

Ch 15: The House of Ithrin

Felix had only left the sanctuary of the cave for a few seconds before he was surrounded by the storm. He turned around but the rocky wall and the crevice where his young friends stood had vanished quite completely in the chaotically swirling blizzard. As long as he knew they were still there, and that they were safe, he would be fine. Confused, at first, about which direction he was supposed to be trudging, he sharpened his senses and soon locked on to his destination and began his long, cold journey. In truth the distance was not so great, but even a burly troll like Felix would be slowed down by winds like these.

Like all trolls, Felix had thick skin which could weather extreme temperatures, both hot and cold. His ears were almost wing-like and could capture even the most subtle sounds. His nose, though small, could instantly recognize the faintest change in odor. And his little black eyes, when really put to work, could perceive objects from miles away. But as of now all he heard was the howling winter wind, all he smelled was the wet air, and all he could see was an endless world of white, where not a single shadow could survive. Though he was heavy, his large sandaled feet kept him on the surface of the snow, for the most part. And when he couldn't stay above, his stout, muscular legs were more than enough to pull him out of the drift.

He pulled his hood lower and bent his head downward to push through the blinding snow. At times he would walk for many, many paces in a clear and easy fashion, only to suddenly bang his shin against a large rock or a chunk of ice or hardened snow. He would curse out loud, muffled by the wind. Though, he would joke that the gale probably just carried his foul mouth to some little old lady in a village far away. He chuckled to himself. It was the only way to keep up his spirits as he went. He stopped for a moment and took an apple out his pack. As he munched, he looked around and thought, 'Jeezalu. If it's this hard to see during the day, I can't imagine what it would've been like at night. I'd probably walk right off the mountain without knowing.' He then chuckled again, imagining a scenario where he fell down to Mimvael and ended up landing in some person's living room.

After walking for a while longer, he sat beneath a rock formation and stopped for something to eat. He had only just begun, when he was startled by grunting and the sounds of footsteps crunching in the snow. He sat silently and tried his best to hide himself in the darkness beneath the rock. He sharpened his sight and discerned several large shapes lumbering through the blizzard in the distance. He recognized many of them as being trolls, but some he could not make out. They were tall and evil looking, with large tusk-like teeth and long ears pierced with metal trinkets and animal bones. In their hands they carried axes, pikes and swords and their blue and green skin seemed unharmed by the frost. Behind them trudged yetis; bulky arctic beasts covered in thick white fur. They were all marching upward, toward the direction Felix had been heading. Worried, he resolved to choose a different route, that is, if he could find any route at all

in the driving snow. He knew he couldn't fight them all at once, but he would do what was needed of him.

By the time night fell, he still had not reached the castle and he had just about exhausted the optimism brought by his sense of humor. He was wandering in a daze, half asleep. Everything came to a head when the snow became thicker and the darkness deeper. If he could see at all before, he couldn't now. With a searing blast of pain, he stubbed his toe against another rock. "Ow! Blast it!" But when he bent down to hit it with his axe, he saw that it was not a rock, but a short statue of a faerie maiden. He rubbed his eyes and felt it to make certain he wasn't imagining things, but when he looked up again the curtains of white parted like a fleeting haze and before him were the gates to Castle Ithrin, with the castle looming overhead.

It was a majestic palace covered in sparkling ice, to the point that the stone had almost given way to its wintry coating and looked like it had been formed from the ice itself. Felix was relieved to have found his destination, but the look of it daunted him. Its spires were like spears of ice and its windows were covered in icicles like the frozen teeth of a fearsome arctic beast. Here, not even the rapidly blowing wind made a sound, as if the world had gone dead. Looking up at its towering walls and frosted palisades he muttered to himself, "Don't worry. *They* did it before, there's no reason why you shouldn't be able to do this." Then he thought, 'but they were Pendragons! For all I know, Brundlebushes might be instantly frozen for trespassing!' But he steeled himself and marched up the stairs to the wide stone bridge that stretched across the chasm to the front gate.

Suddenly a chilling sound broke the silence and there was a fierce beating in the air. Felix's ears pricked upward and he looked into the sky. A sinister shadow fell across the bridge as something tremendous sailed overhead and wheeled around the mountain's peak with another wail. He couldn't see what it was, but he knew the sound all too well and dashed across the bridge as he heard the beast giving chase behind him. He pushed the huge frozen doors open and ducked inside. When he turned, the monster was nowhere to be seen, but he knew it was still out there somewhere. He shut the gates with a crash that echoed all throughout the hall. When he turned he was almost struck blind by the brilliance of it. He was within the halls of Castle Ithrin, the House of the Crystal Winds.

"Who is that, Taku? No. I don't believe I have ever seen him before. I wonder what he wants..."

He stepped into the center of the grand hall and gazed in awe at the exquisite statues and decorations, all made of ice. It was the kind of place where one could be fooled into thinking that they were alone in the world, and not mind it; the silence was so deep. The entrance hall reached far upward to a rose window nestled between gothic arches adorned with icicles of all sizes and perfect form, like each one was crafted by hand. There was a great mantle over a vast fireplace where no fire burned, but rather a cloud of iridescent blue smoke which did not lose its shape or move from its place as smoke usually does. The same glowing smoke was found sitting upon the wick of every

candle in every chandelier and fixture, and within every lamp, giving the entire castle a cool azure glow.

“What is it he wants here? What business would a troll have in Ithrin? Do you think he was sent by Din Frostfang?”

He leaned over to a candle and tried to snuff the smoky ball with his fingers, but it soon returned a few moments later, glowing more brightly than before. “Huh.” As he scaled the long, twisting stairs, the grandeur of the palace fell beneath him as the windows rose ever higher. Etched in their glass were scenes of valor and legend in the history of the sprites, the keepers of the mountain. They were a fair race of faeries whose love of winter made them the guardians of all the realms of ice and snow. Their eyes sparkling like sapphires set in their snow-white faces; their wings like paper-thin sheets of azure gemstone and superbly decorated with swirls of blue and white and silver. Felix couldn’t help but reach out and touch one of the statues. The image was of a sprite so lovely his heart was captivated for a long moment.

“Indeed you are right. He doesn’t seem like one of Frostfang’s men. Though we must discover the truth for ourselves.”

At the top of the staircase was a high tower, its wall lined with another stair which spiraled into the distance where a vast circular window shed a white light on Felix. Thinking only of finishing his task, he took to the stairs and climbed as quickly as he could. He could hear the echoing song of an icy organ permeating the cool, wet walls of the castle. As he climbed, he passed more statues and fine paintings of the delicate sprites and their world of eternal winter. But he would not allow himself to be distracted. Even as he looked upward at the inspiring sight of the king and queen as they filled the round window at the top of the tower, in all their glory. Invarios and Frishina Finfasa, the lord and lady of Mimchara and the kingdom of the sprites.

There was a large set of doors at the top of the tower with the sigil of Ithrin carved into their faces. When he pushed them open, he was instantly bombarded with light and color. Shades of blue, red, yellow, green, purple, orange, and white passed before his eyes, all radiantly glowing. It was like a cathedral of cold glass with columns, stairs and high arches that fell into mysterious vaults. Lining the walls of this grand chamber were 8 huge stained-glass windows depicting portraits of the most honored sprites in their history. Orisha, Telanna, Senta, Venta, Lanni and Alexiana were all immortalized here in their glass shrines. The last two were King Invarios and Queen Frishina at opposite ends of the hall, and theirs were the grandest of all.

At the far end of this chamber rose a stair of lucid ice and a splendid throne. Behind this high set dais was a window greater and more immense than any Felix had ever seen before, depicting a fair-faced man in a flowing cloak of winter, covered with glossy armored plates, with a crown of stars around his brow. Wings of deep crystal

sprouted from beneath his mantle and below were the words: *Falrios, I Atta eln Innessari*. It was not a sprite, but something far more remarkable.

High above, where the ribs of this frozen cathedral met, rested another circular window with a hideous image splayed across it. Afterwards, when he was asked to describe it to his friends, Felix never could find the words to do so. All he could say was that it chilled every space in his body and made his blood go cold like the straits of Halchis. The very sight of it made him cringe, for it was the glass prison of Archon the Frostfang, the cursed wizard of Mimchara. His eyes burned like blue embers and his grin was like a row of swords. One could hardly even tell what was depicted there, man or demon. But it was clear that the window was a ward against a terrible evil.

“Welcome to my palace,” called out a glassy but booming voice. Felix looked upward to the throne and noticed, for the first time, someone seated there; a knight in crystal blue armor that glistened like wet marble. He carried a bow of fine sapphire glass, leaning on it like a staff. A quiver of deadly arrows was slung, unseen, behind his back. His helm was crowned with a diadem of icy spires, and his gauntleted knuckles were mounted with diamond-like studs for throwing fatal punches. Falling from his back was a colossal cape that was sewn, not of fabric, but ever-flowing light, and rose and fell like the beating of wings. The suit of armor he wore was so finely crafted that it looked as if every blacksmith in the world had combined their expertise in forming it, and yet, it was so raw and natural that it just as likely could have been chiseled from the very side of the mountain. “What is your business here?”

“Your majesty,” Felix implored, dropping to one knee. “I’ve come for one of the jewels of Orinost.” It was an action that shocked the knight, though the request came as no surprise. A tremendous white tiger emerged from the side of the high dais and lurched toward the troll with bared fangs, growling.

“Taku! Halt!” The knight held up his hand and the beast lay down in silence. “Your request cannot be granted, despite your honorable and respectful tongue. You can understand, I hope, that troll tongues cannot be judged by the words they utter. Not in this place where Din Archon the Frostfang once dwelt.” The knight peered upward at the window where the wicked sorcerer’s face glared contemptuously into the throne room. “I will not see this jewel fall into his hands, much less the hands of one of his servants.”

“I was not sent by the Frostfang. I am Felix Brundlebush, a Bithri from Bridgetown.”

“Bridgetown, you say?” Felix nodded and a silence ensued. “You are of a noble people, Felix Brundlebush, and though I do not know you, I feel as if I have known you before.” The great helm was tilted. “If you are not in league with Archon, tell me, who is it you come on behalf of?”

“I am bodyguard to the Pendragons. I came to recover this jewel for them because I feared they would not make it through the storm.”

“Pendragons?” He suddenly rose from his throne with the sound of ice breaking and glass shattering. At full height he was, indeed, a marvel of strength. “It seems you serve your masters well to have risked your safety for them in such a manner.” There was no more than an instant and a flash of light when the armored king drew an arrow from

his quiver, set it against his bowstring and launched it off like a bolt of cold thunder, driving for the troll. With little effort, Felix caught the arrow, as well as the two that followed closely after it. "You serve your masters very well, my friend." The knight descended the stairs with heavy, resonating footfalls, until he came near to the base. Felix gripped the handle of his sword, ready to defend himself, but worried that he would be unable to. "Tell me their names."

Now it was Felix who was surprised. Perhaps things were working out after all. "Uhhh. Their names are Jason and Alex."

"Jason Pendragon and Alexander Avis..."

"Wait, how did you-"

"They are most fortunate to have you with them, Felix. But the truth is that you are not with them. This mountain is no longer safe. Come, we must go to them." He summoned the tiger to his side, and came down the remainder of the steps to the icy floor.

"Then you trust me?"

There was a long and uncertain silence, but it was broken with, "I do. You are not an ally of Din Frostfang, but those who *are* his allies are making ready for his return."

"Your majesty, I saw a horde of monsters heading this way as I came."

"Yes, I know." The knight looked about the throne room, from icy rafter to sparkling statue. "They want my palace. Well they can take it if they wish." The bow melted from his hand and the quiver faded from his back, and he placed his gauntlets against the sides of his helm and lifted it. Seemingly endless locks of blue hair fell from the helmet until Felix was peering into the loveliest face he had ever seen. It seems that the knight was not a king at all, but a queen. "I shall not be here much longer, anyway." With a wave of her hand, the tremendous suit of armor shrank into a puddle of water at her bare feet and there was but a glittering dress in its place, surrounded by a fountain of thin icicles which sprouted from her waist like a gown.

Her skin was as white as the mountain itself, and her eyes bluer than the clearest sky. Her cheeks were covered with silver specks and her lips were slender and delicate. Without her armor, the brilliant wings on her back were free to stretch and carry her aloft. She placed the helmet back upon her head, but now it was nothing more than an icy crown to rest upon her deep cobalt curls. She was Frishina Finfasa Crystalwind, the queen of the sprites. She was so radiantly beautiful that upon looking at the exquisite window which bore her image, it seemed now to be nothing at all. Nothing could possibly match the perfection of her splendor. She must have been one of the elders, for no other creature could be so lovely.

She smiled with all the glory of a sunrise after a hundred years of darkness.

"Because you are not a Pendragon, I'm afraid it would do no good to give you the jewel I'm protecting. I must give it to Alex and Jason myself." He smiled back, awkwardly. Suddenly, the rose window at the roof of the chamber shattered with an unearthly wail and there was a rain of glass as Frostfang's image came crashing down and was gone forever. Frishina was seized with panic. "He's here! Your friends are in grave danger, Felix! We must go to them!" With a whistle, the tiger came bounding over to her side. "Taku will take you to them. My wings will carry me well enough. Hurry!"

Before Felix could even mount the beast, it had slipped under his legs and carried him, bounding out of the throne room and down the twisting stairs. Frishina drew forth the sparkling white jewel and looked at it wearily. "You can take my house for now, Archon, but I promise you will not have it for long!" After taking one last, sorrowful look at her castle, she darted out the doors as the entire throne room shook. Turning her head as she went, she was sure she saw the Frostfang, himself, sit upon the throne just as the doors were slammed shut. Both the palace and the entire domain of Mount Mimchara, she knew, were no longer hers to rule. But when the six kings had fallen, she would return.

Taku leaped through the gates with Felix gripping his sides tightly. The tiger stopped upon the bridge, as if he sensed the presence of some enemy, then bolted off into the howling blizzard. The beast was so swift and powerful, that Felix couldn't even see where they were headed or where they had been. The walls of white just sped past them as they dashed from snow bank to snow bank, never stopping, rarely slowing. There was a wail in the air, and Felix looked up in a panic. The vast shadow washed over the mountain again with a roar. The dragon had returned. Taku knew the danger they were in and carried his charge even faster than before, requiring Felix to grip the tiger's fur tighter for fear of flying off into the unknown, or perhaps even into the dragon's mouth.

The tiger ran faster, now, than it was prepared for and fell into a snow drift, sending Felix tumbling off its back. When he emerged from the snow he could hear the clinking of metal through the bellowing winds. Dark shapes stepped through the storm and closed in on the troll and the tiger with weapons drawn. They were surrounded by a throng of ice trolls, bearing cruel looking spears and axes. Quickly, Felix drew his sword and grounded his feet in the snow like he was an impenetrable wall. He rested his axe against his shoulder, ready to cut down anyone who came too closely. Taku was ready, also, and bared his ivory fangs eagerly.

The ice trolls muttered something to each other in their guttural language and glared evilly at their prey, moving forward with their pikes. Felix leaped forward with the tiger at his side and jumped into the fray, swinging his steel like a cornered animal. Even in the deep snow he was a skilled warrior, but there were too many opponents for him to face, even with the ferocious Taku at his side. Suddenly there came a rain of icicles and the trolls retreated. Frishina stood upon a rock formation with her bow drawn. "Come," she shouted. "It isn't much further!" The great dragon shadow sailed overhead with a cold snarl. "It's Vashrog!" She leapt down from the rock. "*E yami Taku! Sano fa Vashrog!*"

The tiger nodded and lifted Felix upon his back again, carrying him onward with Frishina flying close behind. At last they came to the cavern wall where Jason and Alex had been waiting for him. Taku bounded through the crevice, almost smashing its sides in where it was too tight. But the beast and his troll rider made it through safely, and Frishina stepped in behind them, marveling for a moment at her home city. The city she had left so long ago.

"Where are they," Felix shouted. "Alex? Jason? I can't find them!"

Frishina's fair face was suddenly full of dread. "Could they have come looking for you?"

"Oh no!" He jumped back out into the storm. "Alex! Jason!"

"Felix, wait! *Sano, Taku*," she said mounting the tiger.

"Jabe, is that you," Alex asked, trying to feel his way through the snow. "I can't see a thing."

"No kidding," came the reply. "Just stay there!" He found his way to his cousin and gripped his arm. "We have to get out of here," he struggled to say over the sound of the wind. "Which way did we come from?"

"I don't even remember! Everything looks the same now!" The snow was rushing chaotically in front of their faces, blinding them. In another instant, they heard an ear-splitting roar thundering from the sky, and before they realized what it was, a massive shape had plummeted from above and landed right in front of them. They could see nothing before, but the enormous beast before them seemed to chase the winds away, and their view of it couldn't be clearer. It was the dragon skeleton, only a corpse of a dragon, but it moved and breathed and roared as if it had never died. Its bleached bones were held together by a thick coating of ice and there was a cold, unbridled fury burning in its sockets.

With another fearsome roar it expelled a blast of air so chilling, Alex and Jason felt their insides freezing over. They fell backward into the snow, unable to run due to the sickness that was brought on by the cold. With thundering steps it lurched forward, ice cracking as it moved its torn, leathery wings. They were soon staring down its gullet, like a tunnel of ice that went for miles into a frozen hell. They could see the frigid breath welling up in the back of its skeletal throat, ready to rush forward again when, out of nowhere, a short grouping of arrows came whistling overhead, stinging the beast like wintry hornets. The dragon stumbled backward from the shot, giving Felix just enough time to grab the boys and pull them to safety.

"Felix..." Alex said hazily, barely above a whisper.

"Don't worry, buddy, we're getting outta here." He turned to Frishina. "I'm taking them back to safety!"

"Good," Frishina called back. "Taku and I can deal with *him*!" She stared disdainfully at the rearing beast. "*Katima ahe, Vashrog*. It seems a thousand years was too long for you, as it was for I. But I cannot sleep again until I know that you have gone with me!" The dragon stared into her eyes, seeming to understand, and relay his own message without words, but only a short grunt. "Then you have no remorse?" There was a blaring bellow to answer her. "And nor shall I!" She fired another arrow, striking Vashrog on the tip of his snout. Something that only enraged the monster. He bounded forward and swung his tail, smashing a tall rock into bits like a battering ram. Taku tried to drive it back with a growl, but surely nothing could frighten a dragon that had returned from the grave.

Felix brought his weary companions back to the cavern and set them down on the ground, giving them time to catch their breaths. “Are you okay,” he asked, holding Jason’s head up. He had never felt anything like that before, but Jason was coming around and his senses returned to normal.

“What happened,” he asked with a cough.

“It seems that dragon of yours was real after all.”

“*Cough, cough...* I told you. Where is it now?”

“Queen Frishina is dealing with it.”

“I’m gonna deal with it!” He leaped to his feet and pulled the fire sword from his belt. As the flames leaped up the length of the blade, he ran out into the storm to find the dragon.

“Jason! Wait!”

Alex sat up. “Where’s he going?”

“To fight the dragon...”

“I’ve got to help him!” Then he, too, jumped up and ran out.

Felix breathed a sigh and said to himself, “Never a dull moment,” and finally got back up and followed them.

“I should have known that Archon wouldn’t let you rest, even in death! I should have built you a cage!” The frost-covered dragon charged forward with another burst of cold air, swinging his long neck to try and devour the girl and her tiger. But Frishina’s wings helped carry her out of danger, and Taku was a swift and nimble animal. She fired off another group of arrows, but they would not phase the dragon. He spread his wings and rocketed forward, sailing over his enemy and fencing off her escape route. It was true that Frishina was worried now. She was powerful in this form, but since leaving the castle, she had felt her strength wane and her dominance over the realm of Mimchara fade. Now the Frostfang was master of the mountain, and his followers shared in his power. Now she was beginning to realize that she may not have the strength to overpower Vashrog after all.

There was another roar; not that of a dragon, but of fiercely burning fire. She turned to see a blade of flames dancing through the chilling air, wielded by a noble-looking young man. He ran forward and swung the blade like a firebrand, embers flying as he attacked. Jason was certain that if anything could defeat this monster of ice, it would be fire. It was not for nothing that he found this blade in Barclay Castle, and he was sure that it would save them now. As Vashrog stepped forward, Jason swung at its clawed foot. The strike didn’t hurt the beast so much as it enraged him, and he snapped his fanged jaw at the boy, quick as a bolt of lightning.

Luckily, Vashrog had been too far away to reach him, or he would have been snapped in half like a twig. But the shock knocked him backward and he dropped the sword into the snow. Alex and Felix caught up to them and stared at the monster in horror, not knowing how they could possibly escape. Vashrog’s fury was reaching its height now and he could no longer abide these intruders on his master’s mountain. He sneered with a deep rumble in his icy ribs and charged headlong toward them with a wail.

Jason pulled himself up and grabbed the handle of the sword, holding it at the ready, prepared to lop the creature's head off, if fortune granted him the opportunity to do so, not to mention the strength.

But he felt a wave of dread wash over him when he failed to see the blade. He was tightly gripping the handle but there was nothing else there. He had grabbed the wrong sword. He looked around for his fire blade, but it had been covered with snow and he couldn't find it. He had no time left. The dragon's mouth was opening right before him. He was sure this would be the end. But fortune did smile upon him, somehow. Just as Vashrog was charging forward, with his horned snout aimed at the boy like the bolt of a giant arrow, his burning azure eyes suddenly went alight with a different fire. Fear. He splayed his vast wings to keep himself from going any further, and wheeled around. Anything to get him away from the broken sword.

"Fly, you coward! Fly," Frishina shouted, rubbing Taku's neck, as she watched the tremendous monster flee back up toward the castle where his master now waited.

"Come," she said to them, ushering them back to the cavern city. "He may return yet."

"Why did he run," Jason asked, puzzled.

Casually, she replied, "That sword hilt you hold. He's afraid of it."

"But why," he asked as if to renew the same obvious question.

She turned to him with a mysterious smile. "It was the same sword that killed him..." And she would say nothing more about.

Quickly they retreated through the crevice and returned to the temporary safety of the city. "It's good to have some peace at last." She looked the boys over. "So these are the heirs of Pendragon. They're certainly daring." Alex was awestruck by her beauty and Jason was taken with her youth. She was so ancient, yet looked no older than one in her twenties, probably younger. She certainly seemed to want to shed her many millennia of knowledge and be free and innocent again.

But the truth is that she was not innocent. She was a queen among queens. She had lived for thousands upon thousands of years and seen chaos and bloodshed in her time. She had seen death, she had dealt it, she had been felled by it, she had transcended it, she had returned from it. And all this would not now halt her beaming smile and heart-warming voice. She was the kind of girl that one could instantly fall in love with, and yet know that such a person was beyond, not even *your* reach, but the reach of your entire species. She was so noble and splendid that all these thoughts came together and resolved themselves within you, and in moments everything became clear; she was just Frishina, and that was enough.

"I was impressed by both of you. I can see that we weren't wrong in waiting for you. It has seemed like just the blink of an eye to me since I was called back to my castle. These jewels... after their misuse by many people, we old ones were summoned to defend them." She looked around in wonderment. "To us, the passing of ages seems a trivial thing, and 80 years is nothing more than a fraction of a heartbeat. Far too short a time to dwell here again. And yet, it has seemed an eternity of longing, to return to this place only to witness the desolation that the wretch Frostfang has dealt to my home." She wandered a short distance from them, holding her arms out, with Taku padding

mournfully by her side. “These roads were once filled with merriment and the sound of a multitude of happy wings, all fluttering in communion with each other.”

She began to dance in the street, her dainty feet hardly ever touching the icy ground; a sight that none could trade for power or riches, for nothing could bring more joy. Her rich, blue hair swirled around her with the shards of her dress spinning upward like a frozen flower. When she stopped she suddenly gave an apologetic laugh and tried to calm herself, as if she was ashamed to be so childish. “I’m sorry to keep you so long. I forget how the passing of time makes mortals irritable.”

“No,” Alex said with a smile. “It’s no trouble at all. I wish you wouldn’t stop.” He wasn’t sure why he said it but he couldn’t help himself now.

“As do I,” she said, grinning. Her teeth were more brilliantly white than her milky skin, even more so just between her deep sapphire lips. “But sadly, my time here is short, shorter now that my castle has been seized, and there is one thing that I must do before I go.” She stepped close with her hands cupped together. As she parted them with an eager glint in her ice blue eyes, a cool light suddenly cut through the darkness; a light that was cold, yet comforting, and purest white. So, too, was the stone resting in her soft palm; a raw, prismatic jewel like the first they had received. Alex took it like something of wonder and delight and, drawing the green one near it, looked on in awe as they both began to glow fiercely.

“Keep them very safe,” Frishina said, suddenly adopting a look of worry. “Now that they are in your hands, it will be your task to guard them, as we have. There are many who require them for their own evil purposes, but only you can utilize them for the completion of the noble task for which they were intended. But I’m sure you are both very capable of this, and more.” She smiled briefly, but it faded when she looked at Jason’s face. “What’s wrong, Jason?”

“It’s so sad to think that your home’s been taken from you.”

She laughed. “I appreciate your sentiment, but it has been taken from me before, and I from it. Besides, it was not my place to overstay my welcome.”

“What do you mean? This is your home! You’re queen!”

“We all have our allotted times for victory and defeat. It was my lot to rule for many years, even more without my brother by my side.” She was somber. “So great a king was he that I thought I would never live up to him. I missed him grievously. But there was a time for the Frostfang to rise and fall and rise again with his evil brethren.” She leaned forward. “The six have their allotted time as well, and their reign will not be for long.” She clasped Alex’s hands around the jewels with a knowing smile. “Everything has its order, and things will always fall back into place. That I promise you. But it cannot happen without you.” She kissed the three of them on the foreheads, Felix’s blue cheeks turning very red as he tried to hide his embarrassment. “There, a kiss of good fortune for you all, and a blessing from the queen of the sprites.” With that, she leapt upon Taku’s back and made her way toward the cave exit.

“Where are you going now,” Felix asked.

“There is one more thing that I must do before my hour of grace expires and I return to my brother’s side.” She drew her bow and steadied an arrow upon its string. “I

do not know how much strength I have left, but if there is any to be spared I shall see that abomination, Vashrog, back to the grave. I must ensure that if Frostfang mobilizes his forces, at least he will not have the dracolich to send to Vlad's aid!" She leaned forward, uttering something Taku in her own tongue, and bolted off into the winter of the world. Suddenly, she shouted, "When you meet Boosuvius, give him my thanks and tell him to wait for me!" They watched her bound away, not knowing how she would fare, but confident in her wisdom and strength.

"Who's Boosuvius," Jason asked.

Alex shrugged his shoulders, but Felix just smiled mysteriously and said, "Never mind. Let's start for home." And so they did, moving southward for as long as the daylight lasted.

Archon the Frostfang caused much grief to her people, and made even a great paladin slave to his will. Wars were fought merely to keep him from overrunning the mountain kingdom with the many horrors at his command. Like Balvus the Venomleaf, Frostfang was a sower of conflict in the old world and caused the downfall of one of the great races. Like Venomleaf, he would be spreading his filth across Alinor once again, in the wake of Vlad's return. Much was at stake now, and everything depended upon Alex, Jason and Felix completing their task. But if Frishina was victorious in her final efforts on Earth, then Vashrog the dracolich, the terror of Mimchara, would not be present when, and if, the battle was finally fought. They didn't see her again, but it is believed that she hunted the beast for three days and slew it above the towers of Frostfang's castle. Believing this, it was easier for the three to rest.