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# The Echoes of Belmorra

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## Introduction

In the heart of a world divided by shifting allegiances and forgotten magic stands Belmorra—once a beacon of enlightenment, now an enigma cloaked in ruin. Centuries have passed since the city's sudden fall, its name reduced to little more than a cautionary whisper on the lips of wary travelers. To some, the ruins are cursed—a labyrinth of crumbling spires and silent streets haunted by the regrets of ages past. To others, Belmorra is a legend, a puzzle yearning for resolution amid the overgrowth of time and memory.

Yet, as unquiet seasons sweep across the realm, old wounds threaten to reopen. Rumors spread of ominous portents and the awakening of powers thought long extinct. The uneasy balance between those who wield magic and those who distrust it is failing, tugged by unseen forces that radiate outward from Belmorra's shattered heart. In the gathering shadows, an ancient prophecy stirs, one that promises either the world's salvation or its doom—echoes of hope and dread, driven by choices yet to be made.

Drawn toward this nexus of possibility are three unlikely souls. Auren, the exiled soldier, pursues atonement for mistakes he cannot forget, his honor tarnished by war and heartbreak. Nyla, the mysterious scholar, scours ancient texts beneath her quiet demeanor, searching for truths that might grant meaning to her fragmented past. And Jarek, a brash treasure hunter, chases fortune and fame, yet secretly hungers for purpose beyond gilded trophies. Each harbors secrets. Each believes themselves alone—until fate's cunning threads begin to entwine their paths.

As they answer Belmorra's siren call, danger lurks at every turn. The city's leftover guardians—spectral echoes and cunning contraptions—challenge those who would trespass, while competing factions vie for dominance in the hushed corridors of power. Ancient mechanisms and hidden traps lie in wait alongside the city's darker magic, and the deeper the trio ventures, the more intimately their destinies become entwined with Belmorra's own.

Throughout their journey, the line between friend and foe blurs. Haunted by their inner demons, confronted by shifting loyalties, and tested by trials both mortal and mystical, Auren, Nyla, and Jarek must learn to trust one another. Only by unraveling the secrets Belmorra has guarded for centuries—the reason for its downfall, and the threat it now harbors—will they stand a chance against the storm that approaches.

The Echoes of Belmorra is a tale of discovery, loss, and the resilience of the human spirit. Set against a backdrop where science and sorcery have become inseparably

entwined, this epic fantasy invites readers to explore a world where even the smallest choices reverberate across history, and where the echoes of the past may shape the fate of all that is yet to come.

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## CHAPTER ONE: The Call of Shadows

The wind, a bitter sculptor of the northern wastes, tore at Auren's threadbare cloak, whipping strands of his dark hair across eyes that had seen too much. He huddled deeper into the scant shelter of a crumbling ice-shrine, the etched runes on its frozen stones long since faded into illegibility. Three days he'd been chasing a phantom, a whisper carried on the frigid air, leading him further from the meager comforts of the outpost and deeper into the desolate expanse known only as the Grey March. It was a fool's errand, he knew, a penance he hadn't been explicitly assigned but felt compelled to endure.

He hadn't always been a solitary shadow, chasing ghosts across frozen plains. Once, the glint of polished steel and the thunder of cavalry had been his life. Captain Auren of the Silver Guard, they'd called him. The irony wasn't lost on him now, his current attire a stark contrast to the gleaming armor of his past. The Guard had cast him out, his name stripped of its accolades, his honor tarnished by a single, catastrophic misjudgment that still haunted his waking thoughts and tormented his sleep. Redemption was a distant star, but the pursuit of it was the only thing that kept him moving.

His current quest, if it could even be called that, began with a rumor – a half-heard tale from a fur trapper who swore he'd seen flickering lights in the distance, far beyond the recognized boundaries of exploration. Not the aurora borealis, the trapper had insisted, but something rhythmic, almost... deliberate. Auren, ever drawn to the inexplicable, had dismissed it initially. But the seed of curiosity, once planted, refused to wither. And so, he'd packed his sparse provisions, sharpened his trusty broadsword – a relic from his Guard days, surprisingly untarnished – and set off.

Now, as the last vestiges of twilight bled into a starless night, Auren saw them. Faint, pulsating glows on the horizon, too numerous and too regular to be natural phenomena. They shimmered with an unnatural blue light, a cold fire that seemed to mock the icy landscape. The air grew colder, if such a thing were possible, and a subtle hum vibrated through the ground beneath his worn boots. It was an ancient sound, a resonance that spoke of power both forgotten and awakening.

He pushed onward, the strange lights a beacon in the encroaching gloom. His body ached, protesting the relentless march, but his mind was alight with a grim determination. This wasn't about retrieving some lost artifact or mapping unknown territory. This felt different. Deeper. It felt like a calling, though he couldn't yet articulate what it was calling him to. The thought of Belmorra, the legendary city swallowed by time, flickered across his mind, a fleeting, almost superstitious notion.

Belmorra was south, far south. These lights were north. Yet, the same ancient hum seemed to echo in his bones.

As he drew closer, the lights resolved into a series of glowing markers, set into jagged obsidian monoliths that pierced the snow-covered earth like forgotten teeth. They formed a rough perimeter, enclosing something vast and indistinct in the shifting shadows. Auren approached cautiously, his hand instinctively resting on the hilt of his sword. The hum intensified, a low thrum that vibrated in his chest. The air crackled with a faint, static charge.

He passed between two of the monoliths, the blue light washing over him, cool and alien. Beyond the perimeter, the ground sloped downwards into a vast, unnatural chasm. And there, at the bottom of the chasm, was a structure. Or what remained of one. It was colossal, its scale dwarfing anything Auren had ever seen. Great, crumbling walls of dark stone rose from the snow, partially obscured by drifts and centuries of neglect. It was a fortress, a ruin, and something far grander all at once.

The blue lights weren't just markers; they were emanating from within the depths of this sunken edifice. They pulsed, drawing him in, their silent rhythm a relentless lure. This wasn't merely a trapper's fabrication. This was real. And it was profoundly unsettling. The silence of the Grey March had always been absolute, broken only by the shriek of the wind or the distant howl of a tundra wolf. Now, the silence was broken by the hum, and by the sheer, oppressive presence of this place.

He began the descent, each step crunching on the packed snow, the sound amplified in the strange, charged air. The closer he got, the more details emerged from the gloom. Scythe-like arches of ancient design, too intricate for mere fortress walls, twisted into grotesque shapes. Statues, half-buried in snow, depicted figures with elongated limbs and vacant, alien faces. This was not the work of any known civilization. This felt...older. Infinitely older.

A cavernous opening yawned before him, black as pitch, contrasting sharply with the pulsating blue light that spilled from within. It was an entrance, though to what, Auren couldn't fathom. He hesitated for only a moment, the ingrained caution of a seasoned soldier warring with the irresistible pull of the unknown. His past failures had taught him prudence, but they had also instilled a desperate need for answers, for something to cling to in the bleak landscape of his life.

He drew his sword, the familiar weight of the steel a comfort in his hand, and stepped into the darkness. The air inside was still and heavy, carrying the scent of damp earth and something else, something metallic and faintly sweet. The blue light, stronger now, cast long, distorted shadows that danced with his every movement. He found himself in a vast chamber, its ceiling lost in the darkness above, supported by massive, tapering columns of the same dark stone.

Intricate carvings adorned every surface, swirling patterns and cryptic symbols that seemed to writhe in the faint light. He couldn't decipher them, but he felt their meaning, a heavy weight of ancient knowledge pressing down on him. In the center of the chamber stood a massive pedestal, and upon it, a single, glowing crystal. This was the source of the blue light, pulsing with a steady, mesmerizing rhythm. It hummed, a song without words, that resonated deep within his bones.

As Auren approached the crystal, a strange sensation washed over him. Not cold, not warm, but a peculiar pressure, as if the air itself were thickening. Images flickered at the edge of his vision – fleeting glimpses of grand cities, flying vessels, and beings of immense power. It was like a memory that wasn't his own, a whisper from a forgotten age. He reached out a hesitant hand, drawn by an irresistible force.

Just as his fingertips brushed the smooth, cool surface of the crystal, a sharp, metallic clang echoed through the chamber. Auren whirled, sword raised, his senses on high alert. From the shadows, figures emerged. Not men, but constructs of metal and dark stone, their forms angular and menacing, their eyes glowing with the same blue light as the crystal. They moved with an unsettling grace, their silent approach unnervingly swift.

He was outnumbered, perhaps by half a dozen, their metallic limbs ending in razor-sharp blades. No words were exchanged. No challenge given. Only the cold, unyielding advance. Auren had faced worse odds in the war, but these constructs were unlike anything he'd ever encountered. Their movements were precise, their intent clear. They were guardians, and he was an intruder.

The first construct lunged, its blade whistling through the air. Auren parried, the clash of steel against unknown metal sending a jolt up his arm. He moved with a practiced fluidity, years of training kicking in, his mind focusing solely on survival. He ducked under another attack, spinning to deliver a powerful thrust that impacted against the construct's arm with a dull thud. It barely staggered. These were not flesh and blood.

He fought defensively, looking for an opening, a weakness in their seamless design. Their blows were relentless, each strike carrying immense force. The crystal pulsed faster, its blue light intensifying, casting chaotic shadows that made it harder to gauge his opponents. Auren found himself pushed back, step by painful step, towards the massive columns that lined the chamber. His breath misted in the cold air, his muscles screaming in protest.

He glimpsed an intricate symbol carved into one of the columns, directly behind him. It glowed faintly, as if reacting to the crystal's power. A desperate idea formed in his mind. If these constructs were tied to the crystal, perhaps there was a way to disrupt them. He parried another blow, the impact jarring his teeth, and then, with a surge of

adrenaline, he pivoted sharply, using the construct's momentum against itself.

He sidestepped, letting the charging construct smash directly into the glowing symbol on the column. There was a sudden flash of light, brighter than anything he'd seen, and a high-pitched whine that grated on his ears. The construct seized, its blue eyes flickering erratically before it collapsed, its metallic form shuddering and then falling utterly still.

It was a gamble, but it had paid off. The other constructs paused, their movements faltering for a fraction of a second. Auren didn't wait. He moved swiftly, weaving through their attacks, targeting the glowing symbols on the columns. He used his sword as a lever, pushing, shoving, and parrying to force the constructs against the carved stones. Each impact with a symbol resulted in a blinding flash and another construct falling lifelessly to the ground.

Soon, only one remained. It was larger, more heavily armored than the others, and its blows carried a savage intensity. Its blue eyes burned with an almost sentient fury. Auren faced it, his breathing ragged, sweat stinging his eyes. This one wouldn't be so easily fooled. He had to engage it directly.

He feinted left, then lunged right, aiming for a gap in its heavy plating. The construct reacted with surprising speed, deflecting his blade. But Auren anticipated its counter-attack, twisting his body to avoid a sweeping blow, and then, with a roar of exertion, he drove his sword upwards, finding a crevice in its chest plate. There was a spray of blue sparks, a whirring sound, and then, with a final, shuddering clang, the last guardian fell.

Auren stood panting amidst the fallen metal and stone, his sword dripping with an oily, metallic residue. The chamber was silent once more, save for the rhythmic hum of the crystal. He looked at the glowing artifact, no longer with apprehension, but with a renewed sense of purpose. This place, whatever it was, held secrets. Secrets that might just be connected to the whispers of impending doom, to the ancient prophecy that stirred in the world. He had come here seeking answers, and it seemed, answers were beginning to reveal themselves. The Grey March had led him not to a dead end, but to a beginning. The call of shadows had proven stronger than any fear.

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