The Tomb of Sargeras
By Robert Brooks

Part One: The Fate of Another

Almost all of the ship was gone. Burned to nothing.

The metal ribs of the hull, forged in Lordaeron long ago, rested on the ocean floor. So did the remains of the ship's passengers and crew. Only small pieces of scorched wood and cloth drifted on the surface, still glowing, their green embers sizzling beneath the swells.

They would smolder for hours. Fel fire could not be extinguished by mere water.

The debris washed up on a shore of black rocks. A lone figure stumbled along, his skin dry and pale and weeping with sores. He lurched toward the water and picked at the wreckage.

He lifted a charred plank. Sniffed it. His tongue flicked out, licking one of the embers. It sparked and winked out with a hiss. His eyes pulsed green. He smiled.

"More… I need… more…"

He had never tasted fel before. A larger nugget of it called to him from the south. He staggered onward, staying close to the shore. He knew better than to stray into Watcher territory.

It was hard to remember a day without his need. He tried to think back. Surely there had never been a time when he had wanted for nothing. No. It was impossible. Those memories of standing tall in Suramar and consuming his fill of energy…

… *those days before exile…*

… they were just fantasies, fading quickly. That was good. It would be easier once they were gone.

He did not need Suramar. Power—that was what he needed. He had consumed none for days, nothing but that single ember, and there was little left to scavenge here. There were too many others like him. But there was more of the shipwreck offshore, and it would bring a new bounty. He felt it. It was not far. So he continued forward, ignoring his exhaustion, pushing toward whatever was scratching at his mind.

He knew others would be drawn to it, too.

"But it is mine mine mine mine mine…"

It was so close now, calling to him from the waterline.

There.

A dead body lay facedown on the rocks, nudged gently by the waves. Whoever this had been, he had been astonishingly powerful. Even after death, his magical energy shone like a second sun.

It would be a pleasure to devour every fragment of it.

He fell over in his haste, then scrambled on hands and knees. He heard cries of outrage from farther away. More had arrived. They would eat well, too. There was enough for all. But first, *him.*

He pulled the black cloak away from the corpse. An orc. Green skin. Pulsing with dark magic and strange markings. He had never seen such a strong aura. It would sustain him for…

Days? Weeks? Years?

His fingers curled above the body, drawing a taste of the potent radiance. It was vile. And it was beautiful. He drank deeply.

He felt power. He felt fire. He felt might.

He felt pain. He felt the corpse's green hand close around his throat, squeezing hard.

He felt fear. The orc was standing. Not a corpse at all. Never had been. Glowing red eyes looked into his. "You have not paid the price for that power, not as I have," the orc said. The eyes narrowed, and the lips twisted into a smile. "But please, have more."

The exile shrieked. Torrents of corrupted fel surged into his mind. He lived on magic. Now he drowned in it, suffocating beneath an endless ocean of green fire. He was filled to the brim, and yet more flooded in.

Then, in an instant, it was all gone. All of the orc's magic. All of his own. Drained to the last drop. Nothing remained but emptiness and agony.

Yet as his heart went still, he realized he would do anything to wield such might again…

With a casual gesture, Gul'dan ended the wretch's existence, leaving him as wet streaks on the rocks. He had looked like an elf to Gul'dan's eyes, though not like any of the ones who had invaded Draenor. Those hadn't seemed so sickly. "What was he?" Gul'dan asked his master.

—NIGHTFALLEN. AN EXILE FROM SURAMAR.—

More were nearby, running away. They did not get far. Gul'dan lifted his hands, and a few moments later, the Nightfallen all fell to the ground, dead, nothing left of them but withered husks. Green funnels of mist swirled from their bodies and toward Gul'dan's palms, then disappeared into his skin.

Gul'dan closed his eyes and slowly exhaled. The weight of his exhaustion had lifted just a hair, but his satisfaction went far deeper than that. It was good to be the predator again. If only it would last.

He shuffled away from the exposed shore. There was no need to make things easy for his pursuer. He didn't stop moving until he was far inland, hidden amid boulders and dead, barren trees.

He sat down to rest. "Is this the place? The Broken Isles?" Gul'dan asked.

—YES. KEEP MOVING.—

Gul'dan hated the way Kil'jaeden's voice rattled his skull. It had filled his mind the instant he had entered this world, and it hadn't allowed him a moment's relief. "I need time," he muttered.

—YOU HAVE NONE TO SPARE.—

Gul'dan leaned back against a boulder. His pact with the Burning Legion had given him power, but his posture was as gnarled and twisted as it had ever been. His mortal body was still weak. "I need *time.* The archmage is more powerful than you know." Gul'dan had nearly died swimming to shore, using only his physical strength. If Khadgar had detected even a scrap of fel energy moving away from the burning merchant ship… Well, he hadn't, but now Gul'dan could barely stand. "All I need is a moment."

—NO.—

Gul'dan remained motionless, catching his breath.

—YOU DISOBEY ME?—

The orc hissed. He had crossed into a new world, stolen a ship, and sailed over an unfamiliar ocean, all while a relentless pursuer snapped at his heels. Gul'dan could not keep the rage out of his words. "I have proved my loyalty a thousand times over."

—YOU HAVE FAILED AGAIN AND AGAIN. YOU'VE PROVED NOTHING.—

Gul'dan stood up, ignoring his fatigue. *I failed? Me?* He kept that thought hidden. He had held up his end of the bargain. The *Legion* had failed. Every single one of its plans had come to nothing. Mannoroth, the flayer of a thousand worlds, had died in an ambush. Auchindoun and its substantial power had been claimed for only a few heartbeats.

Even Archimonde had fallen.

A dangerous thought surfaced. *Why should I expect things to go differently this time?* Gul'dan buried that question deep. Very deep indeed.

"Where, then, should I go?" he asked, his voice as cold as death.

—*RETRACE YOUR STEPS.*—

Gul'dan looked back toward the ocean. "I don't understand."

—*YOU HAVE VISITED THESE ISLANDS BEFORE. DECADES AGO. DO YOU NOT SENSE IT?*—

"That was not me," Gul'dan said. An icy chunk of uneasiness settled in his middle. Knowing there was already a Gul'dan who had lived and died on this world—this other timeline—made his skin crawl. "We are not the same."

—*IF YOU ARE NOT, YOU ARE NO USE. GO NORTH.*—

Disobedience was not an option. Not yet. Gul'dan started walking again, slowly, feeling for any sign of scrying. He had no doubt that the archmage Khadgar had already begun searching these islands. Nightfallen scavengers scurried about, but they were sent fleeing once they sensed the warlock's menace. Many hid within the decades-old shipwrecks that dotted the shoreline. Gul'dan was pleased; it would be frustrating for Khadgar to inspect them all. There was not a raven in sight, though some vultures soared high above. They kept their distance.

"What happened here? With… the other one?" The questions tasted sour, but he needed to know. All he had heard—among the screams of the unfortunate Alliance and Horde soldiers who had fallen into his care on Draenor—was that the Gul'dan from this timeline had accompanied the first Horde to war. He had been defeated and killed. Eventually. Details were harder to come by. Perhaps that meant Gul'dan had met an unremarkable end, a death not worth retelling. That was not a satisfying thought.

—*YOU RAISED AN ISLAND, THAL'DRANATH, FROM THE WATERS.*—

"At your command?" Gul'dan asked.

—*YOU ARE NOT HERE TO ASK QUESTIONS. YOU ARE HERE TO VISIT THAT ISLAND AGAIN. IT IS A LONG WALK. MOVE.*—

Gul'dan's thoughts continued to swirl in treacherous waters. *There must be something powerful here.* Why else would Kil'jaeden want him to remain ignorant of it? *I may have to obey him, but I do not need to trust him,* Gul'dan decided. Kil'jaeden was known as "the Deceiver" for very good reasons, after all.

"May I at least ask what is on that island?"

—*THE TOMB OF SARGERAS.*—

At that moment, dead silence fell over the land. The vultures veered away. Rodents vanished into their warrens.

Someone was coming. Gul'dan stopped. He listened. He waited. Carefully, very carefully, he wreathed himself in fel power, a simple trick but a useful one. To anyone farther than two paces, Gul'dan would be invisible. Anyone who stepped closer would soon see nothing at all.

He kept his eyes open, but his mind raced. "Sargeras's tomb? He's dead?" he whispered.

—*YOU UNDERSTAND NOTHING.*—

Kil'jaeden had given that answer to many of Gul'dan's questions. The orc's patience was strained each time he heard it.

Someone was moving among the rocks. Gul'dan sensed it before he saw it.

A flash of motion caught his eye. Not a single pebble rustled as a cloaked figure glided on silent footsteps. She emerged into a patch of light, curved blades and emerald armor glittering, each movement taken with confidence and purpose. Not an inch of skin was visible beneath her helmet, yet it seemed she had no trouble surveying everything around her.

Gul'dan smiled. Cordana Felsong had worn something similar. *A Watcher? Here? Very interesting.*

He was tempted to ambush this one, but she was angling north. He followed. Where there was one, there would likely be more. Those Nightfallen had been weak, and their life essences had granted Gul'dan little power. The souls of Watchers would be worth the time to collect.

Kil'jaeden said nothing to stop him. And it burned, oh yes, it *seared* Gul'dan's pride to wonder whether his master would *allow* him this small bit of freedom.

Gul'dan's magic kept him hidden as he hurried after the Watcher. Twice he had to halt as she changed course, veering in irregular patterns before looping around to her original bearing. She

was searching for something. Him? Unlikely. It would take a great fool to hunt Gul'dan alone. Even Khadgar had sought the aid of allies first.

Soon the Watcher rounded the edge of a cliff and emerged onto a flat plateau. A half-dozen others were already there.

Yes…

Gul'dan waited in the shade, gathering power as the Watcher he had followed joined them. He could hear only snatches of their conversation.

"… dead Nightfallen…"

"… sunken ship on the horizon…"

"… as you command, Warden Shadowsong."

Gul'dan peered at them. That name was familiar. Where had he…? Ah yes. Maiev Shadowsong. She was Cordana's leader, spoken of in fear. *If she ever learns of my betrayal,* Cordana had said, *I will have to beg for an end as easy as Illidan's.*

If Gul'dan could kill Maiev right now, that would be one fewer threat to worry about.

He prepared his ambush, a blistering whirlwind of death. They had no chance. They did not even suspect he was here. He raised his hands and—

—*HIDE.*—

Kil'jaeden's voice thundered through his mind. Gul'dan nearly collapsed from the sheer force of it. He dropped his hands, his ambush forgotten. "What…?"

Then he heard it.

Cutting across the plateau was a raven's cry.

Gul'dan dispelled his attack in an instant, hoping desperately it hadn't been sensed. He looked up. The raven swooped downward. For a moment, Gul'dan thought he had been spotted.

But the raven merely circled the plateau twice and then dived down to the Watchers. They watched it approach. In the blink of an eye, the raven transformed. The man who remained walked with a confident stride.

Gul'dan's eyes blazed. His jaw clenched hard enough to cause pain.

"Hello, Maiev," Khadgar said, brushing a feather off of his shoulder.

"I do not remember sending for you, Archmage," the leader said coldly.

"Your legendary charm hasn't faded a bit," Khadgar replied. Then he was next to her, speaking too quietly to be overheard.

Gul'dan silently cursed. "I should end this fool now," he said.

—*THEY ARE IRRELEVANT. LEAVE.*—

"I can kill them all."

—*YOU ARE NOT HERE FOR THEM. OBEY, GUL'DAN.*—

Khadgar was right there. Vulnerable.

In that moment, Gul'dan considered treason. He had known that binding himself to the Burning Legion would require service. He had accepted it. And in return, he had received tremendous power.

But he had not made a pact to be a puppet.

He had delivered *others* into mindless obedience—and if Grommash Hellscream's idiot son had not interfered, he would have delivered many more—but that was not to be Gul'dan's fate. No. His destiny was to rule worlds for the Legion. Service, not slavery. *If the Legion disagrees, the pact is* already *broken,* Gul'dan thought.

But in this moment, treason meant death. Enemies were everywhere. This world was strange and set against him. Gul'dan didn't even know what power the Legion wanted him to claim. Kil'jaeden had kept him on a short leash. Too short to rebel.

For the moment, Gul'dan would play the obedient pet. "I serve, Kil'jaeden." He slowly retreated.

—*YOUR DESTINATION IS TO THE EAST. FIND A WAY TO TRAVERSE THE BAY. YOU NO LONGER HAVE TIME TO WALK AROUND SURAMAR.*—

Gul'dan had an idea about that. He left Khadgar and the Watchers behind and returned to the eastern shoreline. There, atop a shipwreck with Alliance markings, was a small rowboat. It was lashed to the ship by a single rotting rope. One firm tug brought the boat down into the gentle surf. He had never rowed before, but it was simple to learn, and he didn't need to go far. Soon he had put enough distance between himself and the shore—and Khadgar—that he set down the oars and used more pleasing means to move forward. The boat's wake shimmered dark green. On occasion, a fish would surface belly-up.

Kil'jaeden kept him pointed in the correct direction, and within the hour, Gul'dan's destination rose above the horizon. The island was flat, but a strange structure on it stabbed at the sky. Up close, it loomed above Gul'dan. A monument. A promise. Spires and jagged bulwarks stood as testaments to its importance. Whatever it was now, it had once been a true fortress. To crack it open, it would have taken an invasion beyond even what the Iron Horde had planned for this world.

Why would such a place be abandoned? Perhaps its time had passed. Yet Kil'jaeden had reasons to bring him here. It infuriated Gul'dan that he didn't know what they were.

As he drew closer, he felt uneasy. The island *was* familiar. Not the sight of it. Something resonated from this place, some trace of his own power—the *other* Gul'dan's power—that remained from decades ago. Gul'dan no longer doubted he had been here before.

The rowboat's rotten hull broke apart as Gul'dan beached it on the forbidding shore. He walked the rest of the way to that mysterious tomb, where he sensed the unfamiliar magic of whoever had sealed the entrance. There were physical barriers of stone and enchanted metal, as well as an array of hidden arcane locks and gates. This was a simple problem to solve. Gul'dan began spinning fel magic in complex patterns, dismantling each obstacle with ease.

"What is inside? Guards? Traps?" Gul'dan asked.

—*YOUR PURPOSE.*—

Gul'dan paused. That wasn't an answer he had expected. "What will you have me do?"

—*YOU WILL OPEN THE WAY FOR US.*—

Gul'dan didn't understand. "We tried that on Draenor." It had taken a considerable amount of effort, too. All for nothing.

—*THERE, YOU SOUGHT TO CLEAR THE PATH YOURSELF. HERE, YOU NEED MERELY TURN THE KEY. THEN YOU WILL KNOW OUR TRUE POWER.*—

Another barrier fell. This one came with a trap. Dozens of spears wrought from fire and arcane power sprang toward Gul'dan. He absently waved a hand, and they vanished. His thoughts were focused elsewhere. "This is what the other Gul'dan was meant to do. What happened?"

—*YOU FAILED YOUR PURPOSE.*—

"That was not me," he growled.

—*WE WILL SEE.*—

"How did he fail?"

—Disloyalty.—

Gul'dan could trust nothing the Deceiver was saying. Perhaps here, as on Draenor, it was the Legion that had failed.

But they brought me here twice for a reason. Something inside was so powerful that even death could not divert Gul'dan's destiny. Perhaps that destiny was aligned with his masters' plans. Perhaps not.

That thought made Gul'dan smile.

The final defense on the tomb's entrance shattered. Gul'dan blasted the door apart with a thundering boom. Now he needed to move fast; that sound would draw attention.

"Guide me, Kil'jaeden," Gul'dan said. "I will succeed."

He entered the darkness of the Tomb of Sargeras. It was clear the place was massive, with countless corridors descending deep underground. The weight of magics from millennia past and the destinies of this world's souls pressed upon him. He quickly shuffled forward. Kil'jaeden no longer needed to urge him on. Gul'dan was eager to unearth this tomb's secrets, for whatever power lay inside would soon rest in his hands.

Not the Legion's. His.