, turning its burning eyes to pierce the gaze of she whom had slain it.

Time slowed to a crawl.

The dreadsteed's spirit raged, hatred untempered by death - indeed, it was angrier now, having been bested by a small group of mortals deemed unworthy to bond with the powerful demons of Xoroth. Dying here, on Azeroth, was a permanent end to many Xorothian beings, the dreadsteed being no exception. As the warlock approached, its eyes seethed with utter contempt, but it stood protectively over its smoldering body. Battle still raging around them, her companions locked in combat with the dreadsteed's former master, she spoke softly.

"You can live again," she said. "You can serve me, here on this plane, coming to my call and bearing me to my enemies on burning hooves of swiftness and fear - or you can die, forever, right now." She laid out her offer to the spirit, hand outstretched, wreathed in fel flame. It had to know she was a demon summoner, of course, she having properly called it here from its realm, but a little demonstration of her power couldn't hurt. Lightly she touched its muzzle, the orange smolder giving off the barest hint of heat, even as a spirit. This one was particularly strong.

The dreadsteed accepted her touch with a wave of revulsion, but the curiosity surged underneath. A question rose in her mind - what manner of enemies would it run down, with her as its master? Were they worthy? Did they fear her? Her mouth twitched upward in a hint of a smile as she thought of the Grin's recent clashes with the Alliance - a bellowing dwarf, his warhammer swinging wildly before he died to her corrupting magic; an elf hunter stinging her from afar with enchanted arrows; a human, stepping out of the shadows to stun her mid-cast. Some were worthier than others, but all would know terror as she thundered into battle, whether it was with this dreadsteed or one of the swift, bony horses of the Undercity. If they didn't tremble immediately upon seeing her, she would *make* them fear her. Through her, the dreadsteed tasted the memory of that fear. Finally, it decided secondhand glory was better than ceasing to exist entirely, and nudged her hand. Her soul burned with the dreadsteed's touch.

The pact was formed, and time sped up again. The sounds of combat rushed into her ears.

Chieftain Gorfrunch Smashblade roared an Orcish profanity in the Dreadlord's astonished face, his bloodlust in full swing. Armand Zenithuus channeled arcane energies, his eyes glowing blue around the gold as he loosed deadly arcane missiles at his target. Casmir's blades flashed with poisons, surgically finding their marks on the Dreadlord, crippling him to buy time. The priest Edward Lafontaine stood back, his keen healer's eye keeping each in turn from the embrace of the grave.

Rainn Farred, heedless of the fight against Lord Hel'nurath, communed with the spirit of the recently-deceased dreadsteed. To them, she was silent for only a moment before giving the kill order.

"It's done. END IT!" she yelled, forming her own spell of shadow to loose at the Dreadlord. Hel'nurath finally recognized her, the "Cultist" to whom he had sold Xorothian stardust, and died with the shock of betrayal on his face. The summoning circle was littered with the bodies of imps and dreadguards that had come to destroy it. Gorfrunch rested his axe on his shoulder with a grunt, satisfied at the carnage. Edward

muttered another blessing, soothing Armand's last wounds. Casmir scanned the raised steps, alert for any other dangers. The group slowly caught their breath and recovered from the extended fight.

Cas stepped up quietly beside Rainn and handed her a few squares of gauze. "You're bleeding," he said. Dark ichor leaked from her nose, a symptom of the strain of recharging the three artifacts of the greater circle.

"Thank you for keeping them off me," she said, wiping the ichor from her face.

He grinned. "It was fun."

"Let's see it, then!" called Armand, eager to see the fruits of his assistance. Rainn nodded with a smile, heading for the tunnel. The demon would never return to the summoning circle, but outside, with enough room, she could control it. Four sets of eyes watched her intently, one being her own Chieftain. Nervously she began the ritual, a much shortened and simplified version. The dreadsteed answered her call, ripping the barrier between worlds with a scream.

Rainn heaved a sigh of relief. It had worked, and the demon horse was hers. She met each of her teammates' gazes in turn, as best she could with no eyes herself. "Thank you," she said, solemnly. "I couldn't have succeeded without you all."

"Ize fink Ize not had enuf blood today," grinned Gorfrunch, pointing across the Ring to another door. "Wot say weze kill s'more demons, gits?"