

The Angyl Chronicles: Heart of the White Wolf
By Mike Glenn

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Dedicated to my family and everyone who believed in and encouraged me.

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Chapter 1

“You gonna pick that up?” Angyl teased her younger sister, Spiryt. Spiryt, exhausted from weapons training, reluctantly stooped over to retrieve her wooden training sword. “Haven’t we practiced enough for today?” Spiryt whined. “Sure, I guess,” said Angyl, her eyes looking away nonchalantly. “I just hope that one day when it comes down to you or your opponent, they’ll be just as ready to call it a day.” “Life isn’t all about battles you know,” Spiryt retorted matter of factly. “There’s always battles to be fought” Angyl uttered quietly.

She playfully mussed up Spiryt’s neck-length blonde hair. Angyl thought to herself that even though Spiryt was going on age fifteen, she was old enough to learn the ways of the warrior so that she may protect herself and their mother. They had lost their father. He had given his life defending them against some Demun’ja scum. Every day that had passed since, Angyl struggled to understand her feelings between admiration for her father’s courage and sacrifice or resentment because he was no longer with them. Angyl knew that resentment was harsh, but you feel what you feel she told herself.

As the two of them walked from the beautiful meadow back to their home in the woods, Angyl pulled her long, red hair back into a ponytail and slipped a knit garment over her sleeveless top. Spiryt, being barely a teenager, wore a more conservative dress-like top over knee length pants. “Let’s pick up the pace, little sis,” Angyl urged. “It’s a bit of a hike home, and Mom will start to worry if we’re not back soon.” “Angyl..” Spiryt began to say uneasily, “do you really think I’ll ever have to you know, fight a Demun’ja?” Angyl sighed. “I hope not,” she replied.

“Have you ever fought one?” Spiryt asked. “Not exactly,” said Angyl. “I..I wanted to. When Dad was...” There was a pause that seemed to last forever. Her eyes began to well up and her voice started to break a bit. “I wanted to help him, but he told me to hide and to keep you safe.” “N-never mind,” Spiryt said, echoing what her sister was feeling. “I don’t wanna talk about it right now. “Me neither,” Angyl sighed slightly.

In the distance, a group of Demun’ja rode horseback through the trees. “Hold it!” Angyl instructed her sister. The two of them hid behind a large tree. Angyl poked her head out to confirm her suspicions. “They’re Demun’ja,” she said. She reiterated, “There are Demun’ja in the forest!” “What do they want?” Spiryt asked with apprehension. “I’ll go ask,” Angyl quipped, trying to calm Spiryt with levity. “No!” Spiryt yelled, alarmed. Angyl shushed her sister. “I was kidding,” she whispered; “keep your voice down.”

“We need to find a way around them,” Angyl instructed. The two sisters began creeping stealthily closer but trying to avoid being seen. Spiryt began to breathe heavy, panicked breaths as the Demun’ja moved closer – only a few feet away from them. They could faintly hear them talking as they rode by. “We’re almost past them,” Angyl whispered and warned, “slow your breathing. We’re ok.” As Spiryt took a step, a branch snapped beneath her. Two Demun’ja immediately looked up as Angyl and Spiryt froze for a moment. “Run,” Angyl said flatly.

The two of them broke into a dead run. The Demun’ja quickly gave chase with the others galloping after them. “We’re dead. We’re dead. We’re dead,” Spiryt repeated as they ran. “That’s really not helping,” Angyl panted. She looked back as a Demun’ja rode up along side them. Angyl’s brow furrowed. “To hell with this,” she snarled. She

grabbed his leg and pulled him from his horse. He rolled a few feet as his horse galloped away without him. He quickly jumped to his feet and lunged at Angyl. Angyl hit him in the throat with a palm strike. As he dropped to his knees, she finished her attack with a swift kick to his head. As he lay unconscious in the dirt, Angyl hissed, "That's for my father."

Spiryt ran up to her sister. "Angyl, come on!" Just as she said this, another Demun'ja rode up and snatched Spiryt up. "No!" Angyl yelled. "Let her go you animal!" As the Demun'ja rode away with his capture, Angyl was struck on the head from behind. She slumped to the ground as everything around her went black.

"Wake up," Angyl heard a male voice urge, "rise and shine." Blurred surroundings slowly came into focus as she regained consciousness. "That's right," the voice continued with a soothing pleasantness, "take your time." Angyl looked around and saw stone walls with strange art adorning them. A large spherical symbol covered most of the floor. In the center, the source of the pleasant voice came into focus. "That's right," he said in a tone just above a whisper. "Over here." He was a man in his 40s with short greying hair and a neatly trimmed goatee, and he wore a velvety purple suit. "You're not dead in case you were wondering. Although, I can't guarantee that I'm not the Devil," he chuckled mischievously. "I kid but I don't," he continued.

"My name is Morbidas," he smiled. "Nice to meet you," Angyl said with mock sincerity. "Where is my sister?" "Now let's not get off on the wrong foot." Morbidas said raising his index finger. "My goodness, you are beautiful. They told me you were trouble but my word, they failed to mention you had the face of a goddess." "Who are 'they'?" she demanded. "My Demun'ja of course." he said with a hint

of ridicule. “Those THINGS work for YOU?” Angyl inquired testily. Morbidas tried to hide the smile tugging at his lips. “Well, yes.” he replied. Angyl smiled. “Thank you” she said; “that’s all I needed to know.” She lunged at him and was suddenly yanked off the floor by an invisible force. As she rose higher toward the ceiling, she noticed that he seemed to be manipulating her with his hand. “I suppose I should have mentioned,” he chided, “I’m a sorcerer, and that wasn’t very polite.”

He began to spin her slowly with a twirl of his index finger. “If you wish to feel the ground beneath your feet again, not to mention see your sister ALIVE, you’re going to do something for me,” his voice boomed, absent of any kindness. “Nod your head if you agree.” Angyl hesitantly nodded. “Excellent,” he said lowering her down. “Let’s try this again shall we?” With a motion of his hand, Angyl was sitting Indian style in front of him. “I am Morbidas,” he said with conviction, “and you work for me.”

Chapter 2

Morbidas led Angyl down a long circular corridor with organic walls. As they exited the corridor, they entered a large, spacious chamber where she saw Demun'ja in weapons training. This was the second time she had seen them up close, but the first time she could truly realize how imposing they were. They were tall; many of them were at least seven feet and their hulking physics resembled gargoyles. They seemed so bulky yet somehow moved with fluidity. Angyl received glares from these warriors as Morbidas continued to lead her past them.

“At ease gentlemen,” said Morbidas, “she’s one of the gang for the moment.” He turned to Angyl with an almost apologetic look and remarked, “I just realized, lovely, that I never did learn your name.” She smiled and answered, “My name is Angyl, with a Y, not an E.” “A-n-g-y-l.” Morbidas repeated blissfully. “Perfect.” she remarked. Angyl’s smile did not leave her face, and she continued the obvious edgy conversation, “You now know my name, so you can tell everyone who it was that DEFEATED you.” Morbidas tilted her chin slightly with his index finger, “Careful, precious.” he teased. “I’m starting to fall in love.”

Angyl turned with a start to find that a Demun'ja that was much more slender than the others had joined them. The bone structure of this warrior made Angyl wonder if this one was male like the others. The dark leather vest worn was also in contrast to the others who wore only boots and pants and were bare chested. “Ah, Bethar.” Morbidas said, appearing a bit startled himself. “We’ve talked about your sneaking up on people.” he scolded. Bethar replied, “My apologies, Lord Morbidas.” Now Angyl was certain that this Demun'ja was female. “Follow us, would you, Bethar? Angyl here is going to

help us capture our quarry.” Morbidas instructed. He leaned forward and whispered, “Remember, it’s Angyl with a ‘Y’ not an ‘E’. We wouldn’t want to mess up her epitaph.” Bethar chuckled. Angyl turned and glared at them and stated, “You know that I can hear you, right?”

As the three continued on, they came upon two Demun’ja guarding what appeared to be a large tapestry with the same symbol that was on the floor in the room she had first awakened. The Demun’ja appeared to have been standing guard for some time without a break and were starting to slouch. “Rise and shine my minions!” Morbidas’ voice boomed from halfway down a corridor. His guards, taken by surprise, immediately straightened. Morbidas made a sweeping motion with his hands and tossed them aside in opposite directions. He, Angyl, and Bethar stood in front of the tapestry.

“Is this it?” Angyl asked. “All this just to show off your bad taste in décor?” “Hush!” Morbidas hissed. Unexpectedly, he began to sing. His voice was surprisingly melodic and the words were in a tongue Angyl had never heard before. When he had finished, something even more unexpected happened: the tapestry began to dissolve. As it disappeared, chilly mountain air blew into the chamber. Snowflakes drifted inside. Prompted only by extreme curiosity, Angyl stepped forward. Her pace quickened as she moved beyond the chamber. “Hold it!” Morbidas called out. Angyl stopped just short of taking a thirty thousand foot plunge. She took a sharp breath as she stepped back, her heart settling back into her chest.

“Wanna see something even cooler than that?” Morbidas asked. “Look up,” he said, “try not to lose your balance though.” Angyl turned her head upward and saw a massive fortress carved in stone. The architecture was forbidding and intimidating right

down to the swirling dark grey clouds directly above its peak. The clouds appeared to be a type of vortex. “What is that?” she asked, unable to contain her curiosity. “Come back to me with my prize, and I’ll tell you.” he said, suddenly standing beside her. Angyl turned and looked at him. “What do you want from me exactly?” she inquired. “What I want,” he replied, “is a white wolf.” Angyl turned away and scoffed, “You’re a fool, Morbidas. There are no white wolves left.” “You’re almost correct,” he said, holding up his index finger again.

Morbidas explained, “There is but one left in existence in the land of Mhist. I need the two of you to find it and bring it back to me.” “Why me and Spiry?” Angyl asked. “Spiry? Oh, yes. Your sister.” he replied. “Sorry, Angie. Little sister won’t be accompanying you on your quest. Bethar will be your faithful companion.” “Forget it!” Angyl shot back, cutting him off, “I’m not going anywhere with that Demun’ja filth.” “You will do as you’re told or you and your little sister can decide who dies first while the other watches.” His brow furrowed and his nostrils flared as he spoke. “Besides,” he continued relaxing a bit, “Bethar is a tracker. She will know where to pick up the beast’s trail.”

“Why do you want it so bad?” Angyl asked moving right up into his face. Morbidas started to become angry again and replied, “That’s not your concern.” He turned his back to her, clasping his hands behind him. Angyl sighed and responded, “Tell your succubus I’m ready to go. “Don’t come back without the bitch,” he said still not looking back. “I won’t,” Angyl retorted and then added, “I’ll bring you your wolf too.” Morbidas smirked, almost in admiration.

An hour later, Angyl re-emerged with Bethar. They were both wearing armored

body suits. The shoulder, chest, and forearm armor had skulls crafted into the design in keeping with Morbidas' creepy taste. Their respective armor was similar, but Bethar's seemed uniquely designed for her. She also wore a helmet. Suddenly without a word, she whipped out a short sword. Angyl jumped back, ready to defend her self.

Bethar smiled slightly as she pointed her sword at Angyl. Angyl retorted, "If you even think about using it on me, it will be you who tastes the end of it." As quickly as she had produced it, she handed it over to Angyl. "Why do we even need any of this?" Angyl asked looking down at her suit. "I know wolves are vicious, but-". "It's not merely for the white wolf," Bethar said cutting her off. "It's for anyone we may encounter who needs to be reminded that their King is dead." Angyl shook her head bitterly. "Great. I was hoping I'd get to betray my people today," she said sarcastically.

"Follow me," Bethar said. As they approached the edge of the precipice, Angyl looked down. "I'm afraid to ask," Angyl said, "but how do we get down?" Bethar suddenly grabbed her by the wrist and jumped. Angyl screamed as they plummeted. Bethar smirked as they fell, enjoying Angyl's terrified state. Bethar pressed a clawed finger against a skull on the center of her belt. She and Angyl suddenly disappeared, engulfed in teleportation. Several feet above a river, they re-appeared, spit out by the teleportal; they splashed down into the water.

Angyl thrashed for a moment with Bethar still grasping her wrist. "Let me go so I can knock your head off!" Angyl yelled. Bethar released her, thrusting Angyl's arm back at her. She sniffed, as she looked all about, pointed in a northern direction, and commanded, "This way . . . up that hill." "So that's what passes for "tracking" eh?" Angyl quipped, "Taking a good whiff of mountain air?" "Our senses are more acute the

yours, human.” Bethar retorted half turning her head.

Eyes belonging to the elusive white wolf watched them from some rocks above. The beast turned and trotted away to avoid them, scattering tiny rocks. Bethar looked up towards the sound of the rocks. She pointed in that direction, not saying a word. “You’re not much of a talker,” Angyl remarked. “You wish me to talk more?” asked Bethar. “No,” Angyl replied moving past her. She suddenly removed her small sword from its sheath, which was built into the armor. “What are you doing?” asked Bethar. “Just being prepared – that’s all.” Angyl said. “For what?” Bethar asked with a note of distrust in her voice. Angyl looked back at her, “For when I finally tire of your company.” Bethar eyes began to glow white hot as she became angry and countered, “I’m growing tired of your mouth. I’m about to slay you and find the white wolf myself. I DON’T NEED YOU.”

Angyl took a battle stance, brandishing the sword in her hand. “Likewise.” she retorted and asked, “Is this happening now?” “Not a moment too soon,” Bethar grimaced, “YOU have challenged ME!” “I’ll be sure to let Morbidas know that.” Angyl said swinging the blade at Bethar. Bethar blocked the attack with the fluidity of a born warrior. “You won’t win, human!” Bethar taunted as their blades clashed. Angyl lost her footing and slipped onto her back. Bethar grinned triumphantly, moving in for a killing stroke. Angyl rolled at the last second, avoiding an early demise and kicked Bethar in the side, causing her to fall backward. She quickly regained her footing before tumbling down the mountain side.

She kicked Angyl’s sword out of her hand and punched her viciously in the face. Blood ran from her nose. For the first time, Angyl appeared afraid. “No,” she whispered. “Spiryt” she whimpered. Bethar drew back her blade. “I’ll tell her you said goodbye,”

she taunted gleefully. Just as she raised her sword for the killing stroke, the white wolf leapt from above, toppling Bethar and sending her rolling down the mountain. Bethar tumbled several feet and finally smacked her head on a rock. Blood ran from her skull, dripping down the rocks. Angyl gasped in relief and amazement. She looked up at her rescuer.

“Thank you,” she said wiping blood from her face. “I owe you my life.” “Well then,” the wolf spoke, “perhaps you could spare mine, and we’ll call your debt repaid.” Angyl opened her mouth to speak but her state of shock prevented words from coming out. “You-you ...” Angyl stuttered finally finding her voice, “Spoke?” The wolf offered, finishing her question for her, “Will that persuade you?” Angyl only stared as words once again failed her. “I see,” the wolf said. “I don’t know why a human would do Morbidas’ bidding when he has more than plenty of those revolting Demun’ja swine to fill that task. I don’t suggest returning to him though.” The white wolf turned to head back up into the mountains. “Wait! Wait!” Angyl stretched out her hand and pleaded, “I don’t work for him. I have no choice at the moment, and I could really use your help.” “I’m listening.” the wolf said.

Chapter 3

The white wolf led Angyl into a spacious icy blue cave and inside was a large pool of crystal clear water. Beneath the water she could see pillars, steps, and tunnel entry points. It looked like a city that was now empty. “What is this place?” Angyl asked. The wolf brought her a wooly fur of an animal. “Here,” she said still holding the fur in her teeth, “this should warm you.” Angyl wrapped the fur around her. “This was our home,” said the wolf. “Myself and my brothers and sisters, we lived here.” “What happened to them?” Angyl asked sympathetically. “Morbidas,” the wolf replied. “Oh,” Angyl sighed. It was all she could think of to say.

“Why?” she asked. “I mean why does he...?” “Why has he hunted us into near extinction?” the wolf responded, finishing her question. She provided Angyl an account of who Morbidas was and what he had done to their home: “Morbidas is evil. More than you realize. He came to the land of Mhist and brought his demon horde with him. He murdered our king, enslaved the people, and reduced Mhist to a living nightmare.” “That’s the story,” Angyl said in agreement. “It’s more than a story,” the wolf continued, looking her in the eyes, “it is real, and he is not finished. He has been working on a spell that will open wide the doors to The Valley of the Damned, a world between worlds.

“The Valley of the Damned is the home of Morbidas, and there are more Demun’ja waiting on the other side of those doors, and creatures far worse than we have experienced so far. If he brings them here, there will be no slavery and oppression this time.” Angyl was horrified at the thought of what her next words might be. “It will be genocide. They will claim this world as their own and will have no need of human

slaves any longer,” she explained as she swallowed hard. “What’s stopping him then?” she asked barely finding the words. There was a soft sort of sadness in the wolf’s eyes. “My heart,” she said. “Morbidas only needs to obtain the heart of a white wolf to complete his unthinkable spell.”

She turned away from Angyl. “That’s why he murdered my family. They would not give him what he wanted, and they sacrificed themselves to save me,” the wolf quietly explicated Angyl lowered her head and admitted, “I know the feeling.” She reached out and gently touched the wolf’s back. “What is your name?” Angyl asked, making an attempt to connect with the beautiful white wolf. The wolf remained silent. “Look,” Angyl said gently, “I realize what’s at stake, but I have to ask of you something terrible. I need you to come back with me or my sister will die.” She paused, afraid of upsetting the wolf further. “I believe that if we fight together we can stop him AND save her.” The beast sighed, not looking back, “I’m sorry, Angyl. I just can’t. My heart aches for you and your kin. I’m truly sorry.” Angyl vainly fought back tears as her voice broke. “That’s not good enough! You must help me save her!” She dropped to her knees, sobbing. “Please..not Spirytt too.” The wolf jerked her head around, eyes wide. “Spirytt? Your sister, that’s her name, “Spirytt”? Angyl nodded.

“We’re wasting time. We have to go now,” said the wolf. Angyl’s face lit up with gratitude. “Thank you. Thank you so ...” The wolf jumped into the water. Angyl looked back then at her new friend, confused; she asked, “Where are you going? You don’t have time for a swim.” “There’s something down here, something important. I’ll be right back,” the wolf explained and then dove under, swimming toward one of the tunnels. As Angyl watched her disappear into tunnel, Angyl muttered, “This important “something”

had better not be gnawed on.” She watched and waited anxiously from above. After what felt like an eternity, Angyl started to wonder what was taking so long.

She began to wonder if her friend was okay and decided to make sure. She dove into the water and swam toward the tunnel that the wolf had entered. Suddenly, she saw the wolf swimming frantically back towards her. Something was definitely wrong. A huge lobster like creature burst out the tunnel behind her, widening the entrance dramatically. Angyl eyes widened in terror. The wolf emerged from the water with a large splash. She shook off the water from her coat as Angyl scrambled out after her.

“What...,” Angyl gasped, “the hell is...” Before she could finish, a large claw clamped onto her leg and pulled her back under. “ANGYL!” the wolf yelled. She dove in after Angyl and swam madly as the creature pulled her deeper below. She swam at the creature and bit into the arm that held Angyl captive. The creature swatted her aside like a fly. The distraction was just enough for Angyl to wriggle free. She kicked wildly, swimming away from the creature. She suddenly spotted a statue between two pillars. The statue, which resembled a mer-knight, held a sword skyward.

Angyl swam toward the statue and kicked the arm holding the sword. The arm crumbled away in the water as Angyl scooped up the sword. She swam back toward the lobster-like creature that was dangerously close to catching her friend. Its jaws opened wide as it prepared to devour the wolf; however, the jaws clamped shut suddenly as it reacted in pain and abandoned the chase. Angyl wrapped her arm around her furry friend, and they both burst from the water, gasping and coughing. “Let’s..not..do that” the wolf said between gasps, “again.” Angyl said finishing her sentence, “What was that thing? And, please tell me it was worth making it angry.” “Have you seen anyone else since we

arrived?” the wolf asked. Angyl shook her head. The wolf nodded back toward the water, “That would be why.”

“My name is Snow,” the wolf professed. “Snow”, Angyl repeated. “Makes sense.” “It isn’t because my coat is white; it’s where my family was taken from me – the snowy peaks.” “Oh,” Angyl said. “You’re probably wondering why,” Snow said, “it’s because I can think of no name more appropriate for my family’s avenger.” Angyl nodded in agreement. “I almost forgot,” she said. “around my neck Angyl,” Curious, Angyl reached toward her neck and saw a jeweled medallion dangling from Snow’s fur. Angyl lifted the chain over Snow’s head. “It will help us defeat Morbidas,” she said. “That’s why it was so important, and unfortunately the only way to retrieve it was to get it away from our ‘friend’.” Angyl laughed a little, “So you just went in and took it?” “I tried asking nicely,” Snow said chuckling herself. She and Angyl both burst into laughter. “Time to kick some sorcerer butt,” Snow said when they finished laughing.

In the private chamber of Morbidas in his mountain fortress, he stood silently, deep in thought. He stroked his chin between his thumb and index finger. He suddenly waved his hand and a portal like window materialized. Through the window, he could see Angyl and Snow trudging down the mountain. “So we’ve befriended the enemy have we?” he said quietly, “Very well.” A Demun’ja warrior stood unannounced at the door behind him. “Gather your forces,” said Morbidas, not turning; “it appears we have a new quarry.” The Demun’ja growled, “At your command, my lord.” “Go.” Morbidas ordered grimly.

Corridor doors opened, and Morbidas entered a dimly lit passageway leading to the dungeon. “Move aside,” he barked at the Demun’ja guarding the dungeon doors. The

guard quickly stepped away as Morbidas opened the doors with a wave of his hand. He flicked his index finger, closing the doors behind him. He descended down winding steps leading to the dungeon cells. He arrived at the cell that held Spiryt captive and found another guard in front of the door. He sighed and rolled his eyes. Exasperated, he gestured with his thumb for the guard to step aside. He reached for the door and stopped suddenly. He looked back at the guard and barked, "Open the door!" The guard looked surprised at the command.

As the guard moved toward the door, Morbidas flung it open with a wave of his hand. "Gotcha!" he mocked and then winked with a grin. The Demun'ja groaned. Inside the cell, Spiryt was bound in chains at her wrists and ankles. She was dirty and her head hung low, her spirit clearly in a dismal state. Morbidas shook his head. "No, no," he said quietly. "NO. NO. NO." He repeated much louder, "who did this?!" He flung his index finger again and the chains binding her flew apart. Spiryt didn't seem to react at all. "My dear...", Morbidas said crouching down in front of her, "I am embarrassed. This is not what I wanted at all, and I apologize for the lack of hospitality from..." He flung the guard back with his hand. "MY MINIONS!" he yelled.

Again, she did not acknowledge him, so Morbidas leaned in closer. "Would you like me to have him killed?" he whispered. "I can do that," he said. "You need only say the word, and his head will be in a box. You can keep the box as a gesture of my sincerity" he offered. He tilted her chin slightly. "What would you like me to do?" he asked. "You can go to Hell," Spiryt said, finally speaking. Morbidas stood up. He turned and walked away. The guard quickly picked himself up as Morbidas exited the cell. "Bring her to my chambers and put her in attire more dignified," he ordered. "We

can't have her looking like a bilge rat when big sis comes for her," he said walking back up the stairs.

Chapter 4

Angyl and Snow made their way down a wooded hillside. The sun was shining, and there was a certain serenity that they both needed given the circumstances. “So where are we going?” Angyl asked after a period of silence that neither of them objected to. “We need allies to take on Morbidas and his warriors,” said Snow, “we need an army actually, but let’s start with some allies. First, we need to find Darin.” “Who is Darin?” Angyl asked with restrained giddiness. “A pain in the backside with whom I used to play ‘Six Bones,’ and he was a cheater,” explained Snow. She continued, “he’s also a wild card. He’s good in a fight, but you can’t turn your back to him either.”

“So you don’t like him then?” Angyl asked. “Of course not,” Snow replied. “Then how can we trust him?” asked Angyl, confused. “We can’t,” said Snow, “he’s unpredictable but that means Morbidas won’t anticipate him either.” “Makes total sense,” Angyl said facetiously. As they neared the bottom of the hill, the tree line thinned out, and they could see a valley below. “The Valley of Promise...” sighed Snow, “seems like at least two lifetimes since I’ve been here.” Angyl beamed in the sun’s rays and took in the splendor and beauty of the valley. “I think the ‘Valley of Peace’ would be more apt,” said Angyl. “It is peaceful,” Snow replied, “but it’s here that a promise of peace was made to the people of Mhist.” “Meaning?” Angyl looked at her. Snow smiled and replied, “Morbidas’ undoing would come at the hands of a ‘youthful spirit’.”

Angyl chuckled, “I think you mean ‘spirit of youth, Snow.” Her smile disappeared when Snow’s did. “No. I mean exactly what I said. A youthful spirit will free us,” stated Snow. Angyl’s jaw slowly dropped. “Your sister, Angyl, will be the instrument of our salvation,” continued Snow. Angyl struggled to find words, but Snow

interrupted her thoughts, stating, “I have searched for “the youthful spirit,” your sister, for the longest time, even knowing the odds were that it was only a legend. In my despair, one day I simply gave up.” “I gave up!” she repeated louder. “I could no longer...,” Snow stopped mid-sentence, looking intensely above.

“What?” Angyl asked. “What is it?” Angyl asked again, quite puzzled. Snow smiled, “Darin.” She pushed Angyl out of the way with her head. “You should probably move now,” Snow urged. What appeared to be bird flew high overhead. As it descended right where she had been standing, Angyl could see that it was a wild, long-eared creature that resembled a jack rabbit combined with a crow. “SAY..MY..NAAAAAAME!” he yelled.

He noticed Angyl with a bewildered look on her face. “Say my name,” he commanded. “Say my name! Say my name! Say my name!” he yelled insistently. “He’s not going to stop until you say it,” Snow urged her. “Uh, Darin?” said Angyl cautiously. Darin smiled widely, “Yeaaaaah, BABY!” Angyl jumped, startled. “She said it! She said it!” Snow looked at him crossly. “What?” exclaimed Darin. “You KNOW what, Darin. You owe me some bones,” accused Snow.

Darin acted shocked and offended, and stated “I said I was good for them.” “You’re not good for much of anything, Darin,” Snow stated as she continued to deride him. Darin opened his arms and taunted Snow, “Does this mean you’re not gonna give your ol’ buddy Darin a hug?” Snow rolled her eyes. “Come here,” she said reluctantly, “quickly, before I change my mind.” Darin wrapped his winged arms around his old furry friend. Snow sighed and couldn’t help but smile a little. This made Angyl smile as she stood back with her arms folded, taking in this heartfelt scene. “Alright, get off,” she

told him, abruptly ending the moment.

“It’s been forever, Snowy old girl. Why the reunion, not that I’m complaining,” inquired Darin. “It’s Morbidas.” she replied. “Wait,” he said, interrupting, “not here. Let’s convene at my place.” But, Snow resisted, “Darin, I really don’t think we need to see your-” Without allowing another word, Darin picked them up and flew them both away. They soared down into the valley and disappeared from view. Darin carried them into a series of burrows and into an underground cavern where he set them down. Annoyed, Snow scolded him. “Darin, I told you never to do that”. She and Angyl looked around at the cavern that looked like the inside of a mansion with stalactites. There was furniture that appeared to have once been of fine quality but now showed signs of wear.

There was even a large fireplace and bizarre paintings of animal hybrids hung on the cavern walls. Angyl couldn’t resist having a closer look. Angyl muttered “Unusual art.” Suddenly one of the animals in the paintings practically leaped off of the wall and said, “Why, I resemble that statement!” Angyl jumped back incredibly startled. The animal returned to the painting and became motionless again just as quickly. Angyl pointed frantically to the painting, yelling, “That thing is alive! Did you see?” Snow looked at Darin and shook her head. “Living paintings,” she said and continued by asking, “What spell did you steal to bring those monstrosities to life?” “Monstrosities? Steal?!” Darin shot back, “Them’s fightin’ words missy!” He put up his winged arms and began to shadow box.

“I agree,” said Angyl, “and I think it’s quite enough of that. We sought him out because we need his help, so let’s all just be nice!” Snow and Darin both groaned. “Fine.”

they said in unison. “This isn’t over,” Darin whispered. “Likewise” Snow whispered back. He noticed the attire Angyl was wearing, the body suit which had recently been lined with Demun’ja armor. “Uh, Snowy?” Darin pointed. “Do you uh, see her ‘clothes’? Specifically, the symbols? Those are Morbidas’ symbols.” “I know,” Snow replied, “and it’s not what you think.” “Not what I think?” exclaimed Darin, flying up onto a perch. “She’s one of his!” “She’s not, actually. Now get down here, this instant!” she yelled, commanding Darin this time.

Inside Morbidas’ private chambers, Spiryt waited against her will. She was dressed in a suit similar to Morbidas’. Her’s was sky blue and conservative but with a measure of elegance. The doors open and Morbidas entered. He stretched open his arms. “You are a vision,” he said, smiling, adding, “your mom must be a looker because you and big sis got it from somewhere.” He paused for a moment, then said, “Is your father handsome?” Spiryt’s eyes burned with rage as she lunged at him, fist drawn back. He stopped her with a raise of his hand. He frowned as he held her suspended, her fist vibrating from a futile attempt to hit him. “I see looks aren’t the only thing you have in common,” his observed.

“Joke while you can, Morbidas,” she said, “My sister is coming and when she gets here she WILL kill you.” She hit the floor as he released her from his hold. He stooped down and tilted her chin, gripping it between his thumb and index finger. “After the trouble Angyl has caused me, I certainly hope she tries,” Morbidas declared. He released her chin with a forceful push. “Take her away!” he barked to his two Demun’ja who stood at the door. “She’s no fun”, he muttered, shoving past them.

Angyl had been explaining her situation to Darin for the last hour. He had listened

intently but had said little. She was beginning to wonder if they had wasted valuable time. When Angyl had finished with a final plea, Darin spoke. "So we're taking down Morbidas," he stated for clarification and added, "Why didn't you just say so?" He cackled at the joke only he seemed to find funny. "Alright," he said, "first things first. You can't fight Morbidas dressed like one of his stooges, no matter how funny it is." He paused before continuing. "Second," he said, "we're gonna need some reinforcements. Some back up. A cavalry. A...." "Oh for Pete's sake!" Snow snapped, having run out of patience. "She gets it, she's not a buffoon, unlike some present company."

"Right," Darin said almost apologetically. "Well then, on with the show," he played as he cleared his throat. "Ohhh fellaaaas!" he bellowed. Suddenly the hydrids from the paintings began to spring from them. "What's goin' on? What's the buzz?" the animals asked. "Is breakfast served?" another asked. "Joey, you had breakfast last month," Darin answered, adding, "Don't want you overeating." Angyl looked at Snow. "Is he serious? We're gonna take back my sister with an army of 'paintings'?" "I hate to admit it, but it's actually not a terrible idea," Snow replied. "Remember, the unexpected is our best weapon," she added.

Darin turned to Angyl. "Let's get you ready for the main event, dearest." About thirty minutes later, Angyl re-emerged, transformed. Her new body suit was accented with gold spirals on the chest, arm bands, and belt. Loin armor helped to conceal a dagger tied to her upper thigh with a sash, and her boots concealed a second. "My dear," said Darin, awestruck, "you look.." "Like a badass," Snow finished. "I couldn't have said it better," Darin commented. "I almost forgot," he said as he tossed

Angyl a sword. Angyl brandished the sword to get a feel for it's weight and handling.

"Alright, everybody," Darin called out, circling from above their heads "let's GO TO WAR!" Angyl was excited, apprehensive, and worried all at once. "What if we don't pull this off?" she asked Snow with an almost pre-defeated look on her face. "Then we'll take Morbidas down with us," Snow said looking intently straight ahead.

Chapter 5

In the glacier-like peaks of the Icy Wilds, creatures that resembled humanoid woolly mammoths dug in the icy ground for minerals beneath it. Others pulled big-wheeled carts loaded with minerals to a sorting area. Angyl and her strange band of rebels stood at the edge of the encampment where this frigid labor was taking place. Those who needed protection from the cold wore furs. “Are there any more people?” Angyl asked, surveying the scene. She looked back at the others, adding. “Uh, no offense.” “Get used to it, lovely,” Darin told her, “The further you get from home, the fewer humans you’re likely to run into.”

“That’s great, fellas. Keep up the good work!” Angyl heard a man’s voice say. A big man, about six feet tall with short black hair, shaven on the sides walked about the encampment. He had a short goatee and wore a long animal leather overcoat. Angyl caught his eye, and he began striding towards her. “Well, well.... might have to get the boys into the caves cause it just got a little hotter out here,” he said with a wink. “The name’s Ashe,” he said extending his hand. “Angyl,” she said shaking his hand. “Good to meet ya,” Ashe said and then asked, “What can I do for ya?” Angyl looked back at Snow. “Well,” she began to say. “We need some of your minerals,” said Snow, coming right to the point. “Really?” Ashe asked, “What for?” “We’re going to fight Morbidas, and we need to make some weapons,” a cheetah/rat hybrid chimed in.

Angyl, Snow, and Darin looked at him crossly. “Thanks, Archy. We WERE building up to that,” Darin scolded. Ashe folded his arms and nodded, appearing very interested. “That’s great,” he said, “Take what you need, take him down.” “Really?” Angyl asked skeptically. “Absolutely,” Ashe replied, “give the people back their lands.”

“Well then,” Angyl said with hesitation, “thank you.” “Just so you know,” Ashe said as she turned away, “if anyone asks, we were raided.” Angyl turned and looked back at him as though the punch line she’d been anticipating was just delivered. “Nothing personal sweets, but when that fiasco goes to hell, I don’t want the scent of it anywhere near me. Morbidas holds grudges” he told her. “Thank you for your ‘help’, ‘ass’.” Snow retorted. Ashe looked at her crossly and retorted, “It’s ASHE, mongrel.”

“We can definitely not count Ashe as an ally,” Angyl said as they loaded packs with minerals. “Just as well,” said Snow and added, “I don’t like him”. “You don’t like Darin either,” Angyl reminded her. “That’s different,” Snow replied, “It’s not the same kind of dislike. Darin is a pain and a scoundrel, but we go way back.” “You’re a complicated dog Snow,” Angyl mused. “We about ready?” Angyl asked Darin as she switched her attention to the task at hand. “Just loading the rest of the packs,” he replied.

Ashe cleared his throat, announcing his presence. “What can we do for you Ashe?” Angyl asked trying not to show her irritation. “You can leave those packs right where they’re at,” he said. “Excuse me?” Angyl shot back, now unable to contain her frustration. “I thought it over and decided we can’t let you leave with our mineral. I’m not risking my livelihood not to mention my life by having any part in your little suicide mission.” he said. “We had a deal,” Angyl fired back, getting angrier by the second. She mustered courage and countered “We’re taking these packs and concluding our business indefinitely.”

The mammoth men surrounded them. Ashe folded his arms and responded crossly, “That’s where you’re wrong. Last chance. Drop em’ or say your goodbyes.” Angyl sighed, “Alright, you win.” Angyl leaped into the air and dropped Ashe with a

flying kick to the head. “Goodbye.” said Angyl. Ashe sat up rubbing his head. He glared at her and commanded the mammoth men, “Kill them!” The mammoth men rushed them as Angyl withdrew her sword from its sheath.

She brandished the sword and slashed the first attacker. Snow led the others in a charge. She snarled as she lunged and tore into a mammoth’s arm with her teeth. The animal hybrids followed right behind them attacking with their unique, personal attributes. Flying, galloping, and running mammals and predators unleashed a wave of animal fury. As though realizing the battle was not turning in his favor, Ashe backed away. “I don’t think so,” Angyl said glaring at him. She tossed her sword into the air. It twirled, propelling toward Ashe. He tripped as he ran away.

The sword embedded itself right next to his head. He breathed a sigh of relief before looking up in time to see Angyl somersault out of nowhere, landing in a straddling position on him. “I know when I’m beaten,” he said, “Take the minerals and go.” “You tried to kill us, Ashe. That time has passed,” she refuted; she pulled the sword from the ground and held it to his throat. “Nothing personal, sweets.” She stabbed the sword into the icy ground and punched him swiftly in the face, knocking him out cold. The others had overpowered their would be assailants when Angyl walked over to them. Two mammoth men got to their feet and started toward her. She smiled a little and smacked their heads together. “Nice work, guys.” she commended her team.

Loaded down with minerals with which to craft weapons, Angyl and her new friends continued on the long trek to Morbidas’ mountain. “Who’s this ‘Morbido’ fella anyway?” asked Archy. “Morbidas,” Angyl corrected him, looking back, “and you must be kidding. You’ve really never heard of him?” “They’ve been confined to paintings until

now, Angyl. What do you expect?” Snow responded with irritation in her voice. Angyl looked at her, appearing offended she responded, “Excuse me for being a bit surprised.” “Well if you would think before you speak then maybe...” Snow said, raising her voice.

“What is your problem?!” Angyl yelled cutting her off. “It sounds like I’m not the one with the problem, precious!” Snow yelled back. “Stop!” Darin commanded, “You’re both being manipulated.” “That’s absurd,” Snow said testily. “No... he’s right,” Angyl said, regaining her composure, “I mean, listen to us. We haven’t known each other long, but we’re friends Snow.” There was a silence while Snow pondered this. “You’re right,” she finally admitted and apologized, “I’m sorry, Angyl. I really don’t know what came over me.” “I think I do,” Angyl said, stroking Snow’s fur. She explained to her new four-legged companion, “Darin’s right. We were being manipulated, and I feel it in my gut that Morbidas is pulling the strings to divide us.” “Well,” Snow said with shame in her voice, “we’ll have to be alert.” Angyl embraced her friend.

“Didn’t you say Darin couldn’t be trusted?” Angyl asked, breaking the embrace. “You said WHAT?” Darin responded, taken aback. Snow sighed. “You know,” she told Angyl, “sometimes you talk a little too much, and that’s all me, hon.” Angyl opened her mouth to defend herself but only laughed. Unbeknownst to them, this scene was being observed by secret eyes. The eyes belonged to Morbidas as he watched through his magic window from the top of his mountain fortress. As Morbidas stood there in the chilly mountain air, the long tails of his dark black suit whipped in the wind. His suit also sported a high collar and a large gold medallion around his neck. It was a rare occasion when he truly looked like a sorcerer. He listened to Darin go on about

Morbidas' cunning and deceitful ways, and he couldn't help smiling. As he descended below again into his fortress, he entered a chamber where Spiryt was suspended in an emerald that was large enough to imprison a much bigger person. Addressing her, he asked, "I trust you're enjoying your new quarters, my dear. A dungeon is no place for a young lady."

"I'm sure you're just chomping at the bit to be reunited with your sister," he said and added, "I confess I'm looking forward to seeing her again myself." He walked past her new accommodations, then stopped and turned. "You know," he said, "it was going to be a bit of a surprise, but what the hey, I'll tell you now since you can't actually hear me." He continued speaking as though she actually COULD hear him. "You see, for all her attempts to thwart me and the frustration it has caused me, Angyl is still serving me. She's bringing me a white wolf. Maybe not the way I had in mind, but nevertheless."

He began to pace as he talked, "When she gets here with the beast, I'm going to cut it's heart out and use it to complete the spell that will open a door wide enough for the rest of my brethren to join me." He pointed upward and remarked, "THAT DOOR – the swirling vortex thing. I say join 'me' by the way because after it's over, none of you will be around anymore. Not you, not Mommy and Daddy, and especially not that pain-in-the-ass sister of yours." He stopped, turned, and grinned maniacally, "That's right," he said, "I'm planning a party and none of you are invited," Behind the emerald barrier, Spiryt might not have heard a word that Morbidas had said, but she appeared to somehow know just the same.

Chapter 6

The sun scorched the rocky peaks of the Havanian mountains. It was a stark contrast to the chill of the Icy Wilds. Ever closer to their destination, Angyl and her band climbed the perilous, rocky ridge. “Careful, everyone,” Snow advised, “One slip could be it.” “We can always count on you for a bit of confidence, Snowy,” Darin teased. “You know, you could just carry us to the top, Darin” Snow replied. “Actually, I can’t,” said Darin. “Why?” Snow asked him. “Because I don’t want to,” Darin answered before cackling hysterically. Snow glared, “I hope we don’t run into any other nasty creatures, Darin. I may not be able to guarantee your safety.”

Angyl grunted as she climbed, “Guys, less talk, more climb.” Finally, after what seemed like forever, they reached the top of the ridge. “About time,” Angyl breathed. “Is it lunchtime? Did someone bring sandwiches?” a hybrid asked. “Of course,” Darin said sarcastically, “Wait here while I unpack them.” The poor creature sat down and waited obliviously. “You’re not just gonna leave him like that, are you?” Angyl asked Darin as they walked on. “He’s part jaguar. Do you want to tell him there aren’t any sandwiches?” Darin replied, answering her question with a question. Angyl called back to him, “Let’s go! Darin’s a jerk, and he doesn’t have any sandwiches!” Angyl grinned, making her point. “Nice,” Darin said bitterly, “You know they eat guys like me, right?” “I eat guys like you,” Snow said, overhearing the exchange. “Good point,” Darin admitted.

Snow looked back at the others and said, “This region is full of caves. We’ll take shelter in one of them for the night.” Without a word, they followed Snow in agreement with the plan. “There,” Snow said, spying a cave entry. “So we’re taking shelter in the

dark night in a dark cave? That's the plan?" Darin asked with irony in his voice. "Sleep outside then," was all Snow said. "No, no" replied Darin, "I love a spooky, dark cave as much as the next freak." As they entered the cave, they heard water. "Do you hear that?" Angyl asked. "There must be a falls nearby," said Snow. "Showers for everyone," she joked. Angyl smiled and admitted, "I know I could use one." "I think we all could," Snow replied.

Suddenly they heard something else. Something that definitely was not water. It sounded like a low growling. "What is it, Snow?" Angyl asked her friend. "What do you mean?" she responded looking back at Angyl. "Didn't you just growl at something?" Angyl asked her, becoming more concerned. Snow shook her head. They heard the growling again. This time it was louder and angrier. "Now I hear it too," said Snow. "Heck of a cave you picked out," Darin whined. "I'm picking the next one." "Would you shut it?" Snow snapped with a harsh whisper. The growling became louder, now accompanied by snarling. "It's getting louder," Angyl said. "It's getting closer,"

Snow added. "It sounds big," Angyl said. The source of the fierce growling began to reveal itself in the rays of light breaking through the crevices. "You could say that," Snow replied, her eyes widening in terror. "Yeah? How do you know- Oh my-," Angyl said, fear abruptly cutting off the rest of her sentence. Towering above them, visible in the streaks of sunlight was a creature at least nine feet tall that looked like a scaly, reptilian wolf. It had wolf-like features such as enormous, jagged canines, pointed ears, and the eyes of a wolf. Scales replaced fur, however, and its tail came to a sharp, harpoon-shaped point.

"Snow?" Angyl asked. "Huh?" Snow uttered, barely able to manage a response at

all. "Is he by any chance, a distant relative?" Angyl asked hopefully. "Not from my family," Snow said, finding her voice, "nothing that ugly could share my genes." "I was afraid of that," Angyl said with a note of panic in her voice. "Everyone, slowly back away," Snow instructed, "slowly." As everyone inched their way back toward the entrance, afraid to even breathe, some of the hybrids started to panic. "Let's get out of here!" one of them cried out. "No!" Snow barked. The beast jerked its head at the commotion. It leapt at them.

"Run!!" Snow commanded everyone. Angyl grabbed Snow around her waist and rolled out of the way with her, seconds before the beast impacted. "Thank you," said Snow. "Thank me when we're not dead," Angyl quipped. Angyl stood and drew her sword. "Get everyone out of here," she instructed Snow, "I'll buy you some time." Snow hesitated. "Go!" Angyl yelled. "I'll be back for you!" Snow yelled as she sprinted away. "Well yeah," Angyl retorted. "Alright, big guy," she taunted, "show me what you got." The beast swiped at her with a mighty, clawed arm. Angyl dove out of the way. She swatted at the creature with her sword. As the beast continued to swipe at her, Angyl's blade connected with its tough, scaly hide. The sword clanged against the scales and seemed to irritate the creature.

It swatted at Angyl, sending her flying into a cave wall. Then, it charged at her like a bull. Angyl rolled out of the way, causing the beast to crash into the wall, shaking the entire cave. Snow, who was trying to get the others out of the cave and to safety, felt the vibrations and stopped to look up. "Oh crap!" she uttered and commanded, "Move, everyone, move NOW!" Rocks began to tumble. As the others were scrambling for the entrance, large rocks fell, cutting off their escape. Angyl looked up as the rocks fell and

raced to catch up the rest of her band. She looked back when she heard the howling of the beast as falling rocks buried it. “That works,” she thought to herself.

“Hey!” Angyl called out to her group when the dust had settled. “I killed ‘ugly’!” And trapped us in here, I’m afraid,” Snow said. She hated to assign blame to her friend. “I-I’m sorry,” Angyl stammered. “No, there’s a bigger issue at hand than who is at fault,” Snow said, stating a fact while also trying to cushion the blow. “We need to find another way out. These aren’t just caves; many of them are connected. We just need to head back the other way and see where it leads. “Let’s get a move on then,” Angyl said, not quite letting herself off the hook. As everyone filed forward in search of an exit route with Angyl in the lead, Snow nudged her friend with her head.

Angyl looked back at her. “Are you alright?” Snow asked. “You’re not hurt, are you?” Angyl sighed, “Only my pride.” “That will heal faster than broken bones,” Snow assured her. Beneath the mound of rocks where the creature was buried, it began to stir, scattering rocks. A large, clawed arm emerged from the rocks, followed by a low moaning. Rocks flew off the top as the creature’s head burst through with a roar. It was most definitely not over.

Chapter 7

“This is where you left him?” Snow asked, her voice echoing through the cave as they neared a familiar spot. “Under a big pile of rock,” confirmed Angyl, “Why?” Snow moved some of the smaller rocks with her nose and pondered, “Because if these are the rocks, then where is the beast that should be beneath them?” “That...isn’t possible,” Angyl stammered. Snow’s eyes widened as she looked past Angyl. “Not again,” Angyl said, immediately recognizing the look on Snow’s face. She heard growling as the beast rose up behind her. Angyl drew her sword and whirled around. She slashed wildly at it. “The rest of you know the drill,” she yelled. “Not this time!” Snow responded.

“This time we make sure it’s dead and we do it together,” Snow insisted. “Thanks for the vote of confidence Snow,” Angyl told her. “Anytime,” Snow replied flatly. “It’s got scales Angyl” Snow pointed out. “It’s also got bad breath,” retorted Angyl, “What’s your point?” “The scales are separated... not by much but ...” Snow struggled to make her point. “I got ya now” Angyl said. She began picking and jabbing trying to find an entry point through its scaly hide. “If I had known...” she said as she jabbed with her sword, “that I would be here now because I took my sister into the woods to train...” The tip of her sword found its mark just above the thigh. “... We would have stayed...” she jabbed the sword in as far as it would go. “HOME!”

The beast reacted in pain as it fell to one knee, giving Angyl just the vantage point she needed. “Hi, there,” Angyl said. She drove her sword into the creature’s mouth. It dropped to the ground as she pulled the sword out with a sickening, bloody sound. The hybrids looked on with expressions of relief combined with horror. Snow seemed indifferent, except for a swell of pride for her friend, exclaiming “Well done – now back

to one crisis, finding a way out of here.” “I might know of a way,” Darin chimed in. He looked over at one of the hybrids that appeared to be a very large but otherwise, ordinary gopher. “Arnie here, has great talent when it comes to burrowing”, Darin informed them. “What’s his other half?” Angyl asked with much curiosity. “Don’t get him laughing or you’ll see”, Darin warned. “Arnie, it’s show time!” he instructed signaling the gopher. Arnie quickly began burrowing a hole into the cave floor, cackling hysterically as he dug. “Hyena” Snow and Angyl said in unison.

Outside the blocked cave, the gopher/hyena emerged from a freshly dug burrow with the team just behind him. “We’re alive”, said Angyl, pulling herself out of the hole. “And it’s nothing short of a miracle,” Snow chuckled as Angyl helped her out. Now safely above ground, Snow shook dirt from her coat. “Is that what passes for a ‘thank you?’” Darin complained. “Pretty much,” Snow teased. The good-natured ribbing was abruptly interrupted when three Demun’ja warriors ported into their midst. “What the-?” Angyl exclaimed drawing her sword. “Stay back!” Snow commanded them. The first of them spoke, “My name is Kija, and we have time for neither a battle nor explanations. “Oh, why didn’t you say so?” Angyl said with cynical sarcasm. “We can’t just trust them,” Snow said, stating the obvious.

“You can either take your chances with us or the Demun’ja that will follow”, said another. Like Bethar, this voice was female. “There is no time,” she said. “ Give us one good reason,” Angyl countered. Suddenly, even more Demun’ja teleported onto the scene. Angyl brandished her weapon. To her surprise though, the new visitors leapt into the fray, wielding weapons of their own. Steel clashed as Demun’ja weapons collided with each other in a frenzy of weapons and hand-to- hand combat. “TRAITORS!” one of

the Demun'ja attackers growled. Kija's axe locked with the blade of his foe's sword. "You will die for this, Kija!" he snarled. "You are a coward to follow Morbidas!" Kija growled back. As the battle raged, Angyl found herself wondering if her eyes could be deceiving her.

This could be an elaborate deception. Angyl gripped the sword in her hand and ran toward the fray. "NO!" yelled Kija. "Protect the animal!" One of the other Demun'ja from the opposing side who appeared to be the leader took notice. "Don't touch her, human!" Kija tried desperately to hold him at bay until his opponent managed to disarm him. He punched Kija swiftly on his face. He swooped the fallen axe up with his foot, caught it, and slashed Kija's belly with it. "No!" the female cried out, distracted from her own fight. "Kijaaa!" she yelled. During all the distraction two of the attackers managed to catch Snow from behind and hoist her up. Snow struggled and snapped with her jaws! "Angyl, help!" she yelled to her friend. "Snow!" Angyl cried, alarmed.

"Retreat!" the leader barked at his subordinates! They suddenly broke off the battle and abruptly teleported away with Snow. "Noooo!" yelled Angyl. She grabbed the female around the throat. "Follow them. Take us now or die here!" Angyl ordered. "You're neither ready nor in any position to give orders," the female snarled. "Kija is dead, and I am in command. Release me!" she insisted. "You're not in command of me or my friends," Angyl said, tightening her grip around her throat. She broke Angyl's grasp and kned her in the gut. Angyl doubled over with a grunt. "As I said," she told Angyl, "none of you are ready. Morbidas has been watching you, and so have we."

She walked away from Angyl and addressed the others, "If you want to succeed, all of you will take my orders." "What exactly might THOSE be?" Darin asked

begrudgingly. "You have your stolen minerals," she noted. "We didn't steal anything!" Darin shot back. "You fought to take them, did you not?" "Yeah, but-" Darin paused, "okay" he conceded. "Now you will do as you should have already done," she continued. "You will fashion weapons from them." "Then what?" Angyl muttered, straightening up. Their "new leader" turned to face her and offered, "We will instruct you in learning to wield them." "We don't need 'instruction'," Angyl told her. "Draw your sword", she told Angyl who complied and unsheathed her weapon; "I thought you'd never ask" she said gleefully.

"Now attack me," the leader ordered. "You're unarmed," Angyl sighed. "Your honor is commendable", the leader stated but then warned and insisted, "but will not serve you in battle. Now attack me!" Angyl came at her reluctantly, swinging her sword at her adversary. She blocked Angyl's sword with the gauntlet on her wrist, then with the opposite arm as Angyl struck a second time. She backhanded Angyl, causing her to drop the sword. The leader caught the sword as it fell. She held the end of it to Angyl's throat. "Pathetic," she taunted. No wonder they took your friend from you so easily." Angyl glared and fought back tears. She lowered the blade and handed the sword back to Angyl who snatched it from her from her angrily. "Anger will serve you well," she told Angyl "if you can harness it."

The Demun'ja dumped Snow on the ground at Morbidas' feet as they ported into his fortress. "Excellent" he said beaming, "At long last, I can finally scratch that itch," he joked while scratching her back. He jerked his hand back as Snow snapped at it. "Try it again," she snarled, "I'm begging you." "You're feistier than I remember, Snow," he laughed. "Yes, I know your name." "Good," Snow said coldly, "Then you know the

name of the one ...” “Who is going to kill me, I know,” Morbidas said, interrupting her. “I confess, I’ve been watching AND listening,” he said straightening his suit. He sighed, “How do I break this?” He paused as he pondered how to phrase his next words. “That’s not going to happen, I’m afraid. This story has a far different ending, but I think we both know that, Snowy old girl.” “Call me that again, Morbidas, and you die now” she threatened.

“Take her away!” he commanded his warrior, “She can join our friend.” The underlings picked Snow up and hauled her off as she struggled to get away. The group leader stayed behind to make his report. “Lord Morbidas,” he began nervously, “Ryuo has betrayed us. She and a few others ...,” He flinched a bit as Morbidas placed his hand on his collar bone, and revealing his cleverness stated, “I know, Tello, and believe it or not, I’ve planned for it.” Tello relaxed a bit. “Now go,” Morbidas said, patting Tello’s cheek; “You’ve done well.” Tello bowed and retreated quickly. “Treachery runs rampant around here,” he said quietly to himself.

“You look like a Demun’ja, but you don’t blindly follow Morbidas like one,” Angyl said, and then asked, “Who are you?” “I’m someone you don’t want to cross,” Ryuo answered, not looking up from the spear she was chiseling from the mineral. Angyl folded her arms stubbornly, her gaze unwavering. Ryuo looked up from her work and responded, “My name is Ryuo. Do you mind if I finish the spear now?” Angyl cleared her throat self-consciously, and Ryuo resumed chiseling the spear she was crafting. “This stone is strong. The quality is very fine” Ryuo said, almost complimenting Angyl on her find. “Where did you come by it?” “The Icy Wilds,” Angyl replied. “From Ashe?” Ryuo asked, looking up from her work. Angyl nodded without pausing. “He’s an

asshole,” Ryuo and Angyl said in unison. This time Angyl looked up, and they both laughed.

“What can you tell me about Morbidas that I don’t already know?” Angyl asked. “We don’t have that kind of time,” Ryuo replied snidely. “Okay, so tell me something that will help me get my sister and my dog back.” Angyl snapped slamming her dagger down. “Alright!” Ryuo said dropping her own weapon, and then curiously asked, “Wait. Your ‘dog’?” “Don’t tell Snow,” said Angyl, embarrassed. “Not to worry,” Ryuo said continuing, “He’s not mortal. He’s one of us.” “Us?” Angyl echoed. “He’s Demun’ja,” said Ryuo. Angyl’s eyes widened and her jaw dropped at the bombshell Ryuo had just proclaimed. Ryuo smirked a little. “Now that I have your attention,” she said.

Chapter 8

“You have my undivided attention,” said Angyl with extreme curiosity. “In my world,” Ryuo began her story, “Atreyakus was our king. He was our mightiest warrior, and he led us in keeping the peace. We were not barbarians.” “What happened?” asked Angyl, intrigued. “He met an Enchanted, a wizard you would say,” Ryuo continued, “He tempted Atreyakus with power beyond his dreams. He no longer was content to be a ruler. He wanted to be a god.” She paused and looked up at Angyl. “We tried to overthrow him, but we were no match for his newfound power.”

“We failed, but a race called the Spirytiens arrived and drove Atreyakus and the Enchanted out of our lands. The Enchanted showed him a world to conquer.” “Mhist.” Angyl said with a sigh. “Exactly,” Ryuo confirmed and then explained, “He offered us redemption for our treachery if we would once again fall under his command. We had no other choice, and we obeyed his every order until we heard of a prophecy that foretold his defeat by a Spirytian. To ensure that no one would ever know the truth in this world, he took a new form and swore us to silence. He then took the name ‘Morbidas’.”

“Wait,” said Angyl, “Snow spoke of a prophecy too.” “Then you must know the identity of the Spirytian,” Ryuo said. “Spiryt?” Angyl asked in disbelief. “Yes,” said Ryuo. “You were truly not aware that your Spiryt was not your blood sister?” “No!” Angyl fired. “I was NOT aware because it ISN’T TRUE” she said angrily. “Your wolf told you nothing of this?” asked Ryuo, surprised. “She is foretold to play a pivotal role in Morbidas’ undoing. She said nothing of Spiryt being adopted,” Angyl replied. “Fine. Ask your parents then,” Ryuo said icily, going back to her work.

Ryuo brandished the spear she just finished. “When you’re finished,” she told Angyl, “we train.” Without warning, Angyl thrust her freshly crafted dagger at Ryuo’s throat, stopping the point just short of stabbing her. “We don’t need to train,” Angyl said raising an eyebrow. In a blurred motion, Ryuo twisted the arm that held the dagger to her behind Angyl’s back. She then pinned her other arm, immobilizing her. “Yes, ‘we’ do,” she hissed in Angyl’s ear.

The hybrids sat around a campfire, carving weapons of their own. Darin yawned, “I think I’m off to a pretty good start. I’ll finish it tomorrow; right now, I’m ready to turn in.” “We’re training,” Ryuo said flatly. “NOW?!” the hybrids cried out in unison. “Now!” Ryuo echoed. Everyone groaned. Trejo, Ryuo’s right hand, silently approached from behind. “She said NOWWWW!” he bellowed. Everyone jumped, startled. “I need to find a bush now,” Darin said weakly.

Snow looked out from a dark room in Morbida’s fortress with a window just large enough for a beam of moonlight to enter. She appeared roughed up, and the look on her face was one of despair. “Longing for the comfort of a friend to offer the assurance of a happy ending?” Morbidas asked, silently entering the unfurnished room. “I understand,” he continued, “Someone to tell you that a bright new morning is just a long night away.” He slowly stepped toward her and admitted, “This may surprise you Snow, but I actually regret that things are this way.” He advanced closer to her, cautiously despite the chain around her neck and announced, “I don’t want to kill you, Snow. I wish there was another way.”

He paused for a moment in reflection, “I can’t do this, not without granting you a chance.” He waved his hand and the chain around her neck flew apart. “You can try to

run, and you can try to kill me.” he acknowledged as he reached out to touch her fur; “The probability of you succeeding at either though is extraordinarily small, but there is always a chance.” He gently touched her back. “That is what I’m granting you. Go on, Snow,” he whispered and continued, “You’re all alone. You’re going to die tomorrow. You’re out of options and have nothing left to lose.” Snow glanced back at him, “You’re right”, she whispered hoarsely, “So get it over with.” “Pardon?” Morbidas said, still touching her fur.

“Kill me,” she whispered. Morbidas slowly straightened, “You’ve truly given up.” “I don’t want to wait. If I’m going to die, let it be now”, Snow said as she turned to face him. “Grant me a last wish”, she implored him. “Say the words” Morbidas said, sounding sincere. “Let them go,” she said, her voice breaking, “You’ll have what you want, and I’ll be dead. This world will be all yours. Angyl will be unable to stop you. There is no need to kill her or the Spirytian.” Morbidas stroked his chin, considering this. “If you swear it, I’ll believe you,” Snow uttered, her voice straining more and more.

Morbidas sighed, “When Angyl comes to rescue her sister, I will show them both out myself.” “BUT..” he said, “if she tries to kill me, I’ll have to defend myself.” Snow nodded then moved over to the window and stated, “Get on with it then.” Morbidas grimaced as he touched his fingers together and a ball of energy materialized between them. As the ball grew bigger, Morbidas yelled out, “I lied!” He threw the ball at her. Snow glared, “So did I.” She rolled out of the way as the energy ball obliterated the window. Scrambling to her feet, Snow leaped out of the now gaping hole in the wall. Morbidas ran to the wall and looked out in disbelief. As Snow fell into the abysmal air below, she produced a small device between her teeth and bit down on it, teleporting

away.

Ryuo had been training Angyl and the others all night to the point of exhaustion. She advised them, “Your enemy will show no pity no matter how weary you are.” Angyl swung her sword with as much might as she could manage. Ryuo sidestepped her easily and swatted the sword out of her hand. “Are you going to pick it up?” Ryuo taunted. Angyl trudged at her, swinging her fist weakly, “That’s my line, you bi...” Ryuo tripped Angyl and caused her to face plant. “A Demun’ja and a human sparring together. You will never see a stranger sight,” said Snow, announcing herself. “Snow!” yelled Angyl with a sudden burst of renewed energy. “I can’t wait to hear this,” said Snow.

Chapter 9

“Snow!” Angyl repeated as she rushed over and threw her arms around her furry friend and inquired, “how did you escape?” “It wasn’t easy,” Snow replied, “fortunately though, Morbidas isn’t the only one with a slick tongue.” “You sly dog”, Angyl said with a grin. “So what’s all this? We’re joining forces? With the bad guys?” Snow probed, full of questions. “Ryuo isn’t the bad guy, really. It’s complicated,” Angyl replied. “You’re on a first name basis with her,” said Snow, “it must be.” Angyl changed the subject admitting, “I really missed you Snow, and well I was afraid I might never ...” “I know,” said Snow, “I wasn’t too sure myself.”

“If the two of you are through with this touching moment, we need to get back to training,” Ryuo said. “Training can resume in the morning, Ryuo. Everyone is tired,” Angyl countered. “Very well,” conceded Ryuo. “Snow, would you please tell her we don’t need to train more?” Angyl pleaded. “I hate to admit it Angyl,” Snow said, “but she’s not wrong.” “What?!” exclaimed Angyl, flabbergasted. “Thank you,” Ryuo said, smiling for once. “But ...” Angyl interjected. “I was captured after all,” Snow said in a singsong voice. “Whose side are you on?” Angyl retorted as they walked back to the camp. “I’m just saying...,” Snow replied, her voice fading in the distance.

“It’s a pleasure meeting you Ashe,” Morbidas said. He and Ashe dined on a large feast of various meats, bread, and fruit spread out on a long table in his fortress. “Likewise, my lord,” Ashe replied, his mouth stuffed with food. “Your reputation as a formidable warrior precedes you,” said Morbidas, ignoring Ashe’s poor table manners. Morbidas clasped his fingers, resting his elbows on the table. He continued, “I’m a bit surprised that Angyl and her companions were able to rob you and overpower your forces

so easily.” Ashe dropped the leg of lamb he was holding. “Who said it was ‘easy’?” he asked indignantly. Morbidas raised his left hand apologetically and assured Ashe, “I meant no offense.”

“My guys were shall we say, ‘not on their game’,” Ashe said mildly embarrassed. “I’m sure,” Morbidas said graciously, “Good help is so hard to find.” “They do alright most of the time,” Ashe said, talking with his mouth full once again and asked, “So, what is it I can do for you my lord?” “I’ve lost my dog, and I will reward you handsomely for her return,” Morbidas said with a smile. Ashe grinned. “For the chance at some payback,” Ashe said, “I’d almost do it for free.” “Splendid,” said Morbidas rising. “I said ‘almost’,” Ashe said with a smirk. “Of course,” said Morbidas. “Come, let us outfit you and your ‘men’ properly. This time we will up their game.” “I’m not done eating,” Ashe objected. “I am,” Morbidas said adamantly, walking away.

Angyl, Snow, and the others gathered together at sunrise for a last bit of motivation for the difficult battle ahead. “Well this is it ...” Snow said, “We can teleport from here to Morbidas’ mountain. The journey is nearly at an end, but our toughest battle lies just ahead.” “Is this the part where you say, ‘if anyone wants out, now is the time’?” Darin asked, hopefully. “No,” Snow replied flatly. “Sorry, Darin,” Snow told him, “but it’s going to take all of us.” “Kidding of course,” Darin said, looking at the ground. “Sorry, old friend,” Snow apologized again.

“Anything you wish to add?” Snow asked, looking at Angyl. Angyl seemed unusually reserved and somewhat absent. “Let’s go,” was all she said. “Alright,” Snow agreed. “Everyone hold on to each other.” Hands, wings, paws, and claws all clasped. Snow activated the teleportation device once again, and the team abruptly

disappeared into the air. The air rippled as the teleportation device spit them out into a jungle. “Weee!” cried Darin, “Can we do that again?” Angyl looked around at the unfamiliar surroundings. “Where are we?” she asked, “this isn’t Morbidas’ mountain!”

“What happened?” the rest of the group began muttering, echoing Angyl’s sentiments. “I’m not sure,” said Snow, “I did travel very far with it. Maybe it ran out of juice.” “Tell me we’re at least close to the mountain,” said Angyl. “We’ve got to be but we’ll need to get a better vantage point to know for sure,” Snow replied. The team continued to mutter as they navigated the difficult terrain. Angyl hacked away at the underbrush with her sword. Ryuo and Trejo trailed behind. “It’s a wonder they made it as far as they did,” said Ryuo. Trejo grunted in agreement. “Come on, slowpokes!” Angyl called out. Ryuo and Trejo both grunted.

Angyl and Snow looked up at the sound of someone hacking their way towards them. The underbrush parted, revealing Ashe and some of his men. “Just the firepot I was looking for!” exclaimed Ashe. “You’ve gotta be kidding me,” said Angyl, and then asking, “what slimy rock did you crawl out from under?” “You hitting on me, love?” Ashe smirked. Angyl began stomping towards him, exclaiming, “I’m gonna do more than hit you, Ashe! I’d warn you not to get any ideas, but I doubt it will be an issue.” Ashe brandished his sword and countered, “I hope your blade is as sharp as your tongue, precious.” Steel clashed as Angyl swung her sword into his. Their two swords clanked as they battled it out under the jungle canopy. Snow looked back at Ryuo and inquired, “are you just going to watch them?” “If she can’t handle Ashe, she might as well go home now,” Ryuo retorted.

The mammoth men began to move into attack position. “Stand back, boys.” Ashe

said swinging his sword wildly, "I've got this kitten under control." Angyl grunted as she thrust her sword at Ashe and asked, "Were you always so chauvinist or did your father raise you that way?" Ashe stopped for a moment. "My father left when I was a kid, thank you." Ashe said, seemingly offended at the insinuation. "I'm sorry," said Angyl, "must've been tough knowing even he couldn't stand you!" Angyl quipped, picking up the fight again. "That's cold," Ryuo remarked, having overheard. The battle moved through the underbrush as both combatants clashed swords vigorously.

"Give up now Angyl, and maybe I won't send you to heaven" beseeched Ashe. "That's original," said Angyl between breaths, "you've been working on that all day?" The fight began to move up a slope leading to a waterfall. "Ooh, hear that, precious? Sounds like a waterfall," Ashe taunted. "Good," Angyl said, "You smell like a trough." Up the slope they battled until Angyl suddenly stopped and sheathed her sword. "Giving up, love?" asked Ashe. "You're wasting my time," said Angyl, "you're not getting Snow and neither is Morbidas." Ashe stowed his own sword and asked, "What in the name of Mhist makes you think you have any choice in the matter?" Angyl sighed, "You're an arrogant, chauvinist pig, Ashe. Even you must realize that if Morbidas gets his hands on her, no one here will survive. He'll kill you too and even if he didn't, you'd be kissing your livelihood goodbye."

On that note Angyl turned and walked away. Ashe followed after her, asking "Is this the part where you try to persuade me to join your little band of misfits?" Angyl looked back at him and chortled, "What ... are you crazy? I don't want you on my team." "What exactly do you expect me to do then, 'your highness'?" Ashe asked her, throwing his hands up. "Be smart for once and walk away," Angyl said, continuing on. Snow

trotted up to her and declared, “Angyl, I think you should look back.” “No!” she exclaimed, “I’m not giving that self-centered son-of-a-...,” “Angyl,” repeated Snow. “LOOK BACK!” Angyl sighed and reluctantly turned around. Her eyes widened and her jaw dropped as she beheld what she could make out to be Morbidas’ mountain. It was in the far distance but still visible. “What?” asked Ashe, puzzled. “What’s everyone looking at?”

Angyl walked briskly up to him and drew her sword. She held it to his throat, then tilted his chin ever so slightly with the point. “Give us your teleport unit or die where you stand,” she demanded. Ashe swallowed hard, “You’ll do it, won’t you?” He reached for his necklace chain and snapped off the unit and handed it to her. “I thought Morbidas was mean,” he confessed. Angyl breathed a sigh of happiness and showed it to Snow. Snow smiled and urged, “Let’s go and get your sister back.”

Chapter 10

Morbidas stood, silently pondering and staring absently out a window. Two of his warriors quietly awaited his orders. “I wonder..” he finally said, “what would wolf taste like?” He turned around to find his warriors on the ground, and Angyl standing with her foot on the chest of one of them with her team behind her. “We’re a little gamey,” said Snow. “I brought you a white wolf,” Angyl said and then demanded, “now release Spirynt.” “Angyl, I think we all know that some game changers have transpired since we made that arrangement,” Morbidas said, shaking his head, quickly adding, “Here’s another!” He generated a fireball between his fingers and hurled it at them. The group quickly dove in opposite directions to avoid it.

Angyl drew her sword and rushed at Morbidas. As she swung her sword, Morbidas waved his fingers and a fiery sword materialized in his hands. Angyl jumped back for a moment in surprise. “Come to me,” he said, waving the sword with flames surging from it. Angyl swung her blade, and it clashed with Morbidas’, sending flames scattering in every direction. He waved his free hand and the doors flung open. A group of his warriors outside the doors took notice of the scrimmage inside and rushed in to re-enforce their master. “It’s a party now!” said Snow. “Sic em’!” Darin yelled as he drew a stone dagger from a sheath. “That’s my line!” he exclaimed. The rest of the team brandished their hand-crafted weapons and met the attacking Demun’ja warriors head on.

Snow snarled and growled as she lunged at an axe-wielding warrior. He tried to intimidate Snow as he spun the axe, but Snow sunk her teeth into his hand causing him to drop the axe and cry out in pain. He swatted her away with a swift backhand to her face. Snow reeled for a moment, but she quickly recovered and charged at him once again.

This time she pounced as he tried to retake the axe. She knocked him on his back and snarled savagely in his face. "Never-hit-an animal," she said between growls. Two more Demun'ja tried to ambush her from behind. They stopped and looked up as they heard a war cry. Darin bounded over to them and kicked the first of them with his rabbit legs. He hopped over the second attacker and kicked him from behind. As the two warriors lay toppled over each other, Darin yelled, "Say my name! Say it!" Snow said very coolly, "He won't stop till you say it."

Darin grinned widely. "I owe you," said Snow. "Does this mean we can forget about the bones?" he asked hopefully. "No," Snow said, diving back into the fray. Ryuo and Trejo battled their former comrades. There was tension combined with the heat of the battle. Ryuo battled a warrior named Krigar who snarled at her as they locked weapons. Krigar declared to his now adversary, "I trusted you, Ryuo! You were my friend!" Ryuo forced a break in the lock. He then ducked as Krigar twirled his double bladed weapon and swung it at her head. He then leg swept her, knocking her on her back. "Now you're just a traitor," he sneered standing over her. He poised his weapon for a killing stroke. Suddenly he was ambushed by a furry frenzy of enchanted hybrid animals. "Liberation!" one of them yelled. Krigar screamed out as they dragged him away. "Thank you," Ryuo said quietly.

Angyl and Morbidas continued to battle, flame against steel. "Your swordsmanship is impressive. Who did you learn from?" Morbidas asked her. Angyl glared and answered, "From my father." Angyl kicked him in the midsection, causing him to stumble backwards. His sword disappeared as a result of his loss of focus, and Angyl stuck her blade in the floor with a loud crack. She began swinging at Morbidas,

pummeling him with her fists. “You have-no idea-how much pain-you’ve caused me!” she said with hatred burning in her eyes. Morbidas forced her back with an energetic blow. “Good to know” he said, becoming agitated himself.

“I’m going to kill you!” Angyl roared. “Maybe-“ Morbidas countered, waving his fingers around, “but not today.” Angyl suddenly froze, along with her companions. “My brothers,” Morbidas called out, “Time to go, but we’ll be back!” The Demun’ja warriors groaned as they realized the battle between their now motionless adversaries was at an end. “Don’t grumble; you were losing anyway,” Morbidas chastised them. He raised his index finger and then flicked it back, whisking them all away. Angyl and her friends were suddenly freed of their frozen state. They looked around, bewildered. “Where did they go?” the hybrids muttered. “We’ve got to start anticipating things like that,” said Snow. “Did we win?” asked Darin becoming excited. “We won a battle Darin,” Angyl answered. “The war has only gotten underway though,” Snow added.

In a cavern deep within the mountain, Morbidas created a small ball of flame in his hand to light the way for him and his minions. “My lord,” said Krigar, “are we ...” “Yes,” Morbidas answered cutting him off, “we’re deep beneath our home. Yes, we should be IN our home right now, and yes, we will be back to reclaim it by kicking the butts of our enemies.” Krigar opened his mouth to respond but words failed him. “Does that about cover it, Krigar?” Morbidas asked with a cynical tone in his voice. “Um, yes, my lord,” Krigar responded hesitantly. “Goodie!” Morbidas exclaimed and added in an annoyed tone, “Unless anyone else has any questions, let’s press on.” He looked back at his minions and raised an eyebrow.

“No one is going to ask where we’re pressing on to?” Morbidas inquired.

Everyone looked at each other and simply shook their heads. Morbidas seemed almost disappointed. “Well since you asked,” he said continuing on, “we lost; there’s no getting around it. We need an edge before we storm the castle to reclaim it. There are all kinds of shall we say, ‘residents’ living in this mountain. We need an army to strengthen our attack.” “My lord, are we not an army? Shouldn’t we simply send for the rest of our brothers?” asked Krigar. Morbidas looked back at him with an intense gaze. To cover, Krigar added, “Pardon me, my lord, if I’ve spoken out of line.” Morbidas erupted into laughter and replied, “Krigar, somewhere in there is a true thinker. Here I thought you were all brawn.”

“No, my boy,” Morbidas said turning away, “I fear it will take more than numbers. It’s going to take something more hideous, ruthless, and well ... just plain nasty!” He stopped suddenly and stooped down, putting his hand to the ground. He smiled, stood erect, and waved his hand. The ground below flew apart, scattering rocks and dirt everywhere. Before them, a deep, gaping hole laid waiting to be explored. “Shall we?” he said as he looked back at his brothers. Falling in line behind their master, they descended into the hole. They looked around as noises they had never heard before echoed off the cavern walls. “Can you hear it?” asked Morbidas, “This cavern is just teeming with potential.”

Something slithered in the dark as the Demun’ja looked around apprehensively. Krigar practically jumped as something whooshed past him. It actually blew out the flame in Morbidas’ hand. “I don’t know what that just was,” said Morbidas, his voice echoing in the dark, “but I want it!” They heard deep breathing. “That isn’t one of you is it?” Morbidas asked. His voice sounded nearly nervous. The cavern shook with a mighty

roar followed by blazing fire that illuminated the cavern like daylight. The Demun'ja ran for cover while Morbidas stood motionless as if challenging the source for dominion. As ashes smoldered on the cavern walls, the still flaming rock revealed the source of the fierce blast – a large fire breathing dragon! The dragon reared back as though preparing to breathe again. Morbidas smiled wickedly and uttered, “Oh yes. I want it!”

Chapter 11

“We need to find where they’ve disappeared to,” Angyl told her companions, “They couldn’t have gone far.” “This is ‘Morbidas’ we’re talking about,” exclaimed Darin, “They could be in the Andalian mountains!” Angyl had to admit that he had a point. “Let’s split up and search this place,” Snow instructed. As though on cue, Morbidas’ newfound pet burst through the floor! The team scattered as its fiery breath filled the chamber, burning the symbols on the floor right off. The walls were turned smoky black, and Angyl looked up to see the dragon looming over them in all its enormous fierceness. “Oh-my . . .” “RUUNNN!” Snow, yelled cutting her off.

“Allowed me to introduce my new pet, ‘Duke’,” Morbidas beamed. “Isn’t he cute?” he teased. “Duke?” Snow repeated, “Cute? Which of the two should I think is weirder?” Morbidas frowned and then ordered, “Kill the dog first!” “He’s gotta be controlling it,” Angyl said, drawing her sword. “You think?” Snow replied backing away. Angyl shrieked a war cry as she ran toward the dragon, swinging her sword. “Are you crazy?!” Snow yelled, running after her, “Angyl!” Angyl soon came flying back as the dragon swatted her away with its mighty tail. “We need a plan,” said Angyl, laying flat on her back. “Again,” said Snow, “You think?” She clamped onto Angyl’s leg as gently as she could and dragged Angyl out of the way. “Unbelievable,” she said in a muffled voice as she tugged on the leg.

“Hey Morbidas!” Angyl yelled, jumping to her feet and continued taunting her foe, “Big bad sorcerer needs a big ol’ dragon to kill us because he can’t manage it himself!” Morbidas waved his hand, motioning for the dragon to stand down. “Are you really trying to exploit my vanity?” he asked. “Heavens, no” said Angyl. I’m just trying

to trick you into doing something even dumber than the mistakes you've already made."

"Excuse me?" he said, advancing toward her, "What mistakes, pray tell, have I made?"

"Well," Angyl continued, "the incompetent lackeys who can't even handle us for starters.

Let's not forget hiring a moron like Ashe to kill us screams desperation." While Angyl kept Morbidas distracted, Snow and Ryuo circled around behind him.

"The latest bungle of course, would be resorting to a fire breathing dragon that you obviously have to manipulate with magic because there's no way it would listen to you otherwise. It all just makes you look so... what's the word?" Morbidas straightened up at the feel of a dagger pointing in his back. "Weak." Ryuo hissed in his ear. "Snow," she said signaling the white wolf. Snow clamped down with sharp teeth on his hind quarters. Morbida cried out, "Ahhhh! You bi..." "Uh-uh. Be nice," Angyl said with a smile. He flung Ryuo and the wolf aside with a wave of his hand. "My brothers!" he shouted, "Kill them!"

The warriors began to move in ready for another wave of attacks. "Wait. . ." Angyl commanded. "I've got a better idea," she said, the Demun'ja waiting idly but ready. "You and me. No dragons. No magic. . ." Morbidas stroked his goatee as he considered Angyl's alternative. "You want to maintain your fearsome reputation?" Angyl taunted, "Kill me without cheating." Morbidas advanced towards her, "This reeks of trickery. I would have to be a fool to fall for it." He tapped his chin indecisively and relented, "You know, I'll take that chance."

He swung at her with a cheap blow, knocking her down. He moved in for a follow up attack. Angyl caught him in the mid section with her foot. She quickly rose to her feet and followed with a back fist to his face. Back and forth they fought as the rest of

Angyl's team stood back and enjoyed the show. Krigar looked on at Angyl and Morbidas then back at Angyl's companions. He then did a double take. "Attaaaack!" he finally yelled to his comrades. The Demun'ja rushed at Angyl's friends. "Uh-oh!" exclaimed Snow, "Here comes the sideshow!"

As Angyl and Morbidas battled it out, a second battle began. "Just curious, Morbidas," Angyl said, "with all the attention you're showering me with, your pet might be feeling a little left out." Morbidas broke off the battle for a moment and slowly looked back at the dragon that seemed to be shaking off his control with agitation. Morbidas quickly subdued it again with a flick of his finger. The dragon fought for a moment before surrendering its will. Morbidas smiled and looked back at Angyl in time to meet her knuckles. As her fist crashed into his nose, everyone else seemed to take notice.

"Go Angyl!" Snow yelled out as she chased a Demun'ja around. The dragon once again shook off Morbidas' hold as he nursed his now broken nose. "That was a cheap shot!" he said in a muffled tone, his hand clasped over his face. He stood up right as the dragon, mere inches away from his back, snorted hot air. As he went to flick his finger again, the dragon seized the moment and snatched Morbidas up in its mouth and shook him like a rag doll. Morbidas waved his arms, forcing the dragon's mouth open, causing the creature to drop him. The dragon reared back and prepared to breathe its fiery breath. "Oh my!" Morbidas exclaimed. As the fire roared from its mouth, Morbidas created a shield around himself for protection.

"Are you on a break?!" he yelled to his minions. His Demun'ja brothers rushed to intervene while Morbidas fled for safety. The warriors were immediately incinerated by the dragon's breath. Morbidas looked back, horrified. "Oh crap. My bad," he said

apologetically. "I don't think it appreciates being controlled," stated Angyl. "Must be a female," Darin quipped. Snow shot him an icy look. Darin held up his hands in retraction of the comment. "Help me. . .," Morbidas uttered under his breath. "What was that?" Angyl queried, placing a hand to her ear. "Help me!" he repeated, much louder this time. "Your sister is yours to take home. Snow too. Just..help..me."

"Why do you need me?" Angyl asked him, folding her arms. "You're all powerful." The dragon continued to snort hot breath as it advanced towards Morbidas. Morbidas grimaced. "You're right," he said, "I am." The dragon breathed a fiery heat wave at Morbidas. Once again he shielded himself from the blast. This time, however, he began pushing the fire back at the source. He grunted under the weight of the fiery force baring down on him. It inched back toward the dragon. "This is getting interesting," said Darin. Morbidas roared as he thrust the dragon's fire back at the beast, using all of his might. The dragon was enveloped by its own flame. It reared back and roared as Morbidas continued to hammer it with fire until it finally fell. It fell through the gaping hole in the floor and returned to the cavern from which it came, taking more of the floor with it.

Everyone jumped back and scurried to safety as pieces of the floor fell into the hole. Morbidas breathed deeply as he glared at Angyl. "Now we play a new game," he said, "It's called 'seek and destroy'. You will seek your sister before I destroy her." He flicked his finger, zipping away. "Good luck," his voice echoed after he had departed. Angyl turned to Snow and the others; alarmed, she yelled, "He's gonna kill Spiry! We have to find her!" "Everyone split up and turn this place inside out! Go!" Snow barked. "Angyl, the amulet," Snow lowered her head so that Angyl could remove the necklace

from around her furry neck. “It’s time,” she told Angyl.

Chapter 12

The doors of the Spiryt's imprisonment chamber flew open. Morbidas entered in a fury. With a wild look in his eyes, he gazed upon the large emerald that contained Spiryt's motionless body. "I'm sorry, my dear," he told her, "but our time together is up. The good news is that big sister is here to rescue you." He fumed, "The bad news is that isn't going to happen because you'll both be dead in a moment." He grinned wickedly. "So," he continued taunting, "who's going to the great beyond first?" He placed a hand to his ear as though straining to hear. "What's that?" he paused, "Of course, you can watch big sister die."

Frantically searching in another part of fortress, Angyl became panicked. "We have to find her! There's no time!" "We're searching, love," said Darin, checking a room, "We just don't know what we're even looking for." "I may have an idea," offered Snow. Angyl listened intently. "When I was here before, I was groggy because they gave me something to make me more docile, so things are a bit fuzzy. But, maybe . . . just maybe..." she mumbled as she began sniffing around. She sighed before putting her nose to the ground, "Are you..." Angyl started to ask ... "Yes, I'm tracking. Shut up," Snow retorted. She looked up suddenly then broke into a run.

"Isn't she supposed to howl?" Darin whispered. "Come on!" Snow yelled. In the chamber, Morbidas shattered the large emerald, freeing Spiryt from its confines. He held her suspended in the air with his hand, despite weakness from power drained. As he levitated her, he drew her near until he held her by the throat. Her eyes began to open as Morbidas's hand tightened around her throat, and she began to gasp for air. "Now you die," he said. "Morbidas!" Angyl yelled, entering the room with Snow leading the charge,

“Let my sister go!” “Oh do learn a different tune,” he said, rolling his eyes. “You must know, I never let anyone go. It would be devastating to my reputation.”

Snow lunged at him, sinking her teeth into his thigh. He dropped Spiryt as he desperately tried to free himself from Snow’s clamped teeth. He finally managed to wave her away with his hand, but the exertion of more power caused him to fall weakly to the ground. Angyl rushed to her sister’s aid. “Are you alright?” she asked. Spiryt nodded. “I think... I think...” she stammered. Angyl looked over at Morbidas laying in the fetal position. “Wow, Snow,” she said, “Your bite took a lot out of him.” “No, it didn’t,” Snow replied. “He’s running on empty.” Morbidas lifted his head slightly and saw that Angyl had dropped something – the amulet!

He dragged his body over to it, reaching out for it. Angyl and the others did not seem to notice that he now clutched it in his hand. He closed his eyes, absorbing its power. Snow suddenly took notice. “The amulet!” she yelled. Angyl looked first at her empty hand and then at Morbidas. They looked on in panic and fright as Morbidas rose from the ground with renewed energy emanating from him. He opened his eyes and looked at them. “Thank you,” he said. “Spiryt,” said Snow, “touch him.” “What?! Are you crazy?” Spiryt asked. “Touch him!” Snow repeated, this time in a firmer voice. Spiryt reached out and clasped her hand around his ankle. As she did, she began to syphon energy from him. She closed her eyes as it coursed through her.

Spiryt rose to her feet and grasped his hand that held the amulet. “This,” she said, “I believe is mine.” He struggled to wrench his hand free, but her grip was stronger. “Never, Spirytian!” he barked. With a thrust of her hand, she blew him across the room. “Always!” she retorted. Now clasping the amulet herself, Spiryt arose off the floor, lifting

higher and higher into the air. She looked at Angyl. "Thank you sister. I'm alive, I'm charged, and I remember everything. I am the Spirytian." A tear ran down Angyl's cheek. "It's true," Angyl said. "Yes," Spiryt replied, "It's also true that today is a day of deliverance," she said looking down at Morbidas, "His dark reign ends today."

"My reign will go on!" yelled Morbidas, "When you're all dead, I'll take the heart from that infernal beast and open wide my portal. The flood of Demun'ja that will emerge will wash away the rest of the pathetic mortals here." But Spiryt contradicted him, "We stopped you before, Morbidas. You were out matched then and nothing has changed." "Let's find out," challenged Morbidas. He fired a blast of his newfound power at his adversary. Spiryt blocked the attack with one of her own. The two of them seemed evenly matched as both attacked with beams of mystical energy. Darin, finally joining the fray with the others behind him, rushed into the room. He stopped short and gazed in awe. "Okaay," he said, "What did we miss?" "We'll catch you up later," replied Snow.

Meanwhile, Morbidas was beginning to weaken under Spiryt's attacks. "Your defeat is inevitable Morbidas," she said. Morbidas grunted, "I will not lose this world to a deity." He began to regain his edge as he pushed back with all his might. "You are the last of your kind Spirytian, and soon you will be extinct." "Perhaps," relented Spiryt. "Even if I am gone Morbidas, the 'Angylians' are not." "The WHAT?!" exclaimed Morbidas. He broke off his attack in shock, allowing Spiryt to temporarily overpower him with an energy blow. As Morbidas reeled from the attack, he looked over at Angyl who seemed in shock as well. He sneered, "She's bluffing. It's a cheap trick."

"I will never lie to you sister," Spiryt said, lowering herself to the ground. "We do, however, have much to discuss," she said smiling at Angyl. "This battle is at an end,"

declared Spiryt, walking away. Morbidas suddenly erupted into laughter. "At an end?" he repeated and explained, "I might be weakened, Spirytian, but I'm not dead. I'm not dead, you hear me? I'm not dead!!" Spiryt stopped and looked back, "Yes. You are," Then, she looked over at the white wolf, and encouraged, "You heard him. He's weak." Snow snarled, "That's all I need to know." Morbidas suddenly seemed afraid as Snow advanced toward him, growling and snarling. "N-nice dog," he said in a shaky voice. "Let's forget about the whole heart fiasco. Bygones and all that." Snow continued to stalk toward him with hatred in her eyes. "We're not going to want to stay for this," Spiryt advised. She motioned them out of the chamber and waved the doors closed behind her.

Angyl looked back for a moment and listened to Morbidas makes his final pleas. "Now, I'm serious Snow. Don't come any closer. You're a bad do....." Angyl winced as he screamed. Spiryt took her hand, comforting her big sister. "You know," Angyl said, "killing Morbidas was supposed to be MY thing." "You have a higher calling than vengeance," Spiryt told her, "We'll discuss it on the way home." Angyl sighed, then smiled. "Home," she said to herself. "Yes, home," her sister confirmed. "We're in for it with Mom, as it is." Ryuo extended her clawed hand. "Thank you, Angyl." Angyl grasped her hand. "You have earned my respect and you have a friend and ally always," Ryuo told her before releasing her hand. "Hey!" Snow said, joining them. "I helped you know." Ryuo patted Snow's head. "Good dog." "Uh..Angyl? Home?" Spiryt called to her. Angyl smiled once more. Home never sounded so good, she thought to herself.