



The Broken Isles

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The Broken Isles, that lie in the northernmost reaches of the Wine Sea, were once known as the Kingdom of Brin, and a proud prince ruled there. Then came the Great Gawl, King of the Dragons, flying out of the west five thousand years ago, and the prince of Brin came out to parley with him, for Gawl was a fearsome drake, and the fume of his breath could poison a man in a heartbeat.

Gawl asked for the western part of the prince's kingdom – “For,” he said, “those shores are rocky and infertile, and you have no need of them. Give them to me and my kin, and we will let your cities alone.”

The prince thought about this, but finally he refused. “I have twenty thousand men,” he told the dragon, “with tall spears and polished shields and iron helms. And you are only one, though you say you have kin. I will let you have the Fell Mountain, that men fear to look upon, as your domain, but that is all!”

Gawl grinned at this – though indeed Gawl always grinned, for that is what dragons do – and shook his long head.

“That will not do, little man,” he said. “I want the whole western part of your kingdom, from the Slow Channel to the Fell Mountain, and you will give it to me, or I will burn your cities and your people; and your twenty thousand men, with their tall spears and polished shields and iron helms, will not help you.”

And he licked his lips.

The prince quaked a little then, but he was proud as I have said, and he replied: “I cannot accept these terms. You must stay here until I have decided what to do.”

But as his soldiers started to march away, Gawl gobbled them up, and the prince only just made it inside the gates of his city in time.

There he brooded. And Gawl rampaged through the countryside, killing and burning, until finally he came to the prince's city, and then he said again: “Now then, little man. What you denied to me I have now taken by force – and what's more I have burned your cities and your people, and I have eaten your twenty thousand men, with their tall spears and polished shields and iron helms, and very tasty they were, too. Now you will give me your eastern lands as well, or I will destroy you and your city.” And he grinned his dragon's grin.

But the prince was stubborn and proud, and did not relent.

“For,” he said, “I have ten thousand archers, with long bows and nimble fingers and swift arrows, and you are only one, though you say you have kin. I will let you have the

western lands, from the Slow Channel to the Fell Mountain, that men fear to look upon, but that is all!”

Then Gawl let out a great roar, that shook the trees and blew the roofs off the houses, and said: “That will not do, little man – for I already have the western lands, from the Slow Channel to the Fell Mountain, and what is more I have burned your cities and your people, and I have eaten your twenty thousand men, with their tall spears and polished shields and iron helms, and now I will eat your ten thousand archers, too, so that you may know that I am the King of the Dragons, and I will not be trifled with.”

And so the Great Gawl was as good as his word, and he ate the ten thousand archers, with their long bows and nimble fingers and swift arrows, and then he burped, loudly.

And now the prince was left alone. And he shook his fist at the dragon, and said: “Foul and deceitful beast! You have killed my soldiers, and murdered my people! But you will never take me, for the walls of this city have withstood frost and fire, and they will not yield to you.”

But the Great Gawl merely grinned his dragon’s grin. And he began to beat his great wings. And he beat them so hard that they caused a great gale to whip up around the city. And then he stamped his great feet. And he stamped them so hard that the earth shook, and the birds tumbled squawking from the sky. And then he shook his great head, so that thunder and lightning crackled about it. And the prince cowered in his city.

But it was no use. For the winds blew, and the earth trembled, and the thunder rumbled, so that the city walls started to crack, and then the ground itself, and finally the whole kingdom of Brin, until it broke apart, and all that was left were barren islands floating in the Wine Sea. And all the people who had not been buried or burned by the dragon’s fire perished beneath the waves; and ever since they have called that place the Broken Isles, and no man will go near, for it is a haunt of drakes, and darkness follows them like a shadow.



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