

"OFRIN'S DRAGON"
Tales of the Echowood – Mini-Episode 01
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by

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"Homestead on the Corner"
By Trevor Van Winkle

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EXT. CAVE - BLUE MOUNTAINS - WINTER - EVENING

A small, damp-sounding fire sputters in a circle of rocks. The wind howls just outside the open mouth of a large cave, and DEEP, SLOW, HEAVY BREATHS RISE AND FALL from the enormous red dragon further within -- THE DRAGON OF FIRE.

A small, young-ish dwarf jabs at the fire with a stick, knocking a burnt-out log down into the embers. His beard is still a little patchy, but there are hints of premature grey at his temples -- OFRIN OLD-STONE.

DRAGON

(faint note of concern)

You didn't need to stay this long.

OFRIN

(shrugs)

Too late now... couldn't make it back if I tried, not in this storm.

DRAGON

(pointing out the obvious, insistent)

The firewood is getting low.

OFRIN

(trying to move past this)

Well I'm hardly going to freeze to death with the Dragon of Fire in here, am I?

DRAGON

My fire is not so keen as it should be, Old-stone... nor will--

OFRIN

(snapping slightly)

I'll be fine, alright! They'll send another cart down with fresh supplies as soon as the storm breaks, just... leave it.

Ofrin falls silent, as does the dragon. The wind howls. The fire sputters and hisses.

DRAGON

(seeing the real reason for his actions)

How fare your kin?

OFRIN

(suddenly uncomfortable)

My folks? They're uh...
(MORE)

OFRIN (CONT'D)
they're well. Struggling a bit
but... hanging in there.

DRAGON
(trying to get Ofrin to
speak the truth)
Why do they struggle?

OFRIN
(struggling to word this
right)
They uh... The people in the
village haven't been... There are
some people who say that, you know -
- with the winter like it is, we
shouldn't be using our coal and
firewood to, uh... uh...

DRAGON
(putting it together)
They blame your family for the fire-
death.

OFRIN
(beat -- SIGHS, deflating)
They blame me. My family's just in
the village more often... easier
target. Not that it's stopped some
of my cousins from buying into it
as well.

DRAGON
(trying to get him to
talk)
I see.

OFRIN
(impotent anger)
God I wish I could punch them
sometimes.

DRAGON
(concerned)
You wish violence upon your
kinfolk?

OFRIN
What? No! God no, it's just
sometimes I... I don't know, it
feels like it would be easier if I
could. Simpler.

DRAGON

(pause, then calling him
out)

Have you ever chosen the easy way
before, Ofrin Old-Stone? Have you
ever trod the well-worn path, or do
you seek your own way? A better
way? A way that--

OFRIN

(throwing up his hands)

Yes, yes, alright... I get it, can
we just -- not talk about it right
now?

DRAGON

(dubious)

What else is there to speak of? The
cold? It is unbroken, today as it
was yesterday and many days before.
The cave? It is unchanged since my
arrival. The only events worth
speaking of are up on the mountain,
where your people dwell... and you
seem bound and determined not to
speak of them.

OFRIN

Why do we need to talk? Can't we
just... sit here?

DRAGON

To not speak when the heart is full
says more than silence, Old-
stone... you know this well enough.

OFRIN HEAVES A HEAVY, ANNOYED SIGH... then pauses.

OFRIN

(genuine curiosity)

What about your kin?

DRAGON

(confused, matter of
factly)

Fire has no kin.

OFRIN

(insistent)

The other dragons. You mentioned
them when we first met... can you
tell me about them?

DRAGON

(pause, uncertain and
slightly uncomfortable)

I... suppose I could. I cannot
think of any harm that could come
of it... and we do have a night to
fill, I suppose.

(beat)

Very well, Ofrin Old-Stone... I
will tell you of my kin.

(DEEP BREATH, gathering
thoughts)

It is not right to say our story
has a beginning, for we four
existed before time... before the
foundations of this Echowood were
set down, before history, before
the sun began to turn and the days
could be counted. Earth. Water.

Air. Fire. Eldest of all living
things, born before the elements
and forming them with our being at
the bidding of the old god and the
maker-child. Ours were the first
eyes which opened and beheld the
unformed Echowood, in an age so
long forgotten it can hardy be said
to have happened at all. But if I
tell this as a story -- that is
where it begins.

(beat)

Firstborn was Earth: the eldest,
wisest, and greatest of the
dragons. In the west did it rise,
formed from the cosmic chaos beyond
existence into a shape which
stretched across the whole of the
world as it was then. Its scales
were dark: mottled black and brown,
broken here and there with crystal
growths that glowed in the dark
before the first dawn. Its body was
low and wide, with two legs and two
short, broad wings upon which it
walked -- though it would never
fly. In those days it had but one
head on a long, snaking neck that
could reach from the foundations of
the Echowood to the roof of the sky
-- though in time many more would
grow, like the Hyrda of ancient
myth.

(MORE)

DRAGON (CONT'D)

And as it woke in the dark, the first living thing in the Echowood, it moved with slow, deliberate care -- but not with fear. For it was the Dragon of Earth, and the earth knows no fear.

(beat)

Second came Water: closest kin to the chaos which birthed it, vast and mysterious as the sea which formed around its snaking coils as it swam through the pre-existent ether. Green were its flanks, with a sharp crest of night-dark bone black as the fathomless deep atop its head. Leagues and leagues its sinuous body stretched into the sea, though it was smaller by far than its cousin Earth. Its yellow-gold eyes stared out into the blackness before the sun was made, and it saw all that was -- Earth, already ancient in the first moment of creation to the west... and Air, just stirring from its slumber far to the south.

(beat)

And yes... after Water came Air: the artisan, the painter of light, fairest and most beauteous of our kind, swimming through the sky as its flanks began to shine with light of every hue and shade. Before sun or moon or stars, the light of Air illuminated the darkened Echowood from on high. A wingless serpent, but still it flew -- its four small limbs trailing beneath it as it cut through the air to the highest reaches of existence, then curled into a twisting aurora far above. The half-formed sea shone in the brilliance of my closest cousin's art, and the dark eyes of Earth shone almost with tears... and then, last and least of all, came I.

(beat)

Fire. Smallest. Youngest. Fiercest. Proudest. My wings stretched barely a hundred feet across. The flame of my breath was bright, but would hardly trouble the least of my kin.

(MORE)

DRAGON (CONT'D)

I woke almost unnoticed in the east of the world, in the place where the sun was yet to rise, and gave a great roar that shook the ancient Echowood as I expelled a great blast of flame into the half-dark... but a moment later my roar was drowned out by the bellowing call of Earth and the storm-like song of Air. Perhaps Water sang too, though its cries were too deep and secret to be understood by any of the other Dragons. Our song filled the Echowood, and with it was Echowood fully born... Earth and Water and Air and Fire, rising at our call and filling the void of our birth with the designs of the creators.

(beat)

The mountains rose high above the firstborn, rich soil giving birth to the shining trees of the ancient Echowood, wreathed in silver and gold. The sea filled its bounds and crashed against the shores, as lakes and rivers bubbled and flowed in the forest beyond. Great clouds formed in the once-vacuum above, and in the dark before day the first stars twinkled to life upon the great disk of the sky. And as I roared again, trying desperately to be heard -- the sun rose at my back, outshining any fire I could ever breath.

(beat)

Where it shone, other lives began to spring forth from the depths of the Echowood -- the titanic beasts of prehistory, whose names were never spoken and whose forms are long buried in the depths of the underworld, consumed by the Dragon of Earth. The small scurrying things that live and breath in their billions unseen, unknown, and unmarked swarmed and multiplied beneath the trees.

(MORE)

DRAGON (CONT'D)

The fish and whales and sharks and crabs of the great sea rose from the impenetrable darkness of its depths to witness the first sunrise as the first age of the Echowood sprang to life... and all my cousins rejoiced to see it.

(beat)

But I -- I hardly marked its coming. My call had been first in the Echowood, my breath its first warmth -- but both had been entirely overshadowed by the roars of my kin and the coming of the sun. Earth, my elder, already laid burrowed in the depths of the Echowood in the deathlike half-slumber of the shades. Water surfaced only briefly from the waves to behold the sun before diving back into the fathomless dark below. And Air -- my brother and sister and closest elder kin -- curled and danced in the sunlit sky far above, all-but invisible to any eyes but mine. And to my gaze, its eyes and thoughts and mind seemed hardly to regard me... and my pride could not bear it.

(beat)

I could have called to Air. I could have lifted my voice into a song once more and stirred its heart to wonder. I could have realized that, small as I was, I would barely be noticed by such a great and wondrous being. But I did none of these things. I acted without thought, but not without reason -- for I will not pretend it was a madness or passion that overtook me. I am a dragon -- I am the spirit of fire -- and though my reason burns hot with the fire of emotion, it is a reason that is not so easily overwhelmed. And my reason? Pure jealousy. Spite. Pride. And so upon the wing I rose, higher and higher than I was ever meant to fly.

(MORE)

DRAGON (CONT'D)

Above the tallest mountains, above the thunderheads already forming at my approach, almost to the place where the sun turns between the Echowood and the stars -- and there my cousin at last saw me, as I tore through the clouds: fangs bared, talons sharp, flames blazing as I barreled into the side of the Dragon of Air.

(beat)

Long we grappled -- the strength and size and patience of my older cousin against the fire of my unbridled rage. I was less than a bothersome sparrow against its titanic bulk, but it did not wish to fight me -- or at the very least, it did not want to harm me, knowing the true danger such wounds posed to all the world below. It sought to turn my attacks aside as gently as possible, keeping its claws retracted and its teeth away from my flanks -- but I showed it no such courtesy. I bit. I clawed. I scorched its beautiful, shimmering scales with the heat of a thousand furnaces -- and yet it seemed unscathed. It pushed me back again and again, and I tore into it once more with renewed anger. Day turned to night as the sun completed its arc and my kin began to shimmer into azure radiance, stabbed here and there with gouts of orange flame as I poured out my rage -- and yet our strength did not falter. In that first day of creation our powers were limitless, and we had both just woken from the sleep of eons. I would not rest until I'd proved myself the stronger of us two -- the strongest of all Dragons.

(beat)

It mattered not that it was untrue. It mattered not that I was weakest and smallest of our kin, and any fool could see it.

(MORE)

DRAGON (CONT'D)

My heart burned with an anger I thought to be well-earned, and as I wheeled in the sky and plunged once more towards my sister-brother, that anger poured out in a roar and blast of flame that shone brightest blue as it crashed against the head of the Dragon of Air -- and in that moment, my kinfolk had opened its mouth. Perhaps it wished to speak a warning. Perhaps it was trying to roar and frighten me off my course. Perhaps it was trying to match my attack in turn -- after all, who's to say my kinfolk cannot breath out the energies of their elements in the same way I breath fire? It has never been seen -- but they are far more peaceful creatures than I.

(beat)

No matter what it sought to do, the Dragon of Air opened its mouth as the flames of my wrath crashed against its head -- and the protection of its scales and thicker hide gave way to the soft lining of its insides. Its flesh bubbled and cracked in the ferocious heat, and my kin gave the first cry of pain the Echowood had ever heard -- though it was drowned out a moment later, as the air below us turned suddenly to flame.

(beat)

I had forgotten -- or perhaps chosen to forget -- that we were both more than beasts, more than animals, more than simple living things. Our forms shaped and were shaped by the elements themselves -- air and fire, gave life by our lives. We were more than just spirits of those elements, more than mere representations of their form -- we were those elements, in a very real sense. And the war between Fire and Air in the sky above kindled the air below into a firestorm that swept across the Echowood in an instant. Every inch of the forest blazed and crackled with an oven-like heat, and in an moment all the golden trees of the Echowood turned ashen and black.

(MORE)

DRAGON (CONT'D)

The great beasts -- the winged reptiles and the many-tusked titans, the Jötunn of yore and the great trolls above the mountains -- caught flame with the trees, and all animals too large to bury themselves in burrows or caves or the soft earth of the forest were soon little more than ash and soot and bone. Only those living in the depths of my cousin's great sea were truly safe, and many descendants of that primeval world still dwell below those waves. But upon the surface of the newborn Echowood, the first age of life ended as it blazed into the scorching hell of a false sunrise.

(beat)

I felt the burning the moment it began -- of course I did. It was the first fire to ever shine beneath the trees, and the first which I did not breathe into being. I felt my power and my being pour out into it, shaping and fueling the flickering tongues of death... and I knew what it meant. I knew I'd made a horrible mistake. My breath caught in my throat, and the gout of flame which scorched my cousin failed... and yet the flames burned still, fed by the endless fuel of a world, burning. The Dragon of Air convulsed with pain as it tried to remain aloft, but I... I hovered on wings that beat almost without thought as I stared down at the dead and blackened Echowood... dead at my hand.

(beat)

The smell of charred flesh and feather and hair rose to meet me as the Dragon of Air fell towards the far-off waters of the great sea. Far above, the stars seemed to flicker and darken, as though they too had burned for the briefest of moments before being snuffed out by my arrogance. And though the fire within me blazed as hot and bright as it ever would -- my heart felt cold. It felt as if all things were ending, dying before their time...

(MORE)

DRAGON (CONT'D)

and my power was not strong enough to stop it.

(beat)

As I watched, the Dragon of Air drew near the far-off waves, and as it did the Dragon of Water rose once more from its depths. I did not see what happened then -- I was too far off, and my eyes were bleary with tears that smoked and steamed from the heat. But I saw the Dragon of Water raise its head to meet the Dragon of Air, and as it did, something new happened. The clouds, turned to thunder by my rage and scattered by my war, began to collect once more in the ash-choked sky, and from them poured a rain like none the Echowood has ever seen or will ever see again. A cleansing rain, which doused the flames consuming the land and washed the ashes down, down, down the rivers and streams and into the sea. In a matter of minutes, the Echowood was dark and quiet once more -- yet as I stared in disbelief through the scattering clouds, I heard a deep, rumbling roar from underground as the Dragon of Earth began once again to move. The ground below shifted in slow and rolling waves as great rifts opened up in the hearts of burned valleys and at the feet of the blackened mountains as the Echowood itself seemed to turn inside out as the black, dead earth was subsumed and replaced by verdant, growing fields and trees -- not of gold or silver, but of green and autumn hues. Not one hour since I had attacked my sister-cousin and burned it in my rage, it and my brother-kin had restored the face of the Echowood -- in lesser shades, perhaps, but better than charred ash.

(beat)

And yet... something still was missing. Something vital.

(MORE)

DRAGON (CONT'D)

Upon the surface of the world many insects and small animals yet scurried, and below the sea life still flourished in its uncounted forms -- but much of the life that once flourished beneath the sun was gone, and would perhaps take many centuries to return. It had been wiped out all at once within the first day of creation by my pride, and I knew that any number of calamities might snuff it out before it could be fully restored. And I realized then my purpose.

(beat)

I was smaller and weaker and more foolish than the other Dragons, my kinfolk -- but I alone of us four was close enough, near enough, foolish enough to risk myself for the sake of the many living beings within the Echowood. And so I would, and I did, and I will... until the sun goes dark once more, at the ending of all days.

The Dragon pauses, letting the final words of its story land as Ofrin sits beside the small fire, thinking.

OFRIN

(SIGHS, irritated by accepting)

You know, you're not half as clever as you think you are.

DRAGON

(CHUCKLES)

Now, whatever do you mean, Old-friend? I was just giving you what you asked for.

OFRIN

(SCOFFS, gentle annoyance)

What I needed, more like.

(beat, more serious)

I think I'll head back with the next supply cart... see if I can't talk some sense into my cousins.

DRAGON

(nodding)

I think that would be wise, child.

Ofrin glances over to the mouth of the cave, where snow curls in the roaring wind.

OFRIN
(offhand observation)
Storm's getting worse.

DRAGON
(gentle reassurance)
It will end. In its time.

The fire crackles. The wind howls. And Ofrin Old-Stone is not alone.

ROLL END THEME
AND CREDITS