

# **The birth of the Lightners**

A short story by  
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One bright night when the moon shone fully, bathing the mountains of an eerie silver pallor, Fhynaral, Goddess of darkness, approached uninvited Rhotgar's forge, located in the heart of the highest mountains of the world. The God of Metals, busy moulding and shaping a lump of gold under his fiery hammer, did not notice his guest.

Slightly annoyed, the Goddess raised her hand; a strong gust of wind blew into the forge, making the red coals spring sparks all over the place. Rhotgar swore and jumped three feet backwards, patting his beard to extinguish the quickly spreading flames. Once he made sure he wasn't on fire, he looked around to find the cause of the wind, and he finally noticed the Goddess; his eyes opened wide.

Fhynaral stood composed at the entrance of the forge. The moon beams did little to illuminate the silk dark dress she was wearing, but they shone brightly on the numerous beautiful jewels she was wearing. She was tall, slender and pale. Her face was more beautiful than that of an elven princess and her body more enticing than that of any woman on Earth. Her crooked smile alone could make every man tear their heart apart and present it to her as a gift.

"My lady!" exclaimed Rhotgar, stuttering. He quickly recomposed himself and frowned: "What brings you here, Fhynaral?"

The Goddess took a few feather-like steps forward and smiled again. "I have come to watch in person the mystical craft that gives birth to such beautiful masterpieces," she pointed at her jewels. Her voice was soft and melodious, like nightingales' songs, but also powerful and stirring.

The God almost dropped his jaw in surprise. He caught himself, cleared his voice and stroked his beard, blushing. "Well, now. That's an exaggeration..."

"All over the world, every creature speaks highly of your art in shaping rock and metal, to create such beautiful things," she interrupted him, drawing closer. "Would you give me the honour of letting me watch you work, brother?"

The dwarf's face turned red. "They say so? Well... I guess, I've been refining my craft over the centuries. Sure, sister," he added, "you can, hum, watch me work. I can show you how to create jewels."

Phynaral smiled enticingly and drew closer to his workstation. The dwarf reached for his hammer and resumed his work on the piece of gold, now cold. As he felt more confident, he started describing the process of working metals, and he became excited.

The Goddess rarely spoke but looked at him the whole time like a child looks at her parents showing her something beautiful. Hours went by, until Rhotgar, realising he had been talking the whole time, put down his hammer, turned to her and asked: "Maybe I can help you create something? Is there a jewel you would like to make, sister?"

"Actually," she said, regarding him admiringly, "there is something I would love you to help me with." She turned and gestured at the entrance of the forge.

Only then did the dwarf notice the seven creatures standing by the entrance, barely lit by the moonlight. Chained one to another by their hands and their feet, stood seven goblins, shrinking as far as possible from the Goddess and shivering in fear. Slightly shorter than the dwarf, the goblins were light-complexed and thin-boned. Their skin was green and grey, and their faces were twisted in a perpetual grin. Their ears were disproportionally big and pointed.

The God looked at them with disgust. "What have..."

"You see, my dear brother," she interrupted him. "My skills in creation are not as advanced as yours. I recall your mastery in creating the dwarves race," she pointed at his figure. "I would be most grateful if you could help me shape these... creatures, into beautiful beings. Beings that may worship me and that would show the world your crafting mastery."

The God's eyes went from his sister to the goblins in the corner, torn. "I don't think, hum, I don't know how... I mean, I thought you wanted to create jewels."

"Indeed, Rhotgar. Help me turn them into jewels. I want tall, strong and beautiful beings. I want them to harness my magic and be devoted to me. Let the world see once again the skills of the God of Rocks and Metals."

The dwarf played with his sturdy hands, trying to disengage from the awkward situation. "Well, I mean. I guess I could, hum, show you how to, how to enhance their bodies and..."

"Thank you, brother!" she cheered, drawing closer and hugging him tightly. Her exotic perfumes intoxicating him. Her body emanated a chillness that, even in the hot forge, made him shiver.

"Well, alright then. Bring them over. But I cannot make them devote to you, this is something they need to decide for themselves."

The Goddess' face flashed with anger for a moment, but she immediately smiled again.

The arcane, holy process of life creation, which is only in the realm of the Gods, began. For hours, the God of Metals worked on the new creatures, following the ever more demanding requests of the Goddess of Darkness.

When the moon had set and dawn drew close, Rhotgar, sweating in fatigue, was near the end of the process. He raised the hammer for the last time and was about to struck it down to sigil the holy pact, when his sister raised a hand and, without muttering a word, froze the dwarf in that awkward position with her powerful magic.

"What the..." cried the God, trying to break free. She ignored him and focused on the new creatures. She drew her power and began chanting in a language never heard on the world, transferring her magic into them.

"Wait! Phynaral, you can't force them to worship you!" cried Rhotgar, still unable to move, with his hands glued to the powerful hammer. "Damn you, stop it! Release me!"

He had barely finished his sentence when the Goddess finished chanting and released him. Losing his balance, the big dwarf tripped forward, his hammer hitting the creatures, casting the last, powerful blow that would sigil them.

The Goddess, watching excitedly, was forced to close her eyes when a powerful white light illuminated the forge and struck the rock walls like a lightning bolt.

Swearing and cursing, the dwarf righted himself, putting the forge back to focus. He sighed in relief when he found out that the cave wasn't crashing on top of him, then looked down at the new creatures and frowned.

There was no sign of the majestic and huge beings he had been shaping all throughout the night. In their place stood seven curious looking, small creatures. They were as big as the goblins, but their skin was soft and white. Instead of small and dark eyes, theirs were big and colourful, each eye of a different colour. The goblins' wide grins were replaced by a

childish curious smile. Instead of a bulky bald head, they had long, soft dark hair that reached their knees.

Thynaral looked at them, aghast. "What happened?!" she cried. "What happened to my beautiful, strong beings?!"

The dwarf snorted. "I told you. You cannot force them to worship you. You, ungrateful childish Goddess!"

The Goddess cast him a look that would make any mortal flee for their life. She looked at the creatures again.

They were inspecting the forge, a curious smile on their face. They seemed completely indifferent to the Gods' presence, regarding them with as much interest as any of the smith's tools. One of them reached for the Rhotgar's hammer and lifted it to examine it.

Rhotgar leapt forward, astonished. "What're you doing!"

Startled, the white creature dropped the hammer, which fell heavily onto the God's foot. Rhotgar bent in two, letting out a very un-manly shriek.

The Goddess looked at the beings with contempt. "You are not worthy of my legions," she spat. She raised a hand towards one of them and pronounced a word. Black flames erupted from her palm and raced towards the creature.

The newborn stared at the flames with keen interest until, when they were about to hit her, she blinked. A small, white electric lightning bolt took her place, and she found herself between the Goddess' legs. The flames struck the floor, blackening and cracking the solid stone.

The Goddess, taken by surprise, backed away from the creature and, in doing so, tripped on her long black dress and fell down flat.

The forge coals got extinguished as the Goddess of Darkness stood up, her anger freezing the cave in a magical chillness.

Rhotgar felt again his legs not answering to him. The creatures, still able to move, looked at the Goddess with interest, then, with another blink, turned themselves into lightning bolts and raced out of the forge, disappearing into the dawning sky.

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This is, as far as the legend goes, the story of the birth of the Lightners, who are more commonly known in Lothinias as White Magpies. The appellation is due to the inexplicable bad luck that is said to befall anyone who crosses paths with these creatures. To the skeptical youngsters, the elders would tell of that time a White Magpie was seen walking down market street and, as a result, the fruit stand collapsed, causing an army of water melons to roll down the steep road causing havoc to the passing parade of the lords of the city. The tale would often be followed by the story of the siege of Enoras, when, as the storytellers say, a Lightner who was staring at the catapults, fired an unlucky shot that threw a boulder against the walls of the city, creating an opening that ultimately led to the city's fall.

Clearly, many of the stories are made up. Once the legends of the Lightners spread across Lothinias, people started using them as a ploy whenever something bad happened.

It shouldn't come as a surprise that many people tried to banish the Lightners, or even kill them, but most of their effort went to no avail, if not against them. Enchanted by the Goddess of Darkness's magic, as the legend goes, the Lightners are strong magic-users, and have the uncanny

ability of escaping from dire situations. Not able to get rid of them, the other races came up with more exotic ways of counteracting their bad luck. In Farahil, for example, people got into the habit of carrying a pouch of flour wherever they went, following a rumour that claimed if you pour flour on a White Magpie, their bad luck turns into good fortune. Whether true or not, the gossip started when a Lightner was caught in a spices shop and the owner, in the frantic attempt to kick him out, dropped a container of flour, which spread all over the place. After the white creature left the shop, the owner ran back in expecting all his shelves to have come down, or all his money disappeared, instead he found a small collections of diamonds hidden in the flour jar.

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What's more solidly proven is that the Lightners are a peaceful people, if a people at all. Attracted by insatiable curiosity, they spend their life roaming the world and seem to appear whenever something interesting is about to happen. They fly around using their magic powers that let them turn into lightning bolts.