

Dreamforge Spark of the First Forge

Book One Illustrated Middle Grade Edition



Derek Corbett

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Dreamforge world, characters, and story by Derek Corbett.
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The World of Dreamforge



From Vale Village, the road crosses the Snowbound Tundra, the Ice Cave, Mira's walking workshop, the Volcano, the Skyworks, Warden's Pass, and the Celestial Nexus. Beyond lies the Shattered Sea and the sleeping Second Forge.

Meet the Crooked Table

Finn Vale: A determined twelve-year-old who searches for his brother and learns that leadership begins with listening.

Aric Vale: Finn's older brother, misunderstood as the Demon Lord after taking the Hollow Flame into himself.

Brass: A loyal, mischievous clockwork fox who chooses Finn as his companion.

Lyra Thorn: A careful scout searching for the company she once lost.

Mira Flint: A gifted smith who shelters broken machines and keeps the Crooked Table together.

Orin: An elderly scholar determined to preserve histories the tower tried to erase.

Sera Rook: The proud Ashen Heir, forced to choose truth over inherited vengeance.

Caldris: The black dragon manager learning that rules must protect people rather than replace their choices.

Chapter 1

The Empty Bed

Finn Vale knew his brother was gone before he opened the bedroom door. Aric's boots were missing from beneath the bed. His blue work coat was gone from its peg, and the little brass compass their father had made lay broken on the windowsill.

Outside, the village bells rang thirteen times. They had only twelve bells.

Everyone gathered in the square beneath the dark shape of the Dreamforge. The ancient machine floated above the mountains like a city made of gears. For hundreds of years its golden heart had warmed the valleys. Now its light flickered, and pieces of the sky around it cracked like glass.

"The Demon Lord has taken the First Forge," announced Captain Vey. "No one is to cross the northern gate."

Finn pushed through the crowd. "My brother went north last night."

The captain's face softened. "Then I am sorry."

Finn hated those words. Sorry sounded like a door shutting.

That evening he packed bread, a lantern, Aric's red scarf, and the broken compass. Their mother had died years before, and Aric had raised him with patient hands and terrible cooking. Aric had never abandoned him. Finn would not abandon Aric.

At dawn, Finn slipped through the forbidden gate. Snow swallowed his footprints almost as quickly as he made them. Far above, the Dreamforge gave one weak golden pulse, as if a giant heart had heard him leave.

Before leaving, Finn sat on Aric's bed and remembered the winter their mother died. Aric had been only seventeen, frightened and thin, yet he learned how to mend socks, bargain for flour, and make Finn laugh when grief filled the house. He burned supper almost every night. Finn ate it anyway. On the worst evenings, Aric placed their father's compass between them and said its needle would always lead one Vale brother back to the other.

The broken compass now felt heavier than iron. Finn fitted the loose glass into place and found a curl of paper hidden beneath it. Aric had written only one line: *Whatever the bells say, remember who I am.* Finn read it until he knew every mark of the hurried handwriting.

At the village gate, he found old Mara the baker waiting with a wrapped loaf. She did not try to stop him. She tucked the bread into his pack and made him promise to eat before he became heroic and foolish. Captain Vey watched from the wall, his silver armor bright in the dawn. For a moment Finn thought the captain would raise the alarm. Instead, Vey looked toward the failing light of the Dreamforge and turned away.

The road north crossed fields where frost had arrived in summer. Finn's courage lasted until the village roofs disappeared. Then the silence became enormous. He wanted Aric to step from behind a tree and call the whole thing a bad joke. No one came. Finn cried for exactly thirty-seven steps, wiped his face on the red scarf, and kept walking.

Near dusk, the thirteen bells rang again. This time their echoes formed words in the wind: UNAUTHORIZED LIFE DETECTED. Finn did not understand, but the broken compass trembled in his pocket. Its needle dragged itself away from home and pointed toward the mountains. Somewhere ahead, a golden spark answered it. Finn followed.

Three days before Aric vanished, he had come home carrying a bruise he refused to explain. Finn remembered it now: a dark mark circling his wrist, shaped like the teeth of a gear. Aric had pulled down his sleeve and changed the subject by asking about school. At the time, Finn had accepted the distraction. Now he searched the empty room more carefully.

Under the bed lay iron dust and a feather made from black glass. When Finn touched it, the village disappeared. For half a heartbeat he stood inside a chamber of enormous gears while a voice without warmth counted backward from thirteen. Aric knelt before a wall of blue fire, arguing with someone Finn could not see.

"My brother is not part of this," Aric said.

The vision snapped shut. Finn dropped the feather, but it had melted into his palm, leaving a thin blue line. The mark did not hurt. It pulsed whenever the Dreamforge flickered overhead.

Finn took the feather's existence to Captain Vey. The captain locked his office door before admitting that other black fragments had fallen across the valley. Every fragment showed a different memory, and every memory contradicted the royal proclamation. Vey had been ordered to collect and destroy them.

"Did you?" Finn asked.

Vey opened a drawer containing seven carefully wrapped feathers. "A soldier obeys lawful orders. A guardian also asks whom an order protects. I have not yet decided which duty this is."

Finn thought of Aric, who always decided quickly when Finn was in danger and slowly when the choice concerned himself. He asked Vey to help him cross the gate. The captain refused. Too many scouts had vanished in the northern snow, including Lyra Thorn's entire company.

That night, Finn heard the baker arguing with two neighbors outside. They believed Aric had joined the Demon Lord willingly. Finn nearly rushed out to defend him, but an uglier thought stopped him: what if they were right? Love gave Finn reasons to trust Aric, not proof.

He wrote two questions on the back of Aric's note. *Where did you go? Why didn't you tell me?* A third question took longer. *What if I find someone I do not recognize?*

Mara found him packing and gave him their mother's old wool gloves. She warned him that searching for truth meant accepting answers that might hurt. Finn said remaining ignorant already hurt. At the northern gate, he looked back once. The village windows glowed like small safe stars. He could have returned to bed and let older people decide what Aric had become.

Instead, he crossed the boundary stone. The blue line in his palm brightened. Far above, unseen machinery recognized him and changed its count from thirteen to twelve.