

ANGEHLAH AND THE FIRST PEOPLE

A phrase and story as old as the Sentience of The First People- *life is yours for the taking-* still echoes in the minds of the people of Rhyonis. Were it not for those few simple words, there would be no written history, no memory, nor would there be anything of The First People at all. Every humanoid lineage knows the story; the tale being an innate part of their consciousness from the moment of their first thought. This being, of course, Angehlah's sacrifice and Gift of Sentience. Even before their mothers' first words to them, a child would know the phrase that Angehlah used to spread Her Gift, as it is this magic that resonates within their minds. This Gift fuels their sense of reason, their drive, and their very nature which the Wyrms and their children were innately born with. Though, *they* were deemed too unpredictable with this Sentience by the Creation Gods and as such, The First People had not been entrusted with it.

It is said that, like a wild blizzard, Angehlah, the Iciscale Wyrm- first of her kind to walk the realm and one of the first Altruistic Wyrms- moved from her frozen roost on Ish-Gahn's southern tip, speaking to the minds of the elves to impart this blessing. She would then soar northward to follow in the wake of the remaining First People. Though it was an act of kindness, Angehlah knew all too well that this was also an act of war. In spite of this, towards the end of the Dawn of Creation, it was imperative to make bold decisions.

Her Gift would illustrate The First People as an even more appealing target for her enemies; the Nihilistic Dragons. She took a defiant stance and awoke many enslaved minds under the ruling claws of the vile souled dragons that would see The First People in continued servitude. She would charge Her six children- Tylearious, Jacohbin, Pagorah, O'Rius, Carriko, and Rosilver- with the defense of The First People as she continued her path of enlightenment. Each one of these imposing argent dragons lead small armies of their own command that would fight back against the atrocities directed towards their mother's subjects with violent frozen frenzy. Like the snowflake that begins an avalanche, the momentum of these actions set off the renaissance of Rhyonis and life prospered under Angehlah's watchful icy eyes.

As grateful for being awoken as The First People were, never had such terror been thrust upon anyone more than those the Nihilistic Dragons sought out immediately after the Gift of Sentience. Her actions granted the newly conscious minds understanding of pain and fear just in time for their lives to be cut short, if they were lucky. Some would be captured and tormented mercilessly if they were found and utilized as slaves or weapons.

The strike against The First People was not what Angehlah had intended at all, mortified that this outcome had come to pass. She felt her resolve wither as even many of the Altruistic Dragons thought her actions foolish, blaming her for the legendary, full-scale war they now found themselves in; the War of Draconic Divergence. For all those that scorned and blamed her, the vast majority of Altruistic Dragons rallied behind Angehlah and her actions, realizing that whatever fallout were to come from them, the realm would be stronger for The First People having been granted Sentience.

Nearly a millennium of war would rage on between the clashing dragons and humanoid forces that both sides used to their advantage. It wasn't until much loss on both fronts had weighed so heavily on Angehlah's heart that she almost gave up the fight and succumbed to the darkness surrounding her entirely. Only she knew how close she had come to the brink of madness herself. Madness, which she had once saved the world from.

Her cause had seen just as much death as the times before and it now seemed pointless to her in those tired moments. It was her six most trusted lieutenants- her children who initially defended the small colonies of The First People when she began to spread her Gift- who rallied to bolster her resolve. Together, a family greater united, they formulated a powerful spell that would need Angehlah as the central point; a freezing spearhead that would coast over the most violent war zone in Ish-Gahn. This territory had become known as the Wyrm Wastes for the countless lives squandered and sacrificed by the machinations of the dragons' most ancient ancestors.

Conflict had been rather centralized around the Wastes for the last hundred years, and the remainder of the Nihilistic Wyrms found themselves collecting here to make a final move on Angehlah's frozen fortress, Crystallus, the capital of Ish-Gahn. With her six lieutenants on her flanks, they unanimously flew and exhaled their tundral breath over the entirety of Ish-Gahn as they soared, ensuring that no harm befell their allies with the magic of the spell cast called *Silvynos*. The family saved countless of The First People- and dragonkind that fought for the side of knowledge and peace- while simultaneously destroying those that still fought to enslave, torture, and destroy. After grueling millennia, the realm would fall into an icy peace, despite itself.

The land was utterly devastated, though it was now infused with much of the lingering draconic magic cast through *Silynos*. Corpses of countless dragons were buried beneath the soil in a glacial blast and the Wyrm Wastes expanded to blossom into a massive lavender field. To this day, the followers of Angehlah busily tend to this field now known as the Fields of Angehlah. In fact, the Ice Elvan society of Crystallus has become almost entirely correlated with the Fields, earning them the reputation of '*Lavender Bees*'.

During the days that followed the casting of *Silynos*, Tylearious- Angehlah's eldest son and most tactful of her lieutenants- discovered a tome which held many magical secrets within. This tome was found beneath the wreckage of a Nihilistic Dragon outpost.

Tylearious could quite literally feel the raw power it pulsed with like deep, heavy sighs. Countless compiled spells and secrets, foreign to even his vast knowledge, held all in a single book. Simply being in its presence was captivating, tantalizing, and mesmerizing to the point where he found himself transfixed and unable to move from it. He felt it extremely odd his family was so successful in their attack against their foes if they held magic like this, so he immediately took it to his mother, knowing that something was amiss.

This detail, though, is unknown by the common Rhyonian. For the moment that Tylearious entered his mother's chamber with the magic, She- now a Goddess after Her ascension- sensed its importance and had both of them locked away. Both, child and weapon, sealed within a special chamber so that even the memory of this magic could never escape. All this to ensure the terror of a time forgotten would not be remembered.

Much has changed in draconic society since the days before the War of Draconic Divergence, and even more so since the Wyrms first emerged from Rhyonis' roots. Angehlah, haunted by the memories of the horrors of The First People, what they were truly capable of, and truths which motivated Her actions, stands as a testament to the resilience of love, kindness, and sacrifice. That said, descendants of the Wyrms, and spare few of the ancient dragons, reside scattered and separate from one another across the realm. The War of Draconic Divergence saw much loss on either side of the ideology regarding The First People, and loss beyond measure of those that remained would come during the Quelling of the Fire Worn Spires, but that's a story for another time.

Presently, as Angehlah has Her eldest child locked away to safeguard Her charge, She ponders the fate of Her kind and the now flourishing realm She helped to build. Knowing all too well that Her adversaries and allies alike have hidden eggs of their own in hibernation, She waits for their emergence; an emergence that could herald another, worser fate. As She is unsure if those yet to come will aid The First People or destroy them, the inevitable hatching of a scattered clutch wears on every thought. Will these resurgent soldiers keep the quelled storm at bay, or will they incite the primal savagery She remembers in Her deepest nightmares? For either outcome, She waits to act accordingly.

Angehlah alone knows the events that wrought this new age She watches over; the Dusk of Uncertainty. With violent shivers that shake even Her icy core, She recalls the memories of a time before Sentience, to when the great threat of utter madness reigned. Rallying Herself, steeling Her nerves as She has in the face of adversity since the

Dawn of Creation, She stands as the Frozen Vanguard, unwilling to allow darkness to thrive again.

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As cold and dark as Theurgius' shore, so too were the hearts and minds of The First People. Little more than beasts of burden, they clambered from the unturned soil of the Life Glade and fertilized it with slaughter. Like all beings to emerge directly from Rhyonis, The First People were brought into the realm in peak physical form of adult age for their individual species. Although, due to the limitations the Creation Gods placed on them- namely the lack of Sentience they had imparted on the Wyrm and dragons- they lacked the cognitive awareness to do anything other than primal, instinctive survival. This would bring what might be called family units together, but not out of emotional intimacy or a concept such as love so foreign to them as thought itself, but a lustful desire to procreate and produce Life Essence of their own. With those desirous urges, came violent bouts of carnage.

The Wyrm looked at these horrific displays simultaneously, albeit through very different lenses. The Altruistic Dragons watched with disgust and abhorrence for such a waste of life. Meanwhile, the Nihilistic Dragons studied and observed the brutality with a morbid curiosity for what these tools could be used for. There was also a sizable collective of Impartial Dragons of their draconic ilk who refused to engage with either ideology- nor the creatures they observed- and remained cloistered within their own ranks, far away from the growing turmoil.

Of those who were fixated on the newcomers into the realm, none were more concerned than the legendary Angehlah, first of the

Iciscales; tundral dragons with blizzard-like breath and scale of hard-as-diamond icicles. She had acted as mediator for many a debate between various draconic parties during her time- even before The First People emerged- and she saw that, with reason, dragons of every ideology or elemental affinity could, occasionally, see eye to eye.

Early in those days, as she was beginning to formulate her idea to spread Sentience to The First People- to prevent the continued slaughter and tragic fading of Life Essence- war had already begun under her nose. Both Altruistic and Nihilistic Dragons had absconded with droves of The First People beneath their wings. It seemed wherever the dragons found their lairs, the humanoids they brought with them would be locked away within these secret quarters across the realm for protection, servitude, or experimentation.

Those left to the savage ways of their people within the Life Glade of Ish-Gahn- a mere several hundred miles from Angehlah's glacial roost of Crystallus- did not survive long. Some did manage, by no small miracle, to make their way past the mountains surrounding the Life Glade, but those were few and far between.

A land already rife with Life Essence became even more fertile as the hordes of every group of projects of the Creation Gods stumbled forth and clashed into each other in mindless confusion. Angehlah could see all of this from her mountain home and sat, utterly beside herself. She pondered the insanity that was but another facet of the creation of the Creation Gods. She wracked her mind for an answer as to why this is the way it was and, to her great sorrow, she felt herself slipping into the forlorn admittance of defeat so many of her companions had come to. Against her better judgement, she soon

began to think that there was nothing to be done, that she should abandon hope alongside The First People.

“It is what it is . . .” Angehlah exhaled and allowed her frigid breath to dance with a snowy sway. With that breath, she released ambition as the self-appointed savior of The First People. That was until her daughter, Rosilver, entered her chamber.

Little more than a hatchling at this time, Rosilver, Angehlah’s youngest child, was a cheery if withdrawn dragon of only a few decades. Regardless of her age, she was still knowledgeable and capable of magic and wonders, the likes of which The First People could never achieve as they were. Before she could utter the first syllable of her question, the inspiration hit Angehlah like a burst of warmth and light in a cold and dark winter storm.

She knew that The First People were to be treated as the children of herself and all the Wyrms. She felt so blind to not have seen it before; that as the Wyrms fostered knowledge in their own children, they were to be the enlighteners of The First People if they had any hope of survival.

With purpose and new understanding, Angehlah took to the task at hand; saving The First People from death and destruction. In spite of the fall out that may come from it, she knew that life in Rhyonis would never progress if it simply stomped itself out ceaselessly, if love and compassion were not extended to those who needed it most. With great haste, leaving Rosilver in the chamber alone, confused and with her question lingering on the breath between her lips, Angehlah flew to the Life Glade to make her move against the chaos pouring from the central point of all the Life Essence in the world.

In a matter of minutes, the great Argent Matron caught herself as she made contact on a mountain peak overlooking the Life Glade. The terror was something to behold through her distant cavern's maw, but at this proximity, the ancient dragon could not contain the disgust roiling in her gut like plague.

Repugnant, all-consuming desolation lay waste to what would have been the sacred ground of the Life Glade. What Angehlah knew once as rolling fields of luminous jade-like grass, speckled with wildflowers of every imaginable color- glowing with an awareness all their own, with streams of crystal blue water that flowed as gracefully as time- had become nothing more than a cesspool of blood and flesh and waste.

It was a wonder to her that anything could manage to escape the destruction here, but to her own witness, she had seen creatures- not entirely unlike the beasts before her now- beyond the Dragon Spine Mountain that surrounded the Life Glade of Rhyonis. Those lucky few would not be saved from the same fate if something were not done as unchecked violence begets more violence. If the Creation Gods could create her and her kin with Sentience, why couldn't she impart *her* wisdom with *these* creatures and stop this atrocity?

Then, she saw Her. Hidden within the cloud of death and misery, was a monumental, grey-toned woman, looming within the shadows of the mountain like a haunting specter. She would have flown away in horror were she not so caught in the bewildering and demanding gaze that had her eyes and body locked in place.

“So, Frozen Vanguard . . .” She spoke in a voice that was slow, cold, and gravelly as the echoing shouts of death dotting the

soundscape beneath their confrontation. “You seek to end this madness before it’s truly even begun.”

Angehlah tried to struggle against the bind, all too aware of who was addressing Her; The Grey Lady, Alaxendaria, the Creation Goddess of Death. She wished to speak and plead for release, merely being in Her presence was enough to chill even the Icyscale to the bone. The Grey Lady continued to drroll on in Her powerful voice that seemed to push Angehlah closer and closer to the grave with each dolorous syllable.

“I too would like to see this end, but it is my job to collect, not to intervene. There is so much more to come into this world, well beyond this once transcendent Glade. You have a gift entrusted to you by my family, as do all dragons, but you are special in that you had the compassion to wish to impart your being, sacrificing a moment with your own child to save these many.

“You are the Harbinger of Sentience, Angehlah, and it is you that will free the minds of The First People, but in so doing, will bring about your fiercest foe; a foe far darker than even myself, these subjects, and anything else you’ve yet to face. Their identity is yet to be clear, but the Madness and other Remnants of Power here are but a taste of what will inevitably be brought upon this newborn world. Should you be successful in this, you will be granted immortality to stand as the Frozen Vanguard to ensure that whatever befalls the realm, this tumult shall not happen again, so long as you are there to protect them. If you agree to save them, and wake them from this *Ammora*, I will put them to sleep, and you will teach them to *Daria*.”

With a sudden inhale, Angehlah was free of the grasp and could finally respond as the pressure released her lungs and she could

once more breathe. Her body trembled against the weight of the lingering gaze and insurmountable pressure of the decision.

Ammora. Daria. New words she had not heard before but knew to mean *Nightmare* and *Dream* respectively. These words were infused with magic for a spell to be cast that could awaken and fill the empty minds of The First People.

Presented with this destined crossroad, she knew the course she must take. Speaking with all the strength she could muster, knowing the consequences for either decision- for or against the will of a goddess- would be catastrophic. She'd serve the rest of her eternal life defending the world from this darkness and devastation.

“I will do whatever must be done! Please stop this! Your Almightyness, my creator, I will teach these people as you would see of me! I only wish to serve and protect the realm!” Angehlah roared against the enrapturing pressure of a pillar of creation. She howled with all the might she could muster, but the goddess was no longer there. Nothing was there. Just silence, save for Angehlah's breathing against the night air.

She looked around and beneath her, searching for any trace of the Creation Goddess, but Alaxendaria had vanished just as wholly as the light from the eyes of a corpse. Then, strewn across the ground, steadily breathing in rhythmic patterns, were the remainders of The First People still within the Life Glade.

Ammora. Alaxendaria's voice rang in Her mind, breaking the stunned silence, she found herself in.

Daria. Sleeping. They were *all* sleeping. It all seemed so easy when a goddess intervened. Angehlah wasted no time and immediately

flew closer to survey the slumbering people, apparently peaceful and at ease for the first time since emerging from the roots of Rhyonis. She almost shed a tear for them in that moment, though the undeniably vile capabilities of their conscious forms stifled sadness. She smiled, knowing that, when they awoke, they'd be free from the darkness of their former condition and whispered the words she had been taught alongside her hope for them.

“Ammora. Life is yours for the taking. Daria.”

A massive trembling began to shake and, with sparks of ethereal arcane energy, Angehlah witnessed the sound waves of her voice condense and explode outward in a tremendous, cracking reverberation. They carried everywhere, across the entirety of the realm, to all the denizens spread through Rhyonis.

Waves of newfound power and energy coursed over her like the ocean's first caress of the shoreline. Centering herself with a sense of crisp clarity, she found herself standing over shambling forms, rising from a slumber. These would be the first of The First People to walk the realm consciously; the elves.

They were tall and slender folk with youthful but sharp and angular features, blooming to life against the light of a sunlit dawn. With this vibrant radiance of a new day reflecting off the magnificent silver sheen of Angehlah's scales, a new era was just on the horizon. For the first time, The First People saw, understood, and revered, bowing and pledging their devotion to the Iciscle Wyrm, Angehlah, the Argent Matron, Harbinger of Sentience, the Frozen Vanguard, Goddess of Sentience, First of the Ascended Gods.