

The Unknown War

Long-ago when I was a young man a great disaster befell the Earth. In the span of a single day, all the electronics across the globe were destroyed. TVs exploded, computers overloaded, cell phones died, cars wouldn't start, and planes crashed. Hundreds of people died, but it was just the beginning. The next day a storm unlike any other came; it stretched from horizon to horizon and was a 100 times worse than the worst storm in any man's memory. Tornados laid waste to major cities, floods washed away entire communities, and there was lightning so strong that only scorched earth was left in its wake. Tens of thousands were laid low before the fury of the storm. It lasted for an entire year and when it was done little was left of civilization and humanity. The people began to rebuild thinking that the worst had come and gone and life could continue, but they were wrong.

After the storms ended the monsters appeared. They were all manner of dark and evil creatures from the legends of old, such as Hell Hounds, Wyverns, Ogres, and more. Amongst the evil beasts were creatures that had once been men, but had given themselves completely over to the darkness in their human soul's. Some of them could wield magic and practiced the dark of its arts. Their leader was a creature of malevolence and hatred, his name was Wrathreik. His goal was to conquer the world and destroy all light in it. A goal his servants devoted themselves to with great vigor but none more so than his fanatical second-in-command the immortal sorcerer Tyrannos.

Wrathreik was unstoppable and set about destroying the human race. For without their technology and advanced weapons they were unable to put up much of a fight. However, there was still hope for the long dormant gift of magic lost for generations was found once again. Also,

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with the gift of magic came warriors and mages from a lost time. It was they who had imprisoned Wrathreik centuries ago and now returned from another dimension to fight their ancient foe. It was they who trained the humans who found themselves gifted with magic and also new warriors to defend the people, I know this for I was one such warrior.

Swords in hand and with trusted companions at our sides we fought against Wrathreik and his armies of death. For years we fought with skill and honor. However, for each victory of the light the forces of darkness claimed five more. So to protect those who couldn't fight, the light created fortresses. In these places the young, the old, and the injured were safe and craftsmen and farmers supplied the armies of the light to continue the fight.

Though we of the light battled valiantly ultimately our strength failed. Though we had the aid of those who had fought Wrathreik before, they were too few in number. In addition, though many of us were trained by these masters of the ancient arts of war only a small number of the modern humans had the talent to become masters themselves. Technology, the one thing that could have been an overwhelming advantage for humanity against the darkness was gone. The pride and foundation of the modern societie gone, destroyed when the veil that separated our world from Wrathreik was shattered. Despite our fewer numbers and the constant death of our comrades we fought on never wavering in our conviction. That the darkness of Wrathreik could not be allowed to win.

However, after many brutal years of war there was only one fortress left. It was called Hope; it comprised the entirety of the Willamette River Valley. All the surviving warriors and mages of light were gathered there as were the surviving people who had fled from the darkness. We knew that Wrathreik was amassing his armies of darkness to crush us so we prepared for one last great battle. When the darkness came we met them with all our strength.

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The green fields of the valley were strewn with the dead and its rivers ran red with blood. Through the winter the battle raged and the forces of light and darkness strove for the victory, but slowly we of the light were pushed back. Finally, the darkness had encircled the Citadel in the center of the valley trapping the last remnants of light within. The fortress had been built of stone and magic so that no force could tunnel underneath its walls and nothing could fly over them. However, though the enchantments were strong they paled in comparison to the gathered might of darkness. We knew that not even this mighty bastion would deny Wrathreik his victory.

It was at this dark time that the summons came for me to attend a council consisting of the greatest warriors, mages, and wisest elders of the light. We were to decide what to do in its dire hour. In the innermost chamber of the Citadel we met. In addition to myself there was George the warrior old in body, but still strong of arm and cunning of mind. Then there was Jeanette as beautiful as a Norse Valkyrie and as deadly. We were the strongest, bravest, and most skilled Warriors of the light still living. The three most powerful and knowledgeable of the White Mages were also there with the rune inscribed staffs and cloaks of power. There were also three elders; two were men and one woman all old with gray hair but sharp eyes and minds. They had the gathered wisdom of lifetimes. To us nine it would fall to decide not if we should continue to fight but how, for all of us would always agree on one point. That the light would never submit to the darkness.

It quickly became apparent that there were very few options open to us. However, as so often happens in council there were disagreements on what to do. I and my fellow warriors had formulated a plan for an all-out attack against the Army of darkness in order to destroy the leaders; who had gathered in site of the fortress to witness their final victory.

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However only we warriors were willing to risk this attack. For as soon as George finished outlining the plan the rest of the council vetoed it much to Jeanette's outrage.

"For what reason does this Council of bitter old man and quivering white robed baboons who call themselves magi disagree with our..." said Jeanette before I managed to cover her mouth to the great relief of the rest of the council.

"Because" said one of the elders "Even if you were to destroy Wrathreik and most of his lieutenants and scatter his armies to the winds, what if one of Wrathreik's lieutenants escapes your attack? That one will gather what is left of the dark forces and rebuild what you destroyed so that in a few years we will once again be on the brink of destruction. Maybe worse off than we are now." This did not satisfy Jeanette but she did stop trying to bite off my hand.

"So what do you think we should do?" said Jeanette once I removed my hand from her mouth as she took her seat.

The elder who had rebuked her looked like he wanted to strangle her but answered. "I think that we should attempt to banish Wrathreik and his followers back to the prison they escape from." This idea was met with murmurs of approval from the elders and the warriors including Jeanette. However, the mages shook their heads and the eldest of them said

"It cannot be done."

"What do you mean no? If you banished Wrathreik and his armies from the earth before what stops you now?"

"We have no Grey Mages and without those who can wield both the negative and positive aspects of magic the spell cannot be cast" said the eldest mage.

With his announcement silence fell in the chamber. These were the only options available and both would not stop our demise just prolong it.

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After what seemed like hours of silence one of the elders said "If only we could go back and stop Wrathreik from breaking free."

At this one of the mages looked up with renewed hope shiny in his eyes. "There is a way to do that." he said, at this the entire council looked at him and the other mages. "The mind of a person can be sent back through time to his body at an earlier part of his life."

"Yes" said the eldest mage" but it won't work."

"Why not" I asked, "you'd think altering our past so that we never have to face Wrathreik would be a good thing?"

"The reason for this is because Tyrannos avoided being sealed with Wrathreik at the end of the first war. He was free to wander the earth and find a way to release his master, which after centuries he did. Tyrannos will sense the disturbance in time that this spell will cause. He will take steps to find out what happened. At which point he will kill the one we send then release his master.

"Honored sage" said the first mage, "unless I've misunderstood all that you have taught me there may be a way. The disturbance will only exist if the person who we send back retains their memories of the future. To avoid Tyrannos's, attention the one we send back must have their memories suppressed until two days before the breaking."

"Why two days before the breaking, wouldn't it be safer to wait till the day of the breaking?" one of the elders asked.

"No" said the mage. "It'll take some time for the spell to fade away. Until then the person who is sent will not be at full strength; and believe me whoever we send will need all their strength to fight Tyrannos."

For a moment all was silent then the oldest of the elders rose to her feet and said

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"I see no other way. All our other plans will fail and this fortress will not hold much longer against this constant assault. Do I speak for all of us when I say? Let us make the attempt and stop this evil from ever being freed?!"

The chamber echoed as the rest of us jumped to our feet and roared.

"YES!!!"

Once we had made the decision only one issue remained. Who would be sent back? At first we thought a mage should go. However, because of the location where Tyrannos would cast the spell all magic except that which would break the seal would be nullified. That meant a warrior would be the one to challenge Tyrannos. The one who was sent would also need to be within two days journey of Tyrannos. After some debate amongst George, Jeanette, and myself it was concluded that only one warrior in the entire fortress had the necessary skill and lived within the necessary distance to challenge Tyrannos, me.

There was just one problem; I had not been a warrior before the cataclysm. So to ensure I would be ready for the fight my mind would be sent back to when I was four years of age and a magical compulsion was placed upon me. It would drive me to become physically stronger, faster, and master the ancient ways of combat. It was hoped that this in combination with my knowledge from the war would give me the edge I would need to kill Tyrannos.

It took a day and a night for all the necessary spells and incantations to be placed upon me. It was almost too late, for just as the final spell was cast the darkness broke through the gates! I heard our enemies rushing through the Citadel, the clash of weapons, and the screams of the dying. The last thing I saw was the darkness breaking through the door and my greatest friends George and Jeanette facing them with drawn swords in their hands and the light of battle shining in their eyes! Then I was gone, returned to my past.

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I awoke in my family's home on my fourth birthday. I didn't remember my own name; I just had a sense of urgency. Soon the memory of my name returned and the sense of urgency faded, becoming a shadow in the back of my mind. So I lived a normal life like most people making friends, playing games, and going to school except for one thing. I spent every spare moment strengthening my body and studying the ancient ways of combat. If I didn't a sense of unease would come over me that nothing but constant training would alleviate. This is how my life went from the age of 3 to 20.

At the age of 20 I started having dreams of the great battles that I fought in and the long-forgotten sense of urgency returned. These were my memories of the war beginning to reemerge. Then one day the memories of my mission and the impending disaster returned to me! I didn't have much time and worse I had no weapon capable of killing Tyrannos! No modern weapon would kill him and all I had was a training sword and wood ax. Undeterred and with memories of worse situations where I gained a victory, I armed myself and marched into the forest to face my foe and change the course of time.

I traveled deeper and deeper into the woods far from the places where men walked. I knew precisely where to go as if being guided. This was the last gift from the mages, the location of the Focusing Stone. An ancient pillar of granite enchanted to gather and focus the world's magic into the dimensional prison of Wrathreik and his armies. I walked for an entire day and into the night only resting once the moon set and was on the move once again at first light. So it was just as the sun was rising over the horizon that I reached the Focusing Stone and Tyrannos.

When I arrived I saw with sudden horror he was only a few words away from completing the spell. Without hesitation and no plan in mind I lifted my ax high and charged shouting

"FOR THE LIGHT!"

Tyrannos spun around shock on his face only to be replaced with cruel amusement when he saw me. Undeterred I pressed on and just as I reached him brought my ax down for a killing blow! An instant before my ax would've struck he raised his black staff. As the two weapons collided a sound like a falling tree filled the air. With a single blow he had shattered the handle of my ax and sent me crashing to the ground. As I lay there suddenly Tyrannos loomed over me his staff held high ready to crush my throat so I would choke to death!

Just as he started to swing the staff I lashed out with my right fist and struck Tyrannos in his left knee. As he stumbled from the force of the blow, I rolled away from him. From one instant to the next I was on my feet with my training sword in hand. Once again, I had surprised Tyrannos but it did not last. Even as I stood he too regained his feet and attacked. I barely managed to block his first blow but that was all I needed to do.

All of my training and experience from both my lives now came into play. Tyrannos was a fearsome opponent but I was a swordsman born and though he blocked many of my attacks not a one of his ever landed on me. However I knew all my skill was worthless if I couldn't land a killing blow which was impossible with the training sword. I might as well be a Tyrannos with a wooden stick. I would only be able to kill him if I had a real sword not some child's plaything.

Then I saw them, two swords one darker than midnight and the other brighter than the purest snow. The two swords rested in scabbards upon Tyrannos belt, concealed by his cloak until that moment. Knowing that my only chance of killing Tyrannos was to use one of these blades I charged him once again. As my sword met his staff I continued forward until the hilt of my blade locked against his staff. Through sheer strength I forced his staff up above his head moving closer as I did so. Once both weapons were above our heads, I brought mine down with all the force I could. Thus, I smashed the pommel of my training sword into his face.

As Tyrannos staggered I reached blindly for the hilt of one of his swords. I felt my hand brushed the grip of one. Not knowing which it was I grasped it and leapt away from Tyrannos drawing the blade as I did so. As the blade came free of the scabbard it shone forth brighter than the noon day sun on a field of snow. The blade I had drawn was a sword of the light forged in the first war with Wrathreik. Tyrannos long-ago had killed its bearer taking the sword as a trophy. Now Darkness Bane rested in the hands of a champion of the light once again.

Tyrannos roared in fury and drew the other sword, a blade of darkness. As the dark blade rested in his hand it radiated shadows as black as the space between stars. Thus armed we faced each other once again both of us looking for an opening in which to attack.

Since the beginning of the battle neither I nor Tyrannos had spoken a word, until now.

"You cannot defeat me boy. I have lived for countless centuries. You are nothing but a sapling in the shadow of a giant." said Tyrannos.

"Young I may be" said I "but I fight not for myself as you do but for all who live on this planet. And though you are giant you best watch your foot lest you stumble on this sapling and fall."

Tyrannos's face darkened becoming a mask of rage at my impudence and uttering a wordless roar he charged. With that we clashed once again and now our battle was like unto the force of two mighty thunderstorms colliding. Across the clearing we strove back and forth as if in some deadly dance. For hours we fought thus striking, dodging, and blocking both waiting for the other to make a mistake. Then I was driven backwards and failed to see a log directly in my path. I tripped and fell my sword flying from my hands. As I frantically grasped for the sword Tyrannos roared with triumph and raised his sword to strike my head off. Just as the killing blow was about to fall I found the sword. Lunging forward I drove the sword of light into his heart.

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The moment the blade pierced his flesh Tyrannos shimmered and faded, like a shadow caught in the light of the noon day sun. All that remained for him was the black sword. Tyrannos's death broke the spell which would have released Wrathreik and the dark armies. With Tyrannos death also died the secret to releasing his master. The world would be forever safe from Wrathreik, The Dark Conqueror.

Upon finishing his story the old man looked up from the fire and into the eyes of a young boy sitting at the foot of his chair.

"Grandfather was that a true story." asked the boy.

"That is for you to decide my little champion. Now unless my nose is failing me your grandmother has just finished baking some of her chocolate chip cinnamon cookies. Why don't you go bring us some and perhaps I will tell you another story."

With that the boy ran out of the room with a smile on his face because if there is one thing, he liked more than his grandmother's cookies it was his grandfather stories.

Once his grandson was out of the room the old man turned to look above the fire at the mantle. There resting so their blades crossed were two swords one white then snow and the other darker than midnight.

Wrathreik pronounced Wrath-rike

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By David Schuchardt

When I wrote this story I was thinking a lot about time travel and how confusing it can be. I want to see if I could combine a story about time travel with a fantasy story and the result was “The Unknown War”.