

Futile Fantasy Creations Presents...

FUTILE FANTASY TWO

THE TALE OF TIFAERIS

(Situated on the southern coast of the south continent, on the opposite side of Amethyst bay to Tifaeris, the well fortified settlement of Trepe village remained as always, closed to outsiders. A secretive society, nearly all that was known about the Trepe and their way of life was by way of rumour and innuendo. The only three things the rest of the world knew were not to approach a Trepe, certainly never to antagonise one and of course, the thing that set them apart. Like a bizarre anomaly of human nature, the Trepe were a gynaeocracy, government by the women for the women. The men of Trepe village were kept for pleasure and reproductive purposes then ejected as soon as they became too old to perform. A powerful witch doctor, blessed with a mastery of mystic biology, was charged with assuring child birth would result in daughters only. The few male offspring were either sold at birth or raised as slaves. And thus, their way of life was assured.

Once a baby girl was born, all that remained for her now was to have triangles tattooed on her upper arm, to master combat techniques and become a sadistic psychopath, fanatical about maintaining the status quo. That, in a nutshell, was the Trepe demographic.

The south coast, on which Trepe village was situated, enjoyed hot temperatures and glorious sunshine nearly all year round. At times, however, the midday sun could be stifling. Therefore, the warriors who patrolled the sprawling village wore only in the skimpiest leather skirts and cropped tops, covering little but their modesty. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that lusty teenagers came from miles around to leer at them from the nearby hilltop. Many were captured then beheaded for spying.)

TREPE VILLAGE – SMALL HOURS, SUNDAY MORNING

(The mildest of gentle breezes slipped its way through the cobbled alleys between the spacious log huts of Trepe village, taking the edge off the stuffiness. It was only 4am and already, the warriors on sentry duty were sweating beneath their skimpy uniforms.

Patrolling along one of the villages many green cliff tops, one particular Trepe, Suma, allowed the breeze to ruffle her hair and closed her eyes to absorb its coolness. Smiling to soak up the serenity of it all, she glanced out to sea and took a deep, relaxing breath. Without even the slightest hint of hustle or bustle in the silent air, she then allowed herself a brief stretch before heading along the cliff top.

Making the most of the quiet night shift, a rare chance not to be teased by her peers about being "too effeminate", she slowly minced forth, musing about a happy future. Letting the cooling breeze blow her troubles away, she then stared out to sea, when a growling noise from just over her shoulder caused her to leap out of her skin and swiftly spin around. Placing a limp hand to her chest, she puffed out and shook her head.)

SUMA: You frightened the life out of me!

(Before her stood a butch, giant of a woman with tree-trunk legs that begged for women's trousers to be invented. With rock-like fists resting on her hips, she sneered and faked a chewing action as she towered over Suma's modest frame.)

FRIDGE: I've been looking for you, slacker!

(Sensing more than a little animosity in the colossal woman's tone, Suma cowered slightly and spoke up in a small voice.)

SUMA: Is this about the banana skin incident? 'Cause... I didn't even realise I'd dropped it! (Fridge growled.)

FRIDGE: No, it's not about...

(As if it was possible, she then looked twice as angry.)

FRIDGE: That was *you*, was it???

(Suma trembled and stepped back.)

SUMA: No! What banana?

(Lunging forward, Fridge snatched at Suma, ripping her top clean off her torso with one hand and grabbing her neck with the other.)

FRIDGE: Come 'ere!!!

SUMA: Help!!!

(With Fridge's giant hand around her neck, Suma covered her bare chest with her arms and stared back at her with terrified eyes. Pulling back her free fist, Fridge sneered angrily.)

FRIDGE: This is for the banana skin!

(With that, she punched Suma full on the side of her face. Suma screamed and closed her eyes with pain. Shaking with anger, Fridge then pulled back her fist again.)

FRIDGE: And this is for being so weak and feeble that I end up doing half your work!!!

(Suma squeezed her eyes tight in anticipation of another rocket like fist. Terrified she'd beat her beyond recognition, she shuddered in terror, awaiting a fist that never came. Hoping somewhat optimistically that Fridge had mysteriously died and forgot to release her neck, Suma opened one eye to look at her. Even in the darkness she could see that the colour had drained from Fridge's tortured looking face. As she stared wide-eyed out to sea, Fridge's bottom lip quivered.)

FRIDGE: No... it... it can't be...

(Suma gave her a baffled look and tried to see whatever had filled the powerful Fridge with such dread. Unable to budge with the massive hand around her neck, she spoke up in a whimper.)

SUMA: Um... Fridge?

(Stirred from her trance, Fridge looked at Suma and let go immediately. She looked traumatised and distant.)

FRIDGE: Jazzu... must warn Jazzu!

(As Fridge took off towards the village centre, Suma gave her baffled look and turned to face the sea. Much to her surprise, a ship with an oriental ensign, flapping in the breeze, was heading towards the port. With one hand covering her breasts, she rubbed her painful cheek and frowned.)

SUMA: It's just a boat!

(As she stood there baffled, Fridge appeared from nowhere and punched her to the ground.)

FRIDGE: Sorry! Almost forgot!

(With that, she took off back to the village again. Wincing from the pain, Suma sat up and glared at her as she ran.)

SUMA: Huh, when I grow to become leader of the Trepe, she's gonna pay!

(Pausing to consider the likelihood, she groaned and hung her head.)

SUMA: More likely when she becomes the leader, she'll have me decapitated!

(She held her neck and shuddered when suddenly, the air was filled with the sound of a trumpet fanfare. Immediately recognising it as the warning siren, the hairs on the back of her neck tingled and a shiver ran through her body.)

SUMA: Oh no! I'm hopeless at combat!

(With that, she upped then raced off towards the village centre.

Moments later, the previously dormant Trepe village square was very much awake. There was a sense of panic in the air as the entire army raced to take up their positions to defend the settlement. Clad in their iron and leather over 200 of them assembled at the top of the beach road, swords poised in readiness to receive the approaching vessel. Others raced across the centre of the village to find shelter for their loved ones or hide their valuables.

Amidst the panic and chaos, a middle-aged lady warrior stepped from an official looking building and walked purposefully to the front of the gathered troops at the top of the beach. Upon arriving, she took one look out to sea and sighed under her breath.)

JAZZU: I feared this day would come!

(In no more than a matter of minutes, the army was in position and the rest of the population had all taken shelter. The chaos was over and an uneasy quiet fell over the village. And so, the waiting game began. In almost total silence, the assembled Trepe troops watched on as the ship approached the shore. Feeling somewhat embarrassed, the bare-chested Suma, squeezed amongst them and made her way to the front to get a better view. Having always been in awe of her fellow tribeswomen's bravery, she couldn't understand why they all seemed so terribly set on edge all of a sudden.

Having managed to make her way to the front, Suma covered her chest in the vain hope that no-one would notice she was topless and joined the rest of the normally fearless Trepe in nervously awaiting their greatest fear. As she stood looking out towards the ship with a deeply troubled look on her face, the warrior next to her shuddered and dropped her sword.)

WARRIOR: I can't do it!!!

(Scared for her life, she attempted to flee and raced straight into a guard. Jazzu scowled the warrior's way and bellowed.)

JAZZU: Imprison the coward and get back here; I'll deal with her later!

(As the warrior was led away, Suma bit her lip, anxious to know, yet terrified to ask why one ship had caused such panic and fear. Beginning to realise that, in light of the fearful looks on the faces of the harden soldiers around her, heading for the front line might not have been the smartest move she ever made, she bit her fingernails and trembled.)

SUMA: Think I'll stand at the back.

(As soon as she started to turn, Jazzu spotted her movement and bellowed angrily at her.)

JAZZU: Stay put, soldier!

(She then gritted her teeth and snarled.)

JAZZU: Where's your top???

(Scared witless, Suma could only pout as a host of baffled looks came her way. Such was the depth of her embarrassment, she was only too relieved when a figure was thrown overboard the ship, immediately taking everyone's attention away from her.)

JAZZU: Arms at the ready, women!!!

(At once, they all adopted fighting stances.)

JAZZU: It begins!

(In perfect silence, the Trepe watched on nervously, swords poised as the figure swum ashore and started to run up the beach towards them. In the dim light they could just about identify the person's gender and little else. It was a woman and she was visibly in a fair deal of pain. As she emerged from the dark shadows of the beach into the moonlit square, a large gasp immediately arose from the assembled troops. This woman was one of their own.)

JAZZU: She's one of *us*!

(One of the warriors looked to Jazzu with urgency.)

WARRIOR: She's one of the fifteen who went absent without leave two weeks ago.
(Jazzu gritted her teeth.)
JAZZU: Absent without leave, my arse. That bastard must have taken her hostage.
WARRIOR: Then he probably has the others too.
JAZZU: No 'probably' about it.
(She clenched her fists angrily and snarled towards the unfortunate warrior.)
JAZZU: Who is she?
(The warrior behind her spoke up forcefully.)
WARRIOR: It's Carla! Blade and mace division!
JAZZU: Carla, I see.
(Barely able to stay on her feet, the dazed warrior staggered across the square before collapsing at Jazzu's feet.)
CARLA: Empress...
(She struggled to her feet and fought for air.)
CARLA: Empress Jazzu! It's Dim Lee, he has hostages!
(She caught her breath once more then continued.)
CARLA: He wishes to speak with you!
(Jazzu looked as if her worst fear had just been realised and gritted her teeth.)
JAZZU: Damn you, Dim Lee!
(Carla collapsed again as the troubled Jazzu stood thinking.)
JAZZU: Okay, lower your swords, women!
(With that, she waved to the ship with a bitter scowl on her slightly wrinkled brow.)
JAZZU: Damn, Damn, Damn!
(Looking positively livid, she growled bitterly then glanced over her shoulder at the warrior's who was standing just behind her.)
JAZZU: You!
WARRIOR: Ma'am?
(Jazzu pointed down at the barely conscious Carla then stared out at the ship again.)
JAZZU: Take her to the infirmary.
WARRIOR: Ma'am.
JAZZU: Then hurry back here.
(As the warrior carried Carla away, Jazzu stared hatefully ahead and snarled.)
JAZZU: Here he comes!
(Sure enough, a small rowing boat was approaching from the ship. Jazzu clenched an angry fist.)
JAZZU: I hoped we'd seen the last of him!
(New to combat, one of the young warriors among the ranks stepped forward with an anxious look in her eye.)
WARRIOR: Dim Lee... is he that famous warlord?
JAZZU: No, he's a banjo salesman. What do *you* think?
(The warrior mused.)
WARRIOR: Shall we kill him, empress?
JAZZU: No... what? Are you stupid? He has hostages!
WARRIOR: Oh!
JAZZU: Not to mention an army of 3,000 loyal troops who'd be a bit pissed off at us if we killed him!
WARRIOR: So, what's the plan?
JAZZU: We have no choice but to co-operate, we can't afford to risk losing our entire civilisation! Now get back into line.
WARRIOR: Ma'am, sorry ma'am.

(With that, the warrior stepped back into place and resumed nervously staring ahead with trepidation. Like many of the younger warriors, she had no idea what to expect and waiting was like a form of torture. Thankfully, however, they didn't have to wait long. Within a minute of it being lowered from the ship, the small boat reached the beach and out stepped a huge oriental warlord, his armour gleaming even in the darkness. Something of a giant, he hauled his eight foot frame over towards the awaiting Trepe, looking extremely menacing. As he approached Jazzu, Suma's mouth fell open and her arms dropped to her side. Her head told her to run but her jelly-like legs wouldn't allow it. Unlike her comrades, who remained rooted out of a sense of military duty, she remained only out of fear. While *they* gazed coldly upon the incoming giant, *she* stared into his eyes with terror.

Upon reaching the large assembly of Trepe tribeswomen in the square, the lone foe, the mighty Dim Lee stepped up to Jazzu and grinned arrogantly.)

DIM LEE: Jazzu, we meet again!

(Dismayed by his very presence, Jazzu sneered.)

JAZZU: What do you want from us this time?

(Dim Lee stood tall.)

DIM LEE: Don't be abrupt with me you old hag, I own this village!

(Not wanting to antagonise such a powerful man, Jazzu relinquished her angry stance.)

JAZZU: Dim Lee, what do you want with us?

(Nodding to accept her passivity, Dim Lee smiled then spun and yelled "Boo" in Suma's face. Almost having a heart attack, she screamed and dropped her sword. As she stood there trembling, Jazzu shut her eyes in despair of her. Amused by his control over them, Dim Lee chuckled.)

DIM LEE: Ha! What is *your* name?

(Suma leant back and spoke up nervously.)

SUMA: Um... Suma!

(Dim Lee nodded and turned to Jazzu.)

DIM LEE: You should be proud, Jazzu; this Suma typifies your cowardly tribe!

SUMA: Sorry, Jazzu!

(Jazzu scowled.)

JAZZU: It's prison duties for you, Suma!

DIM LEE: Go easy on her, Jazzu! It's nice to see at least one of you Trepe actually looks like a woman! Nice boobs, too!

(Suma received several dirty looks as she cowered and covered herself again.)

WARRIOR: Bitch!

(Dim Lee stood tall and yelled.)

DIM LEE: Enough!!!

(Immediately, there was perfect silence and all eyes focussed on Dim Lee as if they were hypnotised. He nodded and scanned the assembled warriors with his eyes, stopping on Suma.)

DIM LEE: Seriously! Nice boobies!

(As she turned even redder than she had been, Dim Lee then stepped forward and stared down at Jazzu and spoke with authority in his voice.)

DIM LEE: The people of Tang Yul are demanding a new pagoda, I need the best carpenters and masons money can buy!

JAZZU: You wish to enslave us, Dim Lee?

DIM LEE: Don't flatter yourselves; the best builders are all from the town of Wendigo. Unfortunately, they cost money!

JAZZU: Then attack Wendigo and leave us alone!

DIM LEE: You don't understand. A slave will only do half a job; to get the best from a man, you need to reward him well!

JAZZU: What does that have to do with us?

DIM LEE: Isn't it obvious? You will raise the money!

JAZZU: Please, Dim Lee, let *us* build your pagoda and let these people be!

(Dim Lee scoffed.)

DIM LEE: Huh, you are women; you can cook, fuck and clean! Women are not physically capable of such a great task!

JAZZU: But, Dim Lee...

(In no mood to negotiate, he stood tall and sneered down his nose at her.)

DIM LEE: Jazzu? Are you defying me?

(Jazzu shook her head solemnly.)

JAZZU: No, Dim Lee!

(Dim Lee nodded.)

DIM LEE: Good, remember what happened last time you defied me?

JAZZU: Yes, Dim Lee!

DIM LEE: Good, then you will raise one million Lig!

JAZZU: A million?

DIM LEE: You have 5 days, I shall return at dawn on the final day!

JAZZU: Only 5 days?

DIM LEE: Yes! And if you fail to raise the money... let's just say all the enemies you've made down the years will be celebrating your demise for quite some time.

(He then nodded sternly.)

DIM LEE: Now, I have things to do! I'll release the other hostages when I'm back on my ship!

(Satisfied they understood his demands; he turned and headed back down the beach leaving behind him a scene of discord and frustration. Jazzu clenched an angry fist.)

JAZZU: You!!!

(She glared at the shame-faced Suma.)

JAZZU: Get dressed and head over to the prison! Now!!!

(As Suma raced away, almost in tears, Jazzu turned and looked around for her aide.)

JAZZU: Elsa?

(A lady roughly Jazzu's age, stepped up behind her.)

ELSA: Empress?

JAZZU: Come with me! The rest of you, help the other hostages!

(As Jazzu and Elsa headed back to the official looking building to discuss strategy, Dim Lee was rowed back to his ship. True to his word, he released his other Trepe hostages immediately, albeit having set them on fire first as a warning to Jazzu.)

(At short while later, under no illusions that the mighty Dim Lee meant business, Jazzu and Elsa found themselves sat around a small wooden table in the legislative chamber, looking devastated and desperate.)

JAZZU: A million Lig? How much do we have?

(Elsa sighed.)

ELSA: About one hundred thousand! We could probably double that if we traded things but that's about it!

JAZZU: I can't believe this is happening again!

ELSA: What shall we do? We can't fight him!

JAZZU: I know, we'd stand no chance against their 3,000 warriors! He'd crush us in seconds

and destroy our entire existence!

ELSA: And if we can't get the money?

JAZZU: You heard him! He said our enemies will be celebrating our demise. He'll wipe us off the face of the world!

ELSA: You don't think he'd take half now...

(Jazzu interrupted angrily.)

JAZZU: Last time we didn't give him what he asked, he ordered us to destroy Tifaeris! We killed everyone we saw, it was them or us! He doesn't accept compromises. If you don't do as he demands, someone suffers the consequences.

(She sighed.)

JAZZU: We were lucky last time; it was only Tifaeris that suffered. This time the threat is to our *own* existence.

(With that, they both sat looking lost for a moment, when a wry smile seemed to cross their faces at the same time.)

ELSA: Tifaeris is being rebuilt you know!

JAZZU: So I heard, and growing at quite a rate I hear!

ELSA: So they say!

(They sat silently, giving each other a knowing glance.)

ELSA: You know what you must do, empress!

JAZZU: Yes, we must attack Tifaeris and take the money from them!

ELSA: You might not even have to do *that*!

(Jazzu looked lost.)

JAZZU: Excuse me?

ELSA: The mere *threat* of attack might be enough!

(Jazzu raised an eyebrow.)

JAZZU: Threat? Threaten to raze Tifaeris to the ground again if they don't pay us a million lig, you mean?

(Elsa beamed.)

ELSA: Exactly! They're bound to pay up.

(Jazzu nodded gleefully.)

JAZZU: I love it! The last thing they want is to have their town obliterated a second time.

ELSA: Precisely, empress! They'd never recover from a second attack and they know it. I'm absolutely certain of it, whatever money we demand, Tifaeris will pay. Anything to save themselves.

JAZZU: Then that's what we'll do! Prepare the warriors, we leave at dawn!

(Elsa looked baffled.)

ELSA: It is dawn!

JAZZU: Dawn tomorrow! Obviously!

ELSA: Well... sure, I knew that!

JAZZU: Go, get prepared!

ELSA: As you wish, empress.

(As Elsa left to set up the troops for the following dawn, Jazzu sighed and rested her elbow on the table.)

JAZZU: Sorry, Tifaeris! Once again it's you or us!

(For Sir Flaxley of Tifaeris and his beautiful other half, Kritzeveltia, life was a paradise within a paradise right now. Eighteen months ago, along with Princess Mandika of Guevina; her butler Bonson; Derek, the three foot tall green alien and the bumbling halfwit Lefiat; they'd come close to death doing battle to save the world from evil and now they were

reaping their reward. It was during this epic struggle to retrieve a precious artefact entitled the 'key of peace' from the deadliest of hands that they'd met and subsequently fallen very much in love.

Both originally hailing from Tifaeris, Flaxley had been working as a knight for the Kingdom of Guevina and Kritzeveltia, known to her friends as Kritz, was on the final stage of her Trepe warrior training. As soon as the key had been retrieved and the world was safe, however, they'd both turned their backs on their old way of life and had returned to Tifaeris, together.

Having been out of town when Tifaeris was razed to the ground by the Trepe over ten years before, Flaxley had left the devastation behind and learned the knight's code, something he proudly lived his life by. Despite learning to quash any desires he had to take revenge on the Trepe someday, Flaxley never forgot the day he came home and found Tifaeris burning. With his friends and family slain, the sickening images of finding their bodies remained tattooed on his mind. Forever faithful to their memory, even when the king of Guevina offered him a knighthood he refused to abandon his past. He refused to accept the title Sir Flaxley of Guevina and insisted upon the name of his beloved hometown. Understanding his position fully, the king granted him the title, Sir Flaxley of Tifaeris, knight to the royal court of Guevina.

Having been only a child at the time, Kritz had no memory of the massacre in Tifaeris all those years ago. Until eighteen months ago, she'd had no idea she was from Tifaeris or that a massacre had even taken place there. All she'd known was that she'd been adopted by the Trepe to be raised as one of their own. She'd been fiercely loyal to the Trepe and the small nearby township of Tifaeris meant nothing to her. Any memories she may have had of her childhood, having been quashed by magical means. She'd only had one goal in life, to pass her final Trepe warrior test by surviving on her own for a whole year. Upon completing this task, she'd become a fully fledged Trepe warrior, a status she longed for. Then she met Flaxley.

During their struggle to liberate the key of peace and save the world, all those eighteen months ago, Flaxley, who remembered her as a child, had revealed Kritz's Tifaeris roots to her and told her all about the massacre there. Her world was immediately turned upside down and all thoughts of loyalty to the Trepe tribe evaporated. Discovering she was a part of the same tribe that had mercilessly butchered her own family was soul destroying. In that moment, she felt guilty, almost as if being a Trepe warrior meant the blood of all those massacred in Tifaeris was on her hands. It was a revelation that would change her life forever.

Shortly after the revelation, with the key of peace out of harms way and the world safe, Flaxley and Kritz looked into one another's eyes and felt the same yearning. A yearning to go together and put right the wrongs of that terrible day in Tifaeris' past. Driven by this burning desire, they joined hands and headed to the place they knew they belonged. Tifaeris. Home. The king of Guevina would need a new knight and the Trepe tribe would be getting one less fully fledged warrior.

Upon arriving back in the broken down, ghost of a town that was Tifaeris, they immediately took it into their own hands to supervise the reconstruction of the once proud town. At first their progress was slow. They built their own home, then set about building another one

opposite. Inspired by their hard work, the townsfolk slowly started to buy into the idea until eventually a building programme was established. Slowly but steadily, Tifaeris started to grow and once news of the rebuilding started to spread to other townships, people begun flocking to the sunlit paradise and making their homes there. In just the short eighteen months since the key of peace incident, Flaxley and Kritz had turned Tifaeris from a depressing shell into a bustling town once again. Not about to rest and consider their work done any time soon, however, they continued to build and the town continued to grow. The transformation of Tifaeris was likely to go on for years to come. City walls were under construction as was a memorial to those killed in the Trepe massacre all those years ago. There were also plans for another one thousand homes. For Flaxley and Kritz, this labour of love would be a lifetime project.

Having breathed life into the ailing community and brought back hope to so many of those who'd survived the devastating Trepe attack, Flaxley and Kritz were very much heroes to the people of Tifaeris. Flaxley rarely bought his own ale at the inn and every man in the town wanted to be his best friend. Equally as well loved, Kritz, was greeted with gasps of admiration from many of the women she passed. She was very much seen as an inspiration and an icon. She worked hard, she was self-assured and she was beautiful in both face and figure. There were, however, the odd few he would never trust her for having links to the Trepe tribe. These doubters were, however, a very small minority. Very much the equivalent of royalty in Tifaeris, on the day Flaxley and Kritz took a well earned day off to get married on the beach, almost the whole town turned up to share their joy with them. It was safe to say that everything in their garden was positively rosy.)

TIFAERIS – SUNDAY MORNING

(As the sun began to rise, Flaxley leant over the wooden railings that surrounded his large, oak porch, looking absolutely delighted with his lot. Allowing the sun's soft warmth to wash over his face, he took a deep breath of the fresh morning air and briefly closed his eyes. To say he felt good right now would be the understatement of the century. He'd never been so happy in all his twenty eight years on the planet. He'd had a wonderful childhood in Tifaeris and being back there with the woman he loved was a joy beyond anything he could have imagined. Those dark days when Tifaeris was destroyed were rapidly becoming a distant memory and when he thought about the future, he could only picture a full and exciting life.

More than delighted with his lot in life, he looked up at the half built defensive walls at the edge of town and nodded his approval. Once again Tifaeris was becoming the proud, idyllic coastal town that it used to be; only soon it'd be fortified.)

FLAXLEY: Perfect.

(With a contented smile, he then about turned and went back inside his house, pushing the door closed behind him.)

FLAXLEY: Now...

(He rubbed his hands together gleefully then paced across the floor of the main room with a spring in his step and a smile on his face. Looking forward to getting where he was going, he paced out of the door the other side and headed into the bedroom where his beautiful twenty two year old wife, Kritz was laying half-asleep on the bed. Smiling the widest of smiles, he paused to admire her beauty for a moment then sat down upon the bed to talk to her.)

FLAXLEY: Behold! My beautiful wife!

(Kritz opened one eye and spoke up in a sleepy voice.)

KRITZ: Morning!

(She yawned then sat herself up a bit.)

KRITZ: It's a beautiful day again, I see!

FLAXLEY: Certainly is, and the city's looking magnificent!

KRITZ: City?

FLAXLEY: Well, if we keep building at this rate it will be!

KRITZ: True! So what's the plan for today?

FLAXLEY: The wall, the sooner that thing's finished the better!

KRITZ: Okay!

FLAXLEY: But first things first, there's a beautiful woman in front of me that I need to make love to!

KRITZ: Is that all you ever think about?

FLAXLEY: Of course it is, don't you?

KRITZ: Well... I might not be in the mood!

FLAXLEY: Yeah, as if!

KRITZ: You got me, let's go for it big boy!

(Needing no second invitation, Flaxley yanked back the covers then leapt on top of her.)

KRITZ: I'm a lucky woman!

FLAXLEY: And I'm a fantastic lover!

(With that, they began to kiss.)

KRITZ: Let's do it!

(Flaxley pulled his head back and paused.)

FLAXLEY: Ever heard of foreplay?

(Staring back into his eyes, Kritz wriggled her hips to adjust herself then slid down the bed a little.)

KRITZ: You're in.

(More than a little stunned Flaxley glanced down at their conjoined genitalia and immediately did a double take.)

FLAXLEY: Hey that's...

(As she grabbed his buttocks, urging him to thrust, he couldn't help but raise an impressed eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: ...actually a neat trick!

(With that, he lowered his head to kiss her neck and they proceed to make love. Every morning it was the same routine, as soon as they were both awake, the passion began. Aside from their graft and daily chores, life in Tifaeris for these two entwined souls was just one long honeymoon.)

(One whole hour later, as the dizzy heights of ecstasy were passed and their groans faded to satisfied puffs and pants, they both collapsed exhausted onto the bed and stared up at the ceiling. Looking utterly fulfilled, Kritz smiled with joy.)

KRITZ: That was incredible, you never disappoint!

FLAXLEY: You bring out the best in me!

KRITZ: Just for that I'm gonna make you a huge breakfast!

FLAXLEY: Really? Today just keeps getting better!

(Immediately, she climbed out of bed and stood up.)

KRITZ: Yuk!

(And with that, she flopped back onto the bed.)

FLAXLEY: What's up?

KRITZ: I feel really sick again!

FLAXLEY: That's the tenth day running!

KRITZ: Sorry!

FLAXLEY: Don't worry, I'll do breakfast!

(He leapt out of bed.)

KRITZ: Thanks!

FLAXLEY: You'd better stay in bed for a while!

KRITZ: Okay, you can come back in a bit and keep me company!

(Flaxley smiled.)

FLAXLEY: Tempting as that is, you need to get some rest, my love!

(She shrugged.)

KRITZ: Okay! You'd better go on top then!

(Flaxley chuckled.)

FLAXLEY: You're insatiable! Look, just rest up! If you're a good girl, I'll give you a good seeing to when I get back!

KRITZ: Okay, you win! I'll rest today!

FLAXLEY: Good! A sick worker is a poor one!

(Kritz then gave him a coy smile and looked up nervously.)

KRITZ: I might not be sick, you know!

(Flaxley looked confused.)

FLAXLEY: What do you mean?

KRITZ: What if I'm.... you know?

(Flaxley looked blank.)

KRITZ: You know... what if I'm...

(She smiled at him and made a baby cradling gesture with her arms.)

KRITZ: You know?

(Flaxley looked most perplexed.)

FLAXLEY: Acting like a baby to get out of doing some work?

KRITZ: No, you biff!

(She gave him a contemptuous look and swung her cradled arms harder.)

FLAXLEY: Oh!

(A look of wonderment crossed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: You mean pregnant, don't you?

KRITZ: Yes, pregnant!

(Taken by complete surprise, he stood in silence for a moment looking directly at her.)

FLAXLEY: Are you?

KRITZ: It's possible!

FLAXLEY: Wow!

(He sat down on the bed.)

KRITZ: You may even get your wish!

FLAXLEY: Ah yes, a son!

(He pondered in silence for a moment then looked up and mused openly.)

FLAXLEY: A son to mould in my own image! A son to continue the great work we've begun here in Tifaeris! He will be strong, courageous and brave... a warrior, no less.

KRITZ: It could be a girl you know!

FLAXLEY: Ah, yes... a daughter.... she'll be beautiful like you, of course!

KRITZ: You could always raise *her* to be a big, strong warrior!

(Finding the concept ridiculous, he scoffed and chuckled out loud.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, love! Get some rest, you clearly need it.

(With that, he upped and headed out of the bedroom, giggling as he went.)

FLAXLEY: A warrior daughter indeed.

(As he disappeared from view, Kritz allowed herself a single laugh then closed her eyes and

nestled into her pillow. Moments later, she drifted off back to sleep with a smile on her face.)

(Sadly, the joy Flaxley and Kritz had felt since the key of peace incident wasn't shared by his former employer King Falbury the 3rd of Guevina. Without Sir Flaxley as his knight, he'd had to rely on his replacement, the seventeen year old, accident prone, Lefiat. Being saddled with this hapless chap was simply too much for him to bear. It wasn't so much that Lefiat had no fighting skills that troubled him, Guevina was, after all, a peaceful city with no need for a mighty figurehead. Having an excellent swordsman like Flaxley as his head knight had merely been a bonus. All he expected from his royal knight was competence and loyalty. Alas, though thoroughly loyal, Lefiat was far from competent. Every little task he was assigned, regardless how menial, he'd somehow make a mess of. Everything from hoisting the nations flag on the kings birthday to stabling the royal steed had ended in disaster. To this day, nobody knew where the nation's flag had ended up. A gust of wind took it out of Lefiat's hands atop the main tower and it soared across the sky never to be seen again. Very much like his expensive, thoroughbred stallion, the king could only hope it'd turn up someday and be returned safely to the castle.

Having endured the bumbling buffoon, Lefiat, for eighteen months, the king was at the end of his tether. He'd become terrified to set Lefiat even the simplest task for fear of a disastrous outcome. Lefiat was the source of one disaster after another but sadly for the king, ridding himself of the buffoon would not be easy. For some reason, his only child, his eighteen year old daughter, Princess Mandika, the heiress to the throne was in love with him. And to make matters worse, so were the king's subjects. After playing his part in retrieving the key of peace, Lefiat had been introduced as a hero to the people. The fact that Lefiat was responsible for losing the key in the first place wasn't something the citizens were aware of. To them, Lefiat was the peoples champion and this made getting rid of him extremely difficult for the king. This, however, didn't mean he wasn't going to try.

KINGDOM OF GUEVINA – SUNDAY MORNING

Guevina castle was an impressive sight to say the least. Set at the very heart of the city, it dominated the skyline and was seen very much as a symbol of national prosperity. The people who lived in the many grassy suburbs around the castle, were all extremely proud to live in the shadow of its grandeur. Many world renowned artists had travelled considerable distances to paint the castle and capture its glory on canvas. From the outside, the castle, with many a colourful ensign adorning the battlements looked the very embodiment of wonder and joy. A most majestic of places, full of whimsy and happiness. Inside it, however, there was discord. The king was not a happy man.

As the sun broke gloriously through the windows of his beautiful throne room, he sat aside his royal aide, Kayfu, pondering his greatest dilemma with a suspicious glint in his eye.)

KING: Let's see if he wriggles out of that one!

KAYFU: Sire?

KING: Sorry, I was thinking aloud!

KAYFU: Sir Lefiat bothering you again, your majesty?

KING: Is it that obvious?

(Kayfu scratched his head nervously.)

KAYFU: Well, we hardly ever seem to discuss anything else these days, sire.

(The king sighed.)

KING: I know.

KAYFU: There *was* a time when official royal business was always on the agenda but lately all we seem to do is discuss Lefiat's failings.

KING: Well, he has a *lot* of them.

KAYFU: Very true, your majesty! So, what is it about Lefiat this time?

KING: I'm sending him away on a mission!

KAYFU: Another one?

(The king gave Kayfu a sideway glance.)

KING: I know what you're thinking. You're wondering why I keep giving missions to an idiot who can't even hang up his own coat without knocking himself unconscious, aren't you?

KAYFU: No, not at all, sire. Despite the fact he's made a pig's ear of every menial chore you've ever given him around the castle, he does have a curiously excellent record when you send him away on missions.

KING: Curious is the word, Kayfu. It makes no sense.

(Kayfu nodded in full agreement.)

KAYFU: It most certainly doesn't.

(They both sighed, miserably.)

KAYFU: So what is this mission, anyway? Is it to find out why all the dogs in Guevina have vanished?

KING: No, though that is rather curious. His mission is to hide the holy shoe of Dero somewhere on south island where it will never be found!

KAYFU: Holy shoe of Dero?

KING: I made it up!

(Kayfu was stunned.)

KAYFU: Really?

KING: Yes! Look...

(He leant closer to Kayfu then glanced around the room to make sure nobody was listening. Satisfied he wouldn't be overheard, on the grounds that nobody else was in the room, the king then nodded and said his piece.)

KING: That pillock keeps going on these missions and returning safely, I don't get it! It makes no sense whatsoever and I want to get to the bottom of it.

KAYFU: Right, so are you saying you don't consider his safe return a good thing, sire?

KING: Of course it isn't! The whole point of sending him away is that he's meant to die horribly and *not* come back!

(Kayfu looked enlightened.)

KAYFU: I see. I didn't know you were *trying* to get him killed, sire.

KING: Well, I wasn't going to advertise the fact now, was I?

KAYFU: No, of course not.

(A baffled look crossed his brow.)

KAYFU: If you want him out of the way, sire, surely it'd be easier to simply have him beheaded, wouldn't it?

KING: I couldn't! The princess is in love with him, though the gods only know why. And what's more so are my subjects.

KAYFU: Yes I see. That is a problem.

KING: If he'd just go out and die on a mission like he's supposed to, Mandika would eventually get over him and the people wouldn't take long to find a new hero to idolise, I'm sure. Then we could all go back to how things used to be before that halfwit came along.

(Kayfu went all starry-eyed.)

KAYFU: Sounds wonderful!

(The king sighed and hung his head.)

KING: That idiot's only been in the castle for 18 months and already he's destroyed an entire wing of the building! Not to mention a fortune in vases and artworks, he's dangerous!

KAYFU: Yes, yes he is!

(Kayfu bit his lip uneasily.)

KAYFU: Although, I *am* worried that if you keep sending him off on these missions the people may begin to wonder why you're hiding all Guevina's national treasures!

KING: What do you mean?

KAYFU: The holy shoe of Dero for instance!

KING: It isn't really holy; it's just one of Flaxley's old shoes!

KAYFU: I know that, but as far as the people know this is the seventh time in the last year!

KING: I see!

KAYFU: You've already sent him away with the legendary stone of Calvack and the fabled spoon of the ancients!

KING: Well... worry not; this should be the last time. I've employed two cunning spies to follow his carriage and report on his actions! This time, we'll find out just how Lefiat *is* managing to pull off all these missions!

KAYFU: If indeed he is!

KING: What do you mean?

KAYFU: For all we know he might just bury the items outside East Edea then stay at a hotel for a few days until enough time has passed to come back!

KING: I thought that too. So last time, I sent him to hide the remains of the great Bilotto!

KAYFU: Sire?

KING: It was a chicken carcass!

KAYFU: Right!

KING: Anyway, point is, I told him to bury them at the top of mount Tulumia.

KAYFU: Isn't that dangerous?

KING: Yes, deadly in fact, but somehow he came back unscathed!

KAYFU: How suspicious!

KING: Exactly, so I sent a legion of twenty men to go up and check it was there!

KAYFU: And was it?

KING: Yes! Exactly where I told him to put it, and what's more, six of the legion died on the journey!

KAYFU: And yet Lefiat survived the trip on his own?

KING: Unscathed! He completed the mission perfectly. Yet this is the fool who can't even do up his own shoes. The same idiot whose attempt to light his own lantern resulted in the burning down of our west wing. It makes me think he must be getting outside help somehow!

KAYFU: He must be.

KING: Well, perhaps my two spies can shed some light on that. Lefiat's under strict instructions to hide that shoe in the last place anyone will ever look, you see?

(He nodded.)

KING: Think about it, Kayfu. The last place anyone will ever look. What does that mean exactly?

(Kayfu looked stumped.)

KAYFU: The last place anyone will ever look? Well... I don't know. A volcano maybe?

KING: A volcano would destroy it. He's supposed to merely *hide* it where it'll *never* be found *without* destroying it. An almost impossible task. To figure that one out, he'll need guile and wit. He has neither. Therefore, I'm thinking he'll definitely seek someone who has.

(He grinned from ear to ear.)

KING: And once it's confirmed that he's been using third party assistance to get my top secret missions done, I'll have the devious little shit beheaded for treason.

(Kayfu looked enlightened.)

KAYFU: I see. You want those spies of yours to catch him getting outside assistance, thus violating the royal secrets act.

KING: Exactly.

KAYFU: An excellent plan, sire.

(He then shrugged modestly.)

KAYFU: Though if you ask me, whether they catch him or not, you should just have him beheaded anyway!

KING: If only I could. Mandika would never forgive me, nor would the people!

(His aide, Kayfu, nodded whole-heartedly.)

KAYFU: It's true; his popularity grows with each successful mission!

KING: Exactly, which in turn makes it harder for me to have him removed!

KAYFU: Well with any luck those spies will catch him asking for help and our nightmare will be over.

(The king sighed.)

KING: Here's hoping. What the hell does Mandika see in that halfwit anyway? It's times like this that I wish she was a lesbian! Like her mother was!

(Kayfu looked shocked.)

KAYFU: The queen was a lesbian?

KING: What?

(He sighed miserably.)

KING: No, I take that back. I accused her of being one once though. She lost her libido completely in the few years before she died, you see. I was being harsh.

(He forced an unconvincing smile.)

KING: I was a lousy husband, Kayfu, I really was. I was never there for her unless I wanted a bit of the other. I'm just lucky she didn't take a lover, really.

(As Kayfu looked away, grimaced and started to nervously play with his collar, the king started to seethe.)

KING: I was a bloody awful husband but I've been nothing but a devoted father. I've put my heart and soul into raising Mandika and I can't let her waste herself on that idiot any longer. Lefiat has to die.

(Kayfu nodded sternly.)

KAYFU: I couldn't agree more!

KING: I'll find out exactly how he is pulling off these missions then send him off on one I *know* he can't do. The sooner that moron is six foot under, the better!

(As the king continued to fret over his hapless knight's general existence, the young lad himself, Sir Lefiat and his girlfriend, Princess Mandika were arguing in the royal quarters. It wasn't uncommon for teenage couples to have their dramas but these two always seemed to manage to make quite the exhibition of it. For the poorly educated, less than confident seventeen year old, Lefiat, verbal exchanges were quite the challenge. He neither had the heart or the vocabulary to defend himself. Being a year older and a whole lot more self assured, the well educated Mandika always knew exactly what to say to put him exactly where she wanted him. On his knees, begging her forgiveness. This was always the outcome, even when she was the one in the wrong.

As the argument raged in the royal quarters, their friends, retired butler Bonson and Derek,

the three foot tall, green alien from the planet Tryme 17, looked on in astonishment. Wishing they hadn't bothered stopping by to say hello, they looked at each other in total bemusement as the princess, not known for her tact, tore into her trembling other half. It was safe to say that Derek especially felt extremely uncomfortable. Being able to read minds, he constantly cringed, full in the knowledge of what everyone around him was thinking. Mandika was thinking only of herself and looking for the most hurtful comments she could think of, Lefiat's mind was in its usual panicked and bewildered state and Bonson was on the verge of leaping in with his usual brand of cold, cutting sarcasm to put them both down in one fell swoop. Thankfully for Derek, however, his bitter, aging friend never got the chance to speak up. Mandika was raging so ferociously, he couldn't get a callous word in edgeways. Moments later, however, just when it looked like Bonson might get his chance, the young couple both seemed to calm down. More apologetic than angry, Lefiat offered up a sorrowful shrug and looked to Mandika through saddened eyes, before speaking up in his uniquely gormless voice.)

LEFIAT: Sorry Mandika, but I *have* to go! And that's all there is to it.

(The princess took a calming breath then threw her hands up in frustration.)

MANDIKA: Oh, this is getting ridiculous!

(Satisfied she finally saw things his way, Lefiat offered her a sympathetic smile.)

LEFIAT: I'll be back soon; we can have our picnic then!

MANDIKA: It's not just the picnic, this is the seventh time he's sent you away!

LEFIAT: I know!

MANDIKA: Well I'm not putting up with it anymore; I miss you when you go away. You're not going and that's final!

(Having been under the very false illusion that he'd already won the argument, Lefiat looked baffled and raised a nervous finger.)

LEFIAT: Yes I am!

(Clearly incensed by his reply, Mandika scowled and folded her arms.)

MANDIKA: I'm the princess and I say you're staying!

(Desperate to please both Mandika and the king, Lefiat was torn. Looking stressed he tried to fight his corner without offending her.)

LEFIAT: But... he's the king and he says I'm going!

MANDIKA: So who are you going to listen to then? Him or me?

LEFIAT: Well... he can have me beheaded!

MANDIKA: I can stop having sex with you!

(Finally spotting his chance, Bonson turned to Derek and chuckled.)

BONSON: Either way, there'll be no head for Lefiat!

(Turning swiftly Bonson's way, Mandika scowled.)

MANDIKA: You keep out of this!

(As Bonson chuckled to himself, Derek shook his head at him scornfully.)

DEREK: Happy now?

BONSON: Quite. Thanks for asking.

(Satisfied she'd silenced the aging sarcasm monger, Mandika immediately rounded on Lefiat, clearly starting to get angry again.)

MANDIKA: Well? Lefiat?

LEFIAT: I don't wanna die!

MANDIKA: Oh, so your life is more important than sex, is it?

(He pondered her words with a lost look on his face.)

LEFIAT: Well... yeah!

(Bonson and Derek cringed as Mandika flew back into an almighty rage again.)

MANDIKA: That does it, I've bent over backwards to keep you happy... sometimes literally!

Position thirty eight in that book for example!!

(As Bonson and Derek looked at one another, she shook her head.)

MANDIKA: Never mind that! I worked my fingers to the bone for you and as soon as someone threatens to kill you, you abandon me!!!

LEFIAT: But....

MANDIKA: No buts, I'm not talking to you!

(Having satisfied his immediate need to make a wise crack, Bonson had grown bored with the sound of Mandika's voice and decided this would be a good time to interject and bring an end to the disagreement.)

BONSON: If I may suggest something, ma'am?

MANDIKA: What?

(Before he could reply, Derek turned to Bonson.)

DEREK: Bonson, you're not a butler anymore, stop calling her ma'am!

(Bonson sighed.)

BONSON: Old habits die hard, sir!

(Letting her mood get the better of her, Mandika reminded them of another point.)

MANDIKA: Yeah, and I'm still a princess so "ma'am" it is!

(Bonson groaned.)

BONSON: So much for not abusing your position anymore!

MANDIKA: I didn't ask your opinion, Bonson!

(He shrugged.)

BONSON: Suit yourself!

(Calming herself, Mandika took a deep breath and eased her stance.)

MANDIKA: So what were you going to suggest?

(Bonson gave her a swift, disbelieving glare.)

BONSON: So now you *are* asking my opinion, make your mind up!

(Mandika sneered at him furiously.)

MANDIKA: Don't wind me up; I'm pissed off enough as it is!

BONSON: Fine! I was just going to suggest you could go with him!

MANDIKA: Don't be stupid, it could be dangerous!

BONSON: Well, if *he's* going it can't be that bad, besides, you could protect him!

(Understanding Bonson's point for once, Lefiat frowned.)

LEFIAT: I am here, you know!

(Turning to face the pouting Lefiat, Mandika held out a hand and waved it before his face.)

MANDIKA: Forget that! Is it a dangerous mission?

LEFIAT: Dunno, I've gotta go to southern continent somewhere!

BONSON: Southern continent?

LEFIAT: Yeah!

(Mandika beamed.)

MANDIKA: In that case, we're all going!

(Unfortunately for her, her joy was unilateral.)

DEREK: Pardon?

BONSON: I'm not!

(Half closing one eye, she snarled at them angrily.)

MANDIKA: May I remind you two freeloaders, you're both enjoying a cushy life in this castle because you promised you'd help look after *me* from time to time? Now do I have to tell my father you're not keeping your end of the bargain or are you gonna do as you're told?

(Fearing her threat was very real, Derek and Bonson sighed despondently.)

DEREK: Fine, we'll come!

BONSON: So much for my retirement!

(Intended outcome achieved, Mandika smiled.)

MANDIKA: It'll be fun!

BONSON: How do you work that out?

MANDIKA: Well, while he's doing his mission, we can pop to Tifaeris to see Flaxley and bitch face!

DEREK: You mean, Kritz!

MANDIKA: You can call her what you like, she's still a bitch!

LEFIAT: I thought you and her made peace!

MANDIKA: You what?

(Realising his mistake in questioning her in this mood, he panicked.)

LEFIAT: Um... not that anyone would want to make peace with her. She was an ugly woman with no personality or style and she was smelly!

(Mandika grinned.)

MANDIKA: She did smell, didn't she?

BONSON: I thought she smelt divine!

MANDIKA: What do you know? You silly old fool!

(Bonson was furious.)

BONSON: Don't take it out on me!!! You said you liked Kritz!

MANDIKA: I said she was 'okay'... and I was lying! She's a c...

DEREK: Mandika! Please? Why the hostility?

(Mandika sighed heavily then relented from her angry stance.)

MANDIKA: I'm sorry, I'm just angry. It's my father's fault. I'm fed up with him disrespecting my relationship. I love Lefiat despite his many, many faults and I'm sure he doesn't have to keep inventing missions for him!

(Lefiat looked hurt.)

LEFIAT: Eh? What faults?

BONSON: Ooh, where do I begin?

MANDIKA: Belt up, you silly old fart!

(Sensing Bonson was likely to blow a fuse and make Mandika's anger one hundred times worse, Derek leapt into the conversation in a desperate bid to give Bonson something positive to say.)

DEREK: I must say, I'm not surprised you're angry, Mandika, to be honest. Lefiat keeps getting sent away on all these missions... and yet, Bonson told me Flaxley didn't get sent away even half as many times when *he* was your knight.

(Delighted to be called upon for his knowledge, Bonson forgot the insult he'd just received and, much to Derek's relief, smiled knowingly.)

BONSON: It's true. He only sent Flaxley away twice I think.

LEFIAT: That's not fair. How come *I've* ended up doing three times as many missions?

(A dark look engulfed Bonson's brow.)

BONSON: Who said you'd done three times as many missions?

LEFIAT: You just...

BONSON: Flaxley did thousands more than you, the difference being, Flaxley had initiative. He'd *find* things to investigate and take whatever action was necessary. He didn't stand there agape, twiddling his perm like a brain dead wombat, waiting for the king to *tell* him what to do. Flaxley *knew* what to do.

(He glanced at Derek.)

BONSON: And it was a good thing too. If he hadn't been so thorough he'd never have investigated the noises people heard when you crashed on this planet, Derek. He was informed of the noises so took it upon himself to investigate. As a result, you were found and he saved your life. You owe it all to Flaxley's instincts as a knight.

(He then glared at Lefiat.)

BONSON: Failure over here would have stood there like a lemon waiting for someone else to tell him what to do.

LEFIAT: Hey that's mean...

(He sighed.)

LEFIAT: I may not be a Flaxley, but even so... mean.

(Saving his harshest glance for Mandika, Bonson then added a bitter scowl and shook his fist.)

BONSON: And don't call *me* an old fart, you jumped up little so and so! You're not too old for a spanking, young lady.

MANDIKA: Yes I am.

BONSON: Yes, you are. But you're never too old for a sock in the kisser!

(He adjusted his collar and sat back.)

BONSON: Not that I'd do that, obviously.

(Mandika rolled her eyes.)

MANDIKA: Are you finished?

BONSON: For now, yes.

MANDIKA: Good.

(She nodded sternly.)

MANDIKA: Now stop changing the subject. Fact is, Lefiat's being sent away again, only this time *we're* going with him. No arguments.

(She glanced around at her three friend's less than enthusiastic faces then clapped her hands together excitedly.)

MANDIKA: On that note, let's get going!

(Bonson looked heartbroken.)

BONSON: So you really *are* serious about us coming?

MANDIKA: Yes! Now let's get packing and we can sneak out in a carriage! You're taking a carriage I take it, Lefiat?

(Lefiat nodded nervously.)

LEFIAT: Yeah, it's waiting for me at the side gates, why?

MANDIKA: This is the plan then. I'll dismiss the coachman... I'll tell him the trip's been cancelled or something...

LEFIAT: You can't do that!

MANDIKA: I'm a princess; I'll do what I like.

(She nodded firmly.)

MANDIKA: Like all you peasants, he'll do as I bloody well tell him! Then when he's gone, we can all sneak on-board the carriage ourselves. Bonson, Derek, you two can drive!

(She beamed.)

MANDIKA: Easy peasy! Out of the castle without him even knowing, no chastity belt, nothing. It'll be a doddle.

(Derek sighed and looked to an equally apprehensive Bonson.)

DEREK: Why do I get the feeling this is a bad idea?

BONSON: The same reason I do, Derek! The obvious ones.

DEREK: Like the fact, helping the princess sneak out of the castle is akin to kidnapping her?

BONSON: Yes, that sort of thing.

(Ignoring their worries, Mandika bounced excitedly.)

MANDIKA: Less natter, more packing! Tifaeris, here we come!!!

PLAIN LANDS OUTSIDE GUEVINA

(Half an hour after she'd made the decision to sneak out and accompany Lefiat on his mission, Mandika's royal carriage rolled from Guevina castle via the side entrance and headed out of the city. The atmosphere was considerably sour as Bonson and Derek groaned to each other on top of the carriage while Lefiat and Mandika glared at one another within. Derek and Bonson didn't want to be there, Lefiat didn't want Mandika to be there and Mandika was peeved because she was the only one who *did* want to be there. Having been granted sanctuary by the king, helping to smuggle the princess out of the castle, right under his nose, didn't sit well with Derek's conscience. It was as if he was repaying the kind favour by stabbing him in the back. For Bonson, the main reason for not wanting any part of this journey had nothing to do with an attack of conscience, far from it. Every day since retiring he'd gleefully spent his every afternoon plying himself with ale at the inn, something he resented being forced to miss out on. Lefiat's reservations, however, were wholly different to both Bonson and Derek's. Although the king would be livid once he found out Mandika had travelled with him, this was not his main concern either. In fact, it was the least of his worries. Fact was, he was harbouring a terrible secret. As far as he was concerned, keeping this secret safe from Mandika was an absolute priority. So long as Mandika never discovered what he was hiding, he'd happily face whatever wrath the king could muster. Suffice to say, for him it would be an extremely nervous trip. Having three such unwilling travelling companions, Mandika was far from overjoyed. Having been cooped up in the castle for a year and a half, she wanted it to be a fun trip and felt horribly let down by her friends. Always one to easily get carried away by such negative emotions, she quickly found herself glaring at Lefiat and pondering his shortcomings. This was not a happy carriage ride.

As their horses galloped forth from the castle, rendering it a mere speck on the horizon, the four unhappy travellers were completely oblivious to a second carriage following them. Having trailed the royal carriage since it exited the city, its two shady looking coachmen had managed to maintain a constant and safe distance between themselves and the princess' party, thus allowing themselves to see and not be seen. Keeping their eyes firmly on the carriage ahead, the two mysterious, black suited gentlemen spoke to one another in hushed voices as they kept up their steady, stealthy pursuit.)

POYNES: Don't lose him!

REEFE: Good idea, I hadn't thought of that!

POYNES: Don't get stropky, I was only saying!

REEFE: Well don't!

POYNES: Forgive me. I'm just a little stressed. This is the easiest money we'll ever earn if we get it right and I don't wanna mess it up.

REEFE: How can we possibly mess it up? The king told us to follow the carriage and simply report back to him what Sir Lefiat does with that old shoe. It's child's play.

POYNES: With big boy wages.

REEFE: Indeed. So just relax and enjoy the ride.

(Poynes looked thoughtful.)

POYNES: So, where do you think he's heading?

REEFE: It looks like he's gonna take the Azagotse to Port Shehi ferry!

POYNES: That'd make sense! Seeing as the king said he had to head to the south island!

REEFE: It *is* the easiest way to...

(He clammed up.)

POYNES: Easiest way to what?

REEFE: Shush!

POYNES: Hey, don't shush me!

(Reefe waved him away.)

REEFE: Did you hear that?
POYNES: Hear what?
REEFE: There it was again!
(Poynes shrugged.)
POYNES: I heard nothing!
REEFE: It's a creaking noise!
POYNES: You're imagining things!
(Just then, the carriage tilted to the left and shook violently as one of the wheels came loose and buckled. Looking horrified, Reeve fought with the reins in a desperate attempt to stop the horses.)
REEFE: Whoa!
POYNES: Damn it!
(As the horses reared back and came to a stand still, Reeve leapt down from the carriage and took a look at the damage.)
REEFE: We've lost a wheel!
(Glaring down at him, Poynes sighed angrily.)
POYNES: How did that happen?
REEFE: It's my fault for imagining it I suppose?
POYNES: Oh shut up!
(Poynes leapt down and joined him in assessing the damage.)
REEFE: Great, now what? We're gonna lose Sir Lefiat's trail!
POYNES: Look! Don't panic! Once we've put the wheel straight we can head south and hunt him down from there!
REEFE: I guess so, but what if we don't find him?
POYNES: Well, then I guess we'll have to rule out Guevina as a future holiday resort, 'cause I don't fancy telling the king!
REEFE: Me either!
POYNES: It shouldn't be too difficult to track him down; you know what he looks like right?
(Reeve frowned.)
REEFE: No, I thought *you* did!
(They both sighed in disbelief.)
POYNES: Oh, that's just perfect!
REEFE: Relax, he's a knight, he ought to be easy to find, they stand out! Besides, how many people travel in a royal carriage?
REEFE: True, tracking that thing down will be easy.
POYNES: Exactly, if we couldn't even do a simple task like that, we'd be the laughing stock of the spying community!
REEFE: Precisely. Now, stop worrying and hurry up and fix that wheel, will you?
POYNES: You're the boss.
(With that, Poynes reached inside the carriage for his tool kit as the royal coach disappeared over the hill and out of sight.)

(Inside the royal carriage at this time, Lefiat and Mandika were, as ever, deep in heated conversation.)
LEFIAT: All I said was....
MANDIKA: I heard you, try not to speak to Flaxley you said!
LEFIAT: Yeah, that's 'cause...
MANDIKA: I don't care about your reasons, Flaxley's like family to me, I'll speak to him if I want!

LEFIAT: Yeah, but don't mention missions!

MANDIKA: Why not? Are you jealous 'cause he's better at them than you?

LEFIAT: Jealous of Flaxley? No way!

MANDIKA: Well you should be, he's a far superior knight!

(She folded her arms and glared out of the window, leaving Lefiat looking hard done by.)

LEFIAT: That's a horrible thing to say!

MANDIKA: Whatever! I'm speaking to Flaxley whether you like it or not!

(Lefiat sighed in defeat.)

LEFIAT: Fine!

MANDIKA: I'm really looking forward to seeing him and I aint gonna let you or anyone else ruin it!

(She folded her arms bitterly and pouted.)

MANDIKA: I aint gonna speak to that cow of his though!

LEFIAT: Cow?

MANDIKA: Yes, Kritz!

LEFIAT: Oh, I thought you meant an actual cow!

(She rolled her eyes.)

MANDIKA: Don't be....why would I want to speak to a cow?

LEFIAT: Um....

MANDIKA: Idiot!

(Lefiat frowned.)

LEFIAT: Look, please don't discuss my business with Flaxley, that's all I'm asking!

MANDIKA: I'll think about it!

(Bemused by her attitude, Lefiat spoke up.)

LEFIAT: Why are you so tense today?

(Mandika snapped her head at him and barked.)

MANDIKA: I'm not!!!

(Somewhat startled, Lefiat jumped back in his seat.)

LEFIAT: Alright, you don't have to shout at me!

(Mandika sighed apologetically.)

MANDIKA: Sorry, it's the thought of seeing Kritz again that bothers me!

LEFIAT: Why? I thought you two made peace with each other!

(He cringed and trembled as he looked at her with wide eyes.)

LEFIAT: Oh god! I said it again, didn't I?

(Trying to justify her position, Mandika looked out of the window.)

MANDIKA: I know I said I was okay with her, but... she tried to hit me once remember?

LEFIAT: Well, she beat *me* up and left me unconscious, but I'm not bitter anymore!

MANDIKA: Well perhaps you should be!

(Trying not to look threatened or upset; Lefiat looked to the floor of the carriage and mumbled.)

LEFIAT: You're not jealous of her getting Flaxley are you?

MANDIKA: No! I can't deny I used to fancy him but I'm over that, you're my man now!

(Feeling validated, he grinned a smug grin, much to Mandika's annoyance.)

MANDIKA: Stop that!

(Terrified of not doing as she demanded, he stopped smiling immediately.)

MANDIKA: That's better!

(With nothing said to satisfy his curiosity, Lefiat frowned and tried again.)

LEFIAT: So, why do you hate her all of a sudden?

MANDIKA: I just do, okay?

(Feeling he was getting nowhere, he sighed.)

LEFIAT: Well thought out answer!

(Mandika flipped.)

MANDIKA: Do you want to have sex ever again???

(Lefiat drooled, his brain only hearing the offer of sex and not the threat intended.)

LEFIAT: Yes please!

(Mandika frowned.)

MANDIKA: Then shut up and stop asking stupid questions!!!

(As her meaning sunk in, Lefiat shrunk in his seat.)

LEFIAT: Oh... you meant... oh!

(They looked out of separate windows and silence filled the carriage. There was such tension between them, Bonson and Derek could almost feel it from where they were sitting on the roof. Being the caring kind of alien, Derek sighed and turned to the typically grumpy Bonson beside him.)

DEREK: I hope they don't argue all the way there!

(Bonson shrugged and said nothing.)

DEREK: I feel sorry for Lefiat you know!

(Bonson nodded in complete agreement.)

BONSON: Well you have to really, don't you? It can't be easy being that stupid and useless!

DEREK: I didn't mean generally!

(Bonson gave him a sceptical look.)

BONSON: You did, Derek, be honest!

DEREK: No I didn't!

(Bonson scoffed.)

BONSON: You did! You're not the only one who can read minds!

(Derek said nothing, settling for grimacing at him instead.)

BONSON: Fine, what did you mean then?

DEREK: Since we left I've heard her yell at him three times!

BONSON: Well, he can be very annoying, sir!

DEREK: I don't deny that, it's just that Mandika's extremely tense. They both are actually!

BONSON: I'm not surprised. Mandika's basically running away from home and Lefiat's aiding and abetting her. They're bound to be tense.

DEREK: Yes, but not to *that* degree. They're *more* than tense, Bonson, they're utterly frustrated with one another.

(Bonson bit his lip then glanced at Derek thoughtfully.)

BONSON: Yes, you're right. I wonder why!

(As Derek sat silently, staring dead ahead with an uneasy expression on his face, Bonson raised a distrusting eyebrow and pounced immediately.)

BONSON: Why the silence, Derek?

(Derek acted innocent. Sadly, he wasn't cut out for acting at all.)

DEREK: What silence? What are you saying? That's ridiculous. I could have no idea what in the world you mean! Clueless is what I am, clueless, I tell you.

(Bonson frowned.)

BONSON: Convincing! Derek, you know, don't you?

DEREK: No!!!

(Bonson scowled.)

BONSON: Derek?

DEREK: Seriously, I know nothing!

BONSON: You're capable of reading minds! You know exactly what's troubling them!

(Realising he'd been rumbled, Derek sighed.)

DEREK: Fine! Yes I do! But why should I tell *you*?

(Bonson was confused.)

BONSON: Why wouldn't you?

(About to shoot down Bonson's illogical argument, Derek opened his mouth then paused for thought. Stuck for a good reason, he shrugged.)

DEREK: That's true! But keep it to yourself! Promise?

(Bonson crossed his fingers and nodded.)

BONSON: Promise!

(Derek nodded.)

DEREK: Right! Well... we're off to see Flaxley and Kritz, right? And, well, Mandika's been pissed off at Kritz for taking Sir Flaxley away for quite some time now...

(Bonson scoffed in disgust.)

BONSON: What a hussy!

(Realising what he'd said, Derek spoke up quickly to qualify his comment.)

DEREK: No, no, not like that! She misses having Flaxley as her protector, that's all. She doesn't feel safe having Lefiat as her knight and she blames Kritz for it!

BONSON: Well, to be fair, would *you* feel safe having Lefiat for a knight?

(Derek sighed.)

DEREK: Do you want to hear this or don't you?

BONSON: Sorry! So, that's why she's stressed is it? Because we're going to see Kritz and she hates her?

DEREK: That's only a fraction of her woes, Bonson.

BONSON: Oh, really?

DEREK: Really. How do I put this? Why do you think she insisted *I* came with her on this trip?

BONSON: Because you're short! She likes having people around she can look down on!

(As Derek glared at him, Bonson chuckled then offered him a friendly smile.)

BONSON: Just kidding, old chap. I'm assuming from what you've said about her not feeling safe with Lefiat, she brought *you* along to protect her instead.

DEREK: Exactly! She can't tell Lefiat that though, it'd kill him! And she resents him for it, greatly! That's why he's getting so much grief from her.

(Bonson's face lit up.)

BONSON: It'd kill him, would it? In that case...

DEREK: Don't!!!

BONSON: Excuse me?

DEREK: I'm not telling you these things so you can sit there thinking of cruel jibes!

(Bonson looked deeply offended.)

BONSON: I never suggested you were!

(Derek rolled his eyes.)

DEREK: Anyway, moving on... the reason Lefiat's so tense is because he's afraid Mandika will find out about his arrangement with Flaxley!

(Bonson raised an eyebrow.)

BONSON: Arrangement?

DEREK: Yes, the reason Lefiat's been so successful on all these missions is because.....

BONSON: Let me guess, he's been paying his fee to Flaxley to do them for him!

(Derek was stunned.)

DEREK: How did you know?

BONSON: Well, I kind of suspected it all along! How else would you explain it?

(Derek sighed inwardly.)

DEREK: Mandika would kill him if she found out!

BONSON: Then let me tell her!

(Derek frowned.)

DEREK: Just couldn't resist it could you?

(Bonson grinned with satisfaction.)

DEREK: Remember, you promised not to say anything!

BONSON: I won't, but now I'm really looking forward to getting to Tifaeris, this is going to be interesting!

(He looked excited.)

BONSON: Maybe Flaxley will tell Mandika about the missions and she'll kill Lefiat! Then Mandika can have a go at Kritz for stealing her knight and Kritz will kill her. Then, feeling an obligation to Mandika, Flaxley will attack Kritz and accidentally fall off a cliff, I mean, let's be honest she'd never beat him in a fight! Then Kritz will be all alone and seek comfort in my arms!

(He sighed merrily as he pondered the fantasy.)

BONSON: That way, I get to have a merry old time in the sack with Kritz and everyone goes home happy!

(He grinned at Derek and his face dropped. Trying to look innocent, he then scratched his head and turned away.)

BONSON: Don't gape, Derek! It doesn't become you!

DEREK: You know, one of these days your lusty, twisted feelings for Kritz are going to land you with a black eye!

BONSON: They're not lusty *or* twisted, Derek. They're just highly developed and filthy!

DEREK: Eh?

BONSON: What? Look, forget it. Just shut up and steer the carriage. I'm going to take a nap.

(He then laid back a little and closed his eyes. Seconds later, he opened one eye and glanced at Derek before closing it again.)

BONSON: Wake me up when we get to a pub.

DEREK: We're not going to a pub!

BONSON: Then wake me up sooner so I can take us to one.

(Bonson then allowed himself a yawn and sunk into a slouch. Giving him a sideways glance, Derek simply chuckled to himself then refocused on the task in hand.)

TIFAERIS – MONDAY MORNING

(Following another warm night, Sir Flaxley was once again awake early, ready for more hard graft. As he stood in the kitchen preparing breakfast he whistled a merry tune and grinned from ear to ear. It was another beautiful morning in paradise. Kritz, in the meantime was laying in bed, wallowing in the satisfaction of the good seeing to she'd just received from her well endowed husband. Wearing nothing but a satisfied smile, she sat up, ruffled her hair and allowed herself a comforting stretch. As she lay her arms back down by her side, however, she spotted a pair of eyes peering through the window at her.)

KRITZ: Hey!!!

(Startled, the watcher vanished immediately. Kritz frowned and yelled after him.)

KRITZ: Valentine!!! One of these days I'm gonna catch you, boy!!!

(Flaxley yelled to her from the kitchen.)

FLAXLEY: Is that little shit bothering you again?

(She yelled back.)

KRITZ: He's gone now!

FLAXLEY: He's only young Kritz, he'll learn!

KRITZ: Yeah, he will if *I* catch him!

FLAXLEY: You should be flattered in a way. I mean, the fact he wants to leer at your naked body is a tribute to how damn sexy you are!

(Kritz puffed out then shook her head as she yelled back.)

KRITZ: It's not about the fact he wants to see me naked, Flaxley. Hell, I don't care who sees me naked, you know that. It's being spied on that pisses me off.

(She shook her head and laid back on the pillow when the young lad who'd been ogling her, burst through the front door of the house, yelling out in a blind panic.)

VALENTINE: They're coming!!! They're coming!!!

(Spotting him through the bedroom door, Kritz seethed.)

KRITZ: Valentine!!!

(Looking furious, she leapt out of bed and raced out of the bedroom, as naked as the day she was born. Sneering wildly, she sped across the main room, grabbed the amorous teenager by his shirt then kneed him in the stomach. As Flaxley raced from the kitchen to see what all the commotion was about, he found Kritz standing over the wounded, lusty, young lad, snarling angrily.)

KRITZ: Don't just writhe there, boy. Get a good look while you still can, 'cause I'm gonna poke your eyes out in a minute!!!

(As Valentine rolled on the floor in agony before them, Flaxley looked Kritz up and down in horror.)

FLAXLEY: You're naked!!!

(She gave him a sideways glance.)

KRITZ: I'm well aware of that, thanks.

(Flaxley gave her a filthy look and said nothing. Conceding to his fiery glance, Kritz sighed then rolled her eyes.)

KRITZ: Bloody prude. Fine, I'll put some clothes on if it makes you feel better.

(As she sloped off back to the bedroom, scoffing all the way, the severely winded Valentine tried to make his point.)

VALENTINE: They're... coming...

(Flaxley averted his gaze from the departing Kritz and snarled down at him.)

FLAXLEY: Who's coming?

(He lifted him by his shirt collar and asked again as Valentine continued to gasp for air.)

VALENTINE: The... the Trepe are coming...

(As if he'd been hit by a powerful tranquilliser dart, Flaxley froze to the spot, dropping Valentine heavily back onto the floorboards. Seconds later, a look of pure hatred crossed his brow and he shook his fists violently.)

FLAXLEY: They're back... well not this time!!!

(With extreme urgency, he immediately paced towards his sword rack.)

FLAXLEY: Those bitches are gonna pay!

(As a terrified Valentine scrambled to his feet and fled back out of the front door, Kritz slowly re-emerged from the bedroom, clearly daunted by what she'd overheard.)

KRITZ: The Trepe are coming? You don't think they...

(Flaxley looked to her with anger in his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: I hope not, my love, but it's better to be safe than sorry! Now put some bloody clothes on will you?

(Shaking nervously, Kritz returned to the bedroom feeling thoroughly ashamed of her Trepe links. She had no idea why they were coming but couldn't help fearing the worst.

While Kritz rushed her clothes on, Flaxley swiftly grabbed his sword and shield and paced outside into the street just in time to see over one hundred heavily armed women come through the gates to the town. Clenching his fists, he stepped forwards and immediately

confronted them with anger written all over his face. As he stood there snarling menacingly before them, the Trepe stopped marching and stood to attention.)

FLAXLEY: What do you want, Trepe?

(No-one answered as the assembled troops started to part in the middle to allow their leader through. Looking purposeful in expensive armour, Jazzu made her way to the front and stood before Flaxley with a belittling sneer on her face. Unmoved by her sneer, Flaxley folded his arms and stood rigid, almost defying her to come any closer. Looking around in a sneering fashion, Jazzu scoffed and looked Flaxley up and down.)

JAZZU: Who's in charge here? You?

FLAXLEY: What is it to you?

JAZZU: I asked who's in charge?

FLAXLEY: Worry not; you'll go no further than *me* anyway!

(Jazzu scoffed.)

JAZZU: Please don't make me kill you this early in the relationship!

(This time it was Flaxley's turn to scoff.)

FLAXLEY: I'd like to see you try! I really would!

(Just then, an old man's dissenting voice rose up from over Flaxley's shoulder.)

ELDER: Enough!

(The old man in question raced up alongside Flaxley with a desperate look in his eyes.)

ELDER: I am president of the Tifaeris high council, please, *I'm* in charge!

(Jazzu sneered at Flaxley.)

JAZZU: At last, the brains of the village!

(Not about to back down, Flaxley stepped forward and snarled.)

FLAXLEY: This is a town, *our* town, soon to be a city! Not a crappy village like yours!

JAZZU: It'll be a pile of rubble in a minute if you persist!

FLAXLEY: You'll never....

(Not wanting any trouble, the elder intervened.)

ELDER: Let me handle this, Flaxley!

(Jazzu looked surprised.)

JAZZU: Flaxley? As in Sir Flaxley of Tifaeris?

FLAXLEY: Well figured out! Educated guess was it?

JAZZU: I hear you used to be good, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: I was, now I'm excellent! So if I were you, I'd leave while you still can!

JAZZU: Rubbish, I hear Guevina has a new knight... you were fired for being over the hill and had to return here to Tifaeris a sad, second rate loser!

(Flaxley snarled.)

FLAXLEY: I'm a first rate loser and don't you forget it!

(Jazzu grinned as Flaxley cringed to himself.)

FLAXLEY: Look, never mind that! Who told you that crap about me being fired, Trepe?

JAZZU: It's common knowledge!

FLAXLEY: It's a falsehood! It bares no resemblance to fact, whatsoever! I'm in my prime and I could kick your bony arse all day long, you old boot! Yours and all your pathetic so called warriors.

(Growing increasingly worried by Flaxley's attitude, the elder raised his voice.)

ELDER: Flaxley!!! Enough!

(Flaxley gave Jazzu his evil stare as the elder tried to exercise diplomacy.)

ELDER: So, what is it you want?

(Jazzu nodded and tried to look intimidating as she made her proclamation.)

JAZZU: You will give us one million Lig! You have three days to comply!

ELDER: One million? But, how the hell do you expect...

(Jazzu scowled.)

JAZZU: Please don't make me repeat myself!

(Flaxley scoffed.)

FLAXLEY: Or what?

ELDER: Stop it, Flaxley! What if we can't get you a million lig?

JAZZU: Must I remind you of events twelve years ago?

(Flaxley shook with rage, aching to start culling them.)

FLAXLEY: You...

(Jazzu raised her voice and cut him off.)

JAZZU: Only this time we'll make sure you can never rebuild!

(The elder was dismayed.)

ELDER: But, three days?

JAZZU: We shall return seventy two hours from now, you'd better have it together!

ELDER: But how do you expect us to...

JAZZU: I don't care how you do it!!! Just make sure you do! We'll be back!

ELDER: We'll try our best, Jazzu, but...

(Flaxley couldn't believe what he was hearing and turned to the elder.)

FLAXLEY: Why are you negotiating?

ELDER: Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: Sorry Elder! I'm gonna deal with this myself here and now, Jazzu?

(Jazzu scowled his way.)

JAZZU: What?

FLAXLEY: The answer is no! Now let's fight!

(As he drew his sword and took his fighting stance, Jazzu sneered.)

JAZZU: You want us to burn this place to the ground?

ELDER: Flaxley, you don't stand a chance, there's over a hundred of them!

(Flaxley glared at Jazzu as he spoke.)

FLAXLEY: They may overwhelm me eventually Elder, but I'll take a good sixty or so of them with me!

(The elder trembled, fearing he was only making things worse.)

ELDER: Don't, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: Sorry Elder, but if they want to take Tifaeris they'll have to get past *me* first!

KRITZ: And me!!!

(Kritz ran out of the door to their home and raced to Flaxley's side.)

FLAXLEY: I'll rephrase, if they want to take Tifaeris they'll have to get past *us* first!

(Looking quite perplexed, Jazzu scrutinized Kritz and raised a curious eyebrow.)

KRITZ: What are you staring at, Jazzu?

JAZZU: I know you, don't I?

(Kritz sneered.)

KRITZ: No you don't! Not anymore!

JAZZU: What was your name?

(Getting an itchy sword hand, Flaxley rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: This is a very touching reunion but can we fight now please?

(Jazzu ignored him and continued to assess Kritz.)

JAZZU: That's it! You're Kritzeveltia, Kritz for short, how could I forget? You had a stupidly long name, what was it? Skizy Belli...

KRITZ: Skizmotzo Ballevontios, but that was then!

JAZZU: Well, well, what happened to you? You didn't return to the tribe, Kritzeveltia!

KRITZ: It's Lady Flaxley of Tifaeris to you!

(Jazzu was absolutely furious.)

JAZZU: You married this man?

KRITZ: Best thing I ever did!

(Jazzu sneered and raised her voice.)

JAZZU: Looks like our sister needs re-educating! You're coming back to Trepe village with *us*!

FLAXLEY: Like fuck, she is!

JAZZU: Come here, traitor.

(Jazzu went to grab Kritz but Flaxley stepped in front of her and raised his shield ready to do battle.)

FLAXLEY: She's going nowhere!

(As their eyes met with deep hate piercing into each other, the Trepe warriors also raised their weapons ready to battle on Jazzu's instruction. With what seemed like a deafening silence buzzing around them, a bitter stand off began. Flaxley stood firm with hate written all over his face and Jazzu responded likewise. The bitter confrontation seemed to last for ages until Kritz broke the silent tension.)

KRITZ: What the hell?

(She glanced around at the crowd of nervous looking townsfolk who'd assembled behind them and shuddered. Fearing what might happen to them if a fight was to break out, she bit her lip nervously and looked to Flaxley wearing a worried expression.)

KRITZ: Flaxley, this is silly, innocent people could get hurt!

ELDER: She's right Flaxley, don't do it!

(Flaxley stared straight at Jazzu still, determined not to back down.)

FLAXLEY: Their not gonna destroy Tifaeris again and they're certainly not taking *you* away!

KRITZ: I'll be okay; I can look after myself, but if you start fighting the blood of all these people will be on your hands!

FLAXLEY: They can't be allowed to do this again!

KRITZ: Please Flaxley, listen to me!

(As he stared hatefully into Jazzu's eyes, Kritz's words suddenly begun to make sense, courtesy of a little girl's voice piping up from behind him.)

GIRL: Are they going to hurt us, mummy?

(His heart felt like it was being pulled in separate directions. He desperately wanted to protect the town and the woman he loved, yet he knew the consequences could be catastrophic.)

KRITZ: Please, Flaxley, it's too dangerous! Lower your sword... please!!!

(In his heart he knew she was right, and in frustration, he lowered his blade and snarled.)

FLAXLEY: You'll pay for this!

(Jazzu scoffed.)

JAZZU: Yeah, right! We shall return at eight in the morning in three days time, that gives you seventy two hours!

(With that, Jazzu about turned and walked through the middle of her warriors. As far as she was concerned, she'd given Tifaeris the ultimatum and there was no reason to wait around any longer.)

JAZZU: Grab that turncoat, she's coming with us! Company... march!!!

(As the Trepe started to march away, Kritz solemnly hung her head and allowed them to lead her away without a struggle. Her heart was breaking and a tear rolled down her cheek, but for Flaxley's sake she struggled to keep a smile on her face as she glanced back at him, whilst being ushered towards the gates. Saddened to see her leave but greatly relieved by the lack of bloodshed, the elder puffed out then offered Flaxley a sympathetic smile.)

ELDER: You did the right thing, Flaxley!

(Flaxley looked the elder up and down and scowled furiously.)

FLAXLEY: Fuck *you*, Elder!

(He then watched in horror as they led the woman he loved out of the gates. Utterly devastated, he felt like gouging his eyes out to erase the unbearable sight in front of him. As if his whole world had fallen apart, he put his hands on the top of his head and sunk to his knees. With pain rampaging through his heart, he then stared on helplessly as the departing Kritz yelled back to him sorrowfully.)

KRITZ: I love you, Flaxley!!!

(At once, he stood up and started to run to her, but stopped short of the gates and fell to his knees again. Feeling like his heart had been torn in two he clenched his fists furiously then yelled to the skies.)

FLAXLEY: Why???

(As the Trepe led her away, he watched in consummate despair, his eyes unable to remove themselves from the distressing sight before them. For several minutes, he barely managed to blink until Kritz and her Trepe captors disappeared from sight over a ridge. Feeling very much like a broken man, he then bowed his head and started to return to his house with a vacant, crestfallen look in his eyes.)

ELDER: It'll be okay, Flaxley!

(Feeling empty inside, Flaxley ignored him and went inside the house. Desperately wanting to help, the elder shook his head then paced into the house after him.)

ELDER: Flaxley, what are you doing?

FLAXLEY: Get out of my house!

ELDER: Flaxley, get a grip!

FLAXLEY: Don't make me kill you, old man!

ELDER: Flaxley, I'm your friend, I want to help you!

(Flaxley picked up two swords.)

FLAXLEY: Then get out my way.

ELDER: But... what are you doing?

FLAXLEY: Getting prepared, obviously! I'm going to rescue her! I'll arm myself to the teeth and kill them all before they even make it back to their village. There'll be no townsfolk to worry about out there, I can just get on and enjoy some good, old fashioned Trepe butchering, the way the gods intended.

(The elder look exasperated.)

ELDER: But what if you fail? Flaxley, this is *not* the way!!!

FLAXLEY: The hell it isn't! Kritz is my life!

(Looking desperate, the elder implored him with his eyes.)

ELDER: Flaxley, this is no time for hot-headedness!

FLAXLEY: Agreed, this is the time for long overdue revenge!

ELDER: No, Flaxley! For the sake of Tifaeris, I implore you not to do this!

FLAXLEY: She's my wife, elder! I have to get her back!

ELDER: I know that, but you have to be sensible about it!

FLAXLEY: What?

ELDER: Think, man! You need to clear your head and come up with a strategy, not charge off like a lunatic without a second thought about the consequences. Especially when the consequences could well prove fatal!

(Flaxley looked to him and bit his lip.)

FLAXLEY: What?

ELDER: You heard me! If you rush in like a fool, you could get her killed. In fact, as you well know, pissing the Trepe off could get *everyone* in Tifaeris killed. They're a vengeful bunch, as you're well aware. No, you flying off in a fit of red-misted rage is the last thing we

need.

(He nodded firmly.)

ELDER: We've two objectives here, Flaxley. One, we need to find a way to secure Kritz's release without antagonising an already hostile army! Secondly, we need to end that hostile army's threat permanently or this town is done for! Charging out there like a madman and bashing them about in a fit of rage isn't going to get it done! We need a plan for the *long* term, so start thinking like a knight and less like an angry husband.

FLAXLEY: Yeah well, that's...

(He then looked annoyed and threw his arms in the air.)

FLAXLEY: God, I hate it when you're right!

ELDER: So you agree?

(Flaxley flapped angrily.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, okay? You're right!

(The elder looked most relieved.)

ELDER: Thank the stars. So... what's the plan?

(Flaxley exhaled in frustration.)

FLAXLEY: Right now the only plan I can think of is charging out there and killing them all.

ELDER: At the risk of *both* your lives? Not to mention the lives of everyone in Tifaeris if they decide to exact a bloody revenge. That wasn't their entire army, you know? On the off chance that you *were* successful in killing everyone out there, the rest of their army would come and raze this place to the ground, you know that.

(Flaxley clenched his fist and growled.)

FLAXLEY: Alright, alright, I get it. I won't go charging off, okay?

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: So what *are* we gonna do?

ELDER: I might be the Elder, Flaxley, but it's you who can get things done around here. The people will do anything for you, so my suggestion is, let's get them organised! First thing I need to know is, are we gonna pay them a million lig or do you intend to find a way to fight them?

(Flaxley just looked at the elder with a hard expression on his face.)

ELDER: I thought so! In the meantime let's also try to raise the money!

(Flaxley shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: Why even ask me...

ELDER: Please Flaxley; don't fall apart on me now. You heard Jazzu, one way or another we've got seventy two hours to save Tifaeris. I just wish we didn't need to sleep!

FLAXLEY: Seventy two hours? How the hell am I supposed to find a way to destroy their entire army forever in that short amount of time?

ELDER: Well, you'd better think of something Flaxley, because the clocks already ticking!

GREAT SOUTHERN PLAIN – MONDAY MORNING

(By now the party from Guevina were only a few hours away from Tifaeris. Having travelled through the night, they were very tired and irritable except Derek, who only needed about eight hours sleep a week.

As the carriage gently rolled across the soft plains towards the forest of Airon, Bonson arose from a quick slumber.)

DEREK: Just can't keep those eyes open, can you?

BONSON: Up yours, alien!

(He yawned.)

BONSON: Sorry, that was rather uncalled for!

DEREK: I'll forgive you!

(He yawned again.)

BONSON: How far now, Derek?

DEREK: A couple of hours, I suppose!

BONSON: Really? Good grief, I'm tired!

(Derek became animated and shifted in his seat.)

DEREK: Hey, what's that?

(They looked ahead of them to where a mysterious figure, dressed in black, stood on the dusty track a good hundred yards ahead of them. Fearing it might be a highwayman, they craned their necks forward to get a closer look.)

DEREK: Um... Bonson?

(Trying to act cool, Bonson sighed.)

BONSON: Don't panic, it's just some random chap, you bloody drama queen!

DEREK: Yes it is! And if I'm not mistaken, it's Daman Siria!

(Bonson was stunned.)

BONSON: The mystic wise man from Marlboro?

(Derek frowned.)

DEREK: No, the mystic banjo salesman from East Edea!!!

(Half asleep, Bonson raised an eyebrow.)

BONSON: Really? What's a mystic banjo?

DEREK: Eh?

(Coming to, Bonson sat up, feeling quite miffed.)

BONSON: Hey! You made that up! How dare you take advantage of me in my sleepy state?

(Derek sighed.)

DEREK: Now who's the bloody drama queen?

(Giving him his darkest frown, Bonson mumbled under his breath.)

BONSON: You wait 'til I'm awake, Derek!

(Eager to put an end to Bonson's tired hostility, Derek frowned and gestured sternly down the track ahead.)

DEREK: Never mind that, Bonson! What about Daman Siria?

(Turning to face down the track, Bonson mused out loud.)

BONSON: Hmm, what the bloody hell does *he* want? If some mystical, magical chap just appears before you, it can't be good, that's for sure!

(Derek nodded uncomfortably and shuffled uneasily in his seat. During their epic struggle to retrieve the key of peace, Daman Siria had been instrumental in guiding them upon their journey. Nobody had the first idea where he hailed from or even whether he was from this world. All they knew was that he had immense powers, encyclopaedic knowledge and that he brewed a first class ale. Other than that, this apparent force for good was a complete mystery. Unable to figure out why this mystical entity should be seeking them out a second time, Derek mumbled to himself and bit his lip.)

DEREK: Only one way to find out, I suppose!

(Looking more than slightly apprehensive, he slowed the carriage until it came to a nervous halt before the relaxed looking Daman Siria. With Bonson and Derek giving him hesitant looks, Daman looked up and smiled warmly to reassure them.)

DAMAN: Good to see you again, chaps! Lovely day, isn't it?

(Derek forced a smile.)

DEREK: Yes it is... um... how are you, Daman?

DAMAN: I am well! You?

(Bonson frowned, anxious to know Daman's purpose for being there.)

BONSON: Never mind that, what can we do for you, Daman?

DAMAN: I've come for *you*, Bonson!

(Bonson looked startled and sat back.)

BONSON: For me?

DAMAN: Yes for you!

(Looking bewildered, he frowned and gave Daman a questioning glance.)

BONSON: For me?

DAMAN: I think we've established that, Bonson!

BONSON: Sorry, I'm just a bit surprised!

(Looking forward to seeing his old friend Flaxley again, Derek interjected.)

DEREK: Look, I hate to be rude, Daman, but will this take long? Only, we're on a journey!

DAMAN: I'm well aware of that, Derek!

(Dying to know what Daman had planned for him, Bonson sighed.)

BONSON: Well? Are you gonna tell us what you want with me or not?

(Brushing his rudeness aside, Daman nodded.)

DAMAN: Of course.

(He stood tall and beamed.)

DAMAN: Bonson, your time has come!

(Bonson went pale and gaped.)

BONSON: But, I'm only 49! I'm too young to die!!!

(Daman frowned.)

DAMAN: Not that sort of time!

BONSON: Oh!

DAMAN: Besides, you're 59!

(Looking wounded by the suggestion, Bonson immediately went on the defensive.)

BONSON: It's a lie, how dare you say that???

(Derek rolled his eyes.)

DEREK: Bonson, I'm a mind-reader, don't forget! I know exactly how old you are, I always have!

(Looking sheepish, Bonson fell silent for a moment.)

BONSON: You won't tell anyone, will you?

DEREK: Like they don't already know...

BONSON: What?

DEREK: I said, my lips are sealed!

(Annoyed at his cheek, Bonson furrowed his eyebrows at him.)

BONSON: Read *these* thoughts, alien boy.

DEREK: Hey! I don't even know what one of those is but I'd wager I look nothing like one!

(Having completely lost their attention, Daman raised a finger in the air.)

DAMAN: Um... chaps?

(At once, they both spun their heads swiftly to face him. Remembering it wasn't Daman they were angry at, they then both forced a smile. Accepting the gesture, Daman nodded politely.)

DAMAN: Thank you. Now, Bonson, old chap...

(With that, he stood tall and nodded to him, delighted to be the bearer of good news.)

DAMAN: I bring you news of great importance. Your destiny awaits. You've been chosen to train as a wise man!

(At once, Bonson and Derek's jaws dropped.)

BONSON: A what now?

DEREK: A wise man?

DAMAN: A wise man! You'll be trained in the mystic arts and groomed to sit alongside myself at the council of the wise.

DEREK: Council of the wise?

DAMAN: I can't go into too much detail, Derek. Let's just say we're a group of elders who use the mystic arts for the betterment of the world. We stand back from the mortal world and act as a force for good without prejudice. And Bonson's high levels of wisdom haven't gone unnoticed by us.

(He nodded proudly.)

DAMAN: The privilege of council membership and the immortality that comes with it, is bestowed only to the elite few whose wisdom sets them far apart from the rest. And that's you, Bonson. That's why I'm here to offer you this unique opportunity today.

BONSON: I see!

(He gaped for a moment then smiled happily at Daman.)

BONSON: Immortality, eh? What can I say, I'm honoured! Thank you.

(With that, all trace of humility and modesty evaporated and a conceited grin appeared on his face.)

BONSON: Though it's no surprise you picked *me* really. I always knew I was destined for great things.

(Derek looked astonished.)

DEREK: You did?

BONSON: Yes, I did. You cheeky sod! There's *always* been something special about me that I found wonderfully endearing and I couldn't quite put my finger on it.

DEREK: You find *yourself* endearing?

BONSON: I do!

(He sneered then glanced away.)

BONSON: Not that I have to explain myself to you, chummy.

(Derek looked at Bonson blankly then mused out loud.)

DEREK: Hmm... clearly this council of the wise is getting desperate.

BONSON: Excuse me?

(Derek looked most taken aback.)

DEREK: I said that out loud?

BONSON: Yes, you pint-sized sack of green crap! How dare you?

(Derek shrugged then tried to qualify his comment with an innocent grin.)

DEREK: I didn't mean to offend you, Bonson, but you have to admit... if this council works for the betterment of the world, then choosing *you* seems a little...

BONSON: The word you're looking for is 'inspired'.

DAMAN: Derek, worry not. Bonson's been chosen for his wisdom, not for his kindness or compassion.

DEREK: Well, obviously.

BONSON: Hey!

(He furrowed his brow.)

BONSON: I'm quickly going off you, Derek.

DEREK: Oh, come off it. Even you wouldn't try to pretend that benevolence is your strong point.

(Bonson looked to him then offered a conceding shrug.)

BONSON: I'm no frilly-shirt wearing, nature loving pansy, if that's what you're saying.

(Daman rolled his eyes then swiftly interjected.)

DAMAN: Anyway, if you're done nattering, we've got work to do.

(He then gestured for Bonson to alight the carriage and step aside him.)

DAMAN: If you accept this noble offer, Bonson, we should get going.

(Bonson nodded sternly.)

BONSON: Of course I accept your offer. Becoming a wise man and lording it over all the

mere mortals sounds great fun.

(He then looked uncertain.)

BONSON: I can still live at the castle for free though, right? Only it's a short walk to my local and I do enjoy an ale or two.

DAMAN: Relax, Bonson. While you're in training, you'll just carry on with your life as if nothing's changed. The only difference will be me dragging you away to train from time to time.

BONSON: Not during opening hours I hope.

DAMAN: Well even if it is, I have good quality ale back at *my* place, Bonson.

BONSON: That's true! In that case I'm in!

DAMAN: You won't get to "lord it" over *anybody* though. We're not here to rule, we're here to guide.

BONSON: It's still an esteemed position though right? Higher than knight, butler, princess or green alien?

DAMAN: Of course, once you're qualified and old enough to join the council, you'll gain immortality and become part of the highest court in the world.

(With that, Bonson swiftly started to climb from the carriage.)

BONSON: Then how can I refuse?

(As soon as he'd leapt down from the carriage, he turned and looked back at Derek.)

BONSON: Farewell Derek, say goodbye to Mandika and dumb arse for me! I'll meet you in Tifaeris later!

(Derek nodded.)

DEREK: Will do!

BONSON: And if anyone asks where I am, tell them his esteemed wise-ness is indisposed, off working for the greater good. Like a god, really!

(Derek just looked at him wearing a blank, unimpressed expression.)

DEREK: Right!

(With that, Derek got the horses moving again immediately.)

DEREK: I'm leaving now.

DAMAN: Farewell, Derek.

(As Daman and Bonson watched the carriage head off down the track, Bonson raised a curious eyebrow.)

BONSON: So, a wise man, eh?

DAMAN: Uh huh!

(Turning to face him, Bonson looked quizzically into Daman's eyes.)

BONSON: So... apart from the obvious, why me? It wasn't just my wisdom; it was my charisma too, wasn't it?

(As Derek and the carriage disappeared from sight, Daman turned to face Bonson.)

DAMAN: The 'why' will become apparent in time, Bonson. All you need to understand for now is that you've been chosen! As simple as that!

BONSON: For my charisma *and* wisdom, right?

DAMAN: Bonson... that's immaterial!

BONSON: I'm right though, aren't I?

DAMAN: It doesn't matter. You were chosen, isn't that enough?

(Bonson shrugged.)

BONSON: I suppose. But... by whom? You? Or did *all* the elders take a vote? Didn't get blackballed by anyone did I?

DAMAN: We're not masons, Bonson.

BONSON: Well you say that, but you sound like mystic freemasons to me.

DAMAN: Well, we're not. And besides, if we were and you *did* get blackballed I wouldn't

be here, would I?

BONSON: That's true.

DAMAN: Look, all I can tell you is, this is your destiny, Bonson. Your wisdom made you stand out and you were chosen a long time ago.

BONSON: How long ago?

(Daman frowned.)

DAMAN: You ask a lot of questions, Bonson.

BONSON: Well, obviously. The pursuit of answers *is* the road to wisdom after all, isn't it?

DAMAN: Yes, and in that statement you answered *all* your own questions!

(Bonson look impressed with himself.)

BONSON: I did?

DAMAN: You did!

(Bonson nodded to himself for a moment then looked to Daman again.)

BONSON: So... my destiny, eh? This was always meant to be?

DAMAN: Absolutely. Since you were chosen you've been protected by the high council of the wise to ensure you reached this age!

BONSON: Really?

DAMAN: Really! For once you're sixty and fully qualified, you are to become a member of said council!

(Bonson gave him a sceptical glance.)

BONSON: And what if I don't want to? Will I have a choice?

DAMAN: Of course you will, but why would anyone say no?

(Wearing a knowing smile, as if it was a test, Bonson replied smugly.)

BONSON: Because wisdom can also be a burden!

DAMAN: It's true; once again you have proved you are wise!

(With that, Bonson mused and stared into space as he elaborated generously.)

BONSON: I mean look at Lefiat, he's so stupid most things he ought to be worried about go right over his head!

DAMAN: Well that's a bit harsh.

BONSON: If he was burdened with wisdom and *knew* just what an accident prone halfwit he was, however, he'd be too scared to leave his room!

(Daman frowned.)

DAMAN: I think he has a fair idea...

BONSON: Not only that...

DAMAN: Okay Bonson, I get the point!

(Realising he was babbling, he stopped and grinned at Daman.)

BONSON: So, Daman, protection, eh?

DAMAN: Yes!

BONSON: What did that involve?

DAMAN: Well... for one, remember your heart attack?

(Placing his hands on his hips, Bonson scowled at his learned friend.)

BONSON: Of course I remember it, I wouldn't be very wise if I forgot it, would I?

DAMAN: Point is, how lucky were you to be struck by lightning at the right time, restarting your heart?

BONSON: Oh, yes, having a heart attack *and* being struck by lightning simultaneously, that was bloody lucky wasn't it? If I'd been really jammy, I'd have spontaneously combusted as well!

(Daman rolled his eyes and sighed.)

DAMAN: Don't be facetious, man! Look, all you need to know is you've been protected from death!

BONSON: I have?

DAMAN: You have!

(Bonson rubbed his chin and mused thoughtfully.)

BONSON: So, if I'd leapt from a cliff for nothing, I'd have survived?

DAMAN: Well, no!

BONSON: No? Why not?

DAMAN: Well, for one thing leaping off a cliff for nothing is hardly the act of a wise person, is it?

(Bonson nodded understandingly.)

BONSON: That's true!

DAMAN: Any act of complete stupidity like that will automatically cancel your wise status!

BONSON: Okay, so as long as I don't willingly place myself in danger, I'm protected from harm?

DAMAN: That's right!

BONSON: Excellent. I'll remember that!

(Satisfied he'd made himself clear, Daman smiled and rubbed his hands together rigorously.)

DAMAN: Right, shall we go? I have to teach you illusionary techniques and the secret of nature!

(Looking amazed, Bonson did a double take.)

BONSON: You know the secret of nature???

DAMAN: I do! Now, let's go!

(Just then, a strange mist engulfed them both. Coughing and unable to see, Bonson held one hand to his mouth and batted smoke with the other. Seconds later, when the smoke lifted he found himself standing in the living room of Daman's home. With a look of sheer wonderment emblazoned on his face, he slowly faced Daman and enthused excitedly.)

BONSON: You've just got to teach me that!

(Daman smiled knowingly.)

DAMAN: All in good time, my friend, all in good time!

TIFAERIS – MONDAY, MID-MORNING

(With Bonson gone, Derek enjoyed a peaceful, sarcasm free ride across the plain. Feeling quite relaxed, it wasn't long before he guided the coach between the iron gates of Tifaeris to complete the journey. Peering excitedly from the carriage window, Mandika was wide awake and grinning from ear to ear. A stark contrast to the tired and nervous Lefiat. Soaking up the beautiful scenery of the picturesque township, Mandika gasped.)

MANDIKA: So, this is Tifaeris!

(Lefiat yawned and pointed out of the window without thinking.)

LEFIAT: Yeah, *that's* Flaxley's house!

(Baffled as to how he could possibly know, Mandika gave him a sideways glance.)

MANDIKA: How do you know?

(Realising his mistake, Lefiat's eyes bulged.)

LEFIAT: Um... I'm a knight I can tell these things!

(Offended that he'd think she'd be gullible enough to believe his feeble excuse, Mandika scowled.)

MANDIKA: Yeah, right!

(She scoffed.)

MANDIKA: I bet Derek told you earlier it was the first house on the left as you go through the gates.

(Satisfied that explanation would get him off the hook, Lefiat nodded sternly.)

LEFIAT: Yeah, that's what happened and no mistake.

(Mandika nodded knowingly then raised an impressed eyebrow.)

MANDIKA: Wow, your understanding of left and right is really coming on.

(Lefiat frowned and held his hands towards her.)

LEFIAT: Well you did make me have L and R tattooed on my palms.

(Mandika sighed.)

MANDIKA: And yet still you get it wrong most of the time... maybe I should have taught you the alphabet first.

LEFIAT: I told you that at the time...

(He looked at his palms then sighed inwardly.)

LEFIAT: You say they're letters, to me they're just weird shapes.

MANDIKA: Just remember, L is shaped like a boot and stands for left. It'll come.

(She forced a smile and glanced out of the window.)

MANDIKA: So, that's Flaxley's house, is it?

(Lefiat shifted uneasily in his seat.)

LEFIAT: Yeah, that's what I'm informed... I've never been here though. Never. Not even once.

(Mandika gave him a sideways glance then resumed beaming gleefully from the window as Derek brought the carriage to a stand still. As Derek proceeded to climb down, Mandika then stepped from the carriage excitedly and took a breath of the fresh sea air.)

MANDIKA: What a beautiful place!

(Looking slightly daunted, Lefiat followed her out nervously. As he looked around at the quaint log cabins that lined the leafy avenues, a baffled expression crossed his brow.)

LEFIAT: Hey, where's Bonson?

(Derek shrugged.)

DEREK: He had to leave; he's to become a wise man!

LEFIAT: A what?

DEREK: Well, Daman Siria appeared and...

(Not caring in the slightest where the rude old buzzard was, Mandika interrupted coldly.)

MANDIKA: Never mind that old git, I want to see Flaxley!

(Derek smiled then gestured towards a large wooden homestead.)

DEREK: Fair enough, it's this house here!

MANDIKA: Right. *You* can knock, I have delicate fingers!

DEREK: We won't have to knock, Mandika. This is Flaxley we're talking about, he won't mind if we stroll right in.

(As Derek led them forth, Mandika waved her hand at him nervously.)

MANDIKA: Hang on! If we're gonna go barging in, you'd better be *sure* this is his house!

(Derek rolled his eyes.)

DEREK: Of course I'm certain. I've been here before, Mandika! Unlike some of you, I visit *my* friends.

MANDIKA: I know you've been here before, but maybe it just *looks* like his house! These wooden shacks are all very generic.

DEREK: Trust me, Mandika, it's his house!

(Happy he'd said his piece, Derek continued on, up the stairs to Flaxley's porch and in through the front door. Lefiat and Mandika followed on nervously. Once inside, Derek looked around the large wooden living room and shouted out.)

DEREK: Flaxley???

(Hearing no reply, he frowned.)

DEREK: He isn't here!

MANDIKA: Maybe it's the wrong house!

DEREK: Mandika, it's the right house! I'm not Lefiat!

LEFIAT: Eh?

(At this point, Flaxley stormed in holding a hammer and a chisel.)

DEREK: See?

MANDIKA: Lucky guess!

(Shocked to see them there, Flaxley stopped dead and glared at them. Immediately sensing trouble, Derek smiled sympathetically.)

DEREK: You seem troubled my friend!

(Flaxley didn't flinch.)

FLAXLEY: What are you doing here?

(Appalled by his lack of grace, Mandika sneered angrily.)

MANDIKA: Some welcome!

(With that, Flaxley just threw the chisel on the sofa and paced back out of the door, ignoring them completely.)

MANDIKA: Flaxley???

(Derek bit his lip anxiously.)

DEREK: Let him go, Mandika!

(Baffled by it all, Mandika held out her palms.)

MANDIKA: What was that all about?

(Derek looked sad and sighed inwardly.)

MANDIKA: And what the hell's up with you?

(Sharing Derek's apprehension, Lefiat sighed.)

LEFIAT: Something's wrong, isn't it?

(Mandika gave him a belittling sneer.)

MANDIKA: You're perceptive! Of course it is!

DEREK: You two, sit down! I read his mind and you aint gonna like this!

(With all kinds of terrifying thoughts racing through their heads, they all placed themselves at the table and looked to Derek with worried eyes. Sighing with sorrow, Derek began to explain immediately.)

DEREK: It seems that the Trepe are threatening to destroy Tifaeris again! And what's more they've taken Kritz... and Flaxley seems to have lost the plot completely!

(There was a stunned silence until Lefiat jumped to his feet defiantly.)

LEFIAT: Then why are we just sitting here?

MANDIKA: Exactly! Let's get out of here before the Trepe come!!!

LEFIAT: Yeah! No! That's not what I meant! We have to save her!

(Mandika was *not* impressed.)

MANDIKA: What?

LEFIAT: Um... save the people of Tifaeris?

MANDIKA: That's better! Now sit back down!

(As Lefiat shyly shrunk into his seat, Derek gritted his teeth, annoyed by her attitude.)

DEREK: Mandika, you'd better stop bitching! Flaxley feels like his whole world has collapsed around his ears, he's gonna need our support!

(Feeling she was too magnificent to be bossed around by an alien, Mandika snarled back.)

MANDIKA: I wasn't bitching!

(Very aware of the condescending frowns coming her way, Mandika screwed up her face.)

MANDIKA: What?

(Desperately trying to avoid antagonising her, Lefiat steered away from elaborating and raised another point he wasn't clear on instead.)

LEFIAT: So how come he hasn't gone after her?

(Mandika scoffed.)

MANDIKA: That's obvious!

LEFIAT: Is it?

DEREK: Yes, Mandika, is it?

(They both waited for her to explain.)

MANDIKA: What? Why are you looking at me?

DEREK: Why is it obvious?

MANDIKA: Eh? Leave me alone!

(Putting her rambling aside, Derek sighed.)

DEREK: I wonder why he didn't go after her then!

LEFIAT: Perhaps he's scared!

MANDIKA: Flaxley fears nothing! He's a competent knight!

(She muttered under her breath.)

MANDIKA: Unlike someone I could mention!

LEFIAT: Well whatever happens I'm gonna try and help him, I owe him my life!

DEREK: He can count on my support too!

(They both looked at a less than enthusiastic Mandika.)

MANDIKA: Oh, alright then! I'll do what I can but only for Flaxley's sake. And I guess it wouldn't hurt to pretend I liked... well... didn't despise Kritz!

(At this point, Flaxley stormed back in angrily, looking across at them as he reached for his toolbox.)

FLAXLEY: Look, Lefiat, I can't do your mission for you this time, you've come at a bad time!

MANDIKA: Do his mission?

LEFIAT: Uh-oh!

(Mandika's face seemed to burn red.)

MANDIKA: He's been doing your missions???

(Lefiat started to sweat and sink in his seat as Mandika flapped.)

MANDIKA: You bastard!!!

(Not wanting to seem like the villain, Lefiat panicked and said the first thing that came in his head to deflect attention away from himself.)

LEFIAT: You hate Kritz!!!

(Immediately, Mandika froze, closed her eyes and cringed. Lefiat, for his part, gulped and bit his fingernails.)

LEFIAT: I've got a feeling I'm gonna regret saying that!

(Wearing a face of doom, Flaxley strode over to the where they sat trembling at the table and spoke calmly but firm.)

FLAXLEY: Go home!

(With that, he about turned and headed for the door again. Not about to let Mandika and Lefiat ruin everything, Derek looked to his departing friend urgently.)

DEREK: Flaxley!!!

(Flaxley stopped and sighed angrily.)

FLAXLEY: What???

DEREK: We've travelled a long way to see you, and *this* is how you treat us!

(Flaxley turned to face him and frowned.)

FLAXLEY: I've got things to do!

DEREK: Then let us help you!

(Flaxley sniggered.)

FLAXLEY: Help me? Don't be funny!

(He started to turn to leave when Derek spoke up imploringly.)

DEREK: Yes, Flaxley, we can *help* you! Or have you forgotten what we all went through

together eighteen months ago?

(Flaxley furrowed his brow and turned to face him again.)

FLAXLEY: What are you saying, Derek?

DEREK: We went to hell and back with you for that key of peace, and we'd gladly do it again!

(Flaxley sighed and eased his stance a little.)

FLAXLEY: Derek, this is different!

DEREK: No it isn't! Kritz is very much one of *us*! And when one of *us* is in trouble, it's our duty to come together and help.

FLAXLEY: What do you mean, "us"?

DEREK: We were a crew!

(Flaxley gave him a doubting glance.)

FLAXLEY: Most of you were a burden!

DEREK: Maybe, but the friendship we all forged never was!

(He puffed out forcefully.)

DEREK: Right now you need that friendship, Flaxley. You need all the friends you can get.

And you need all the *help* you can get. And that's where *we* come in. We know what it means to struggle at your side, Flaxley and we're willing to do it again. For Kritz!

(Absorbing Derek's words, Flaxley nodded thoughtfully then sighed to himself.)

FLAXLEY: Okay! Sorry, you're right. I'll just finish what I'm doing then I'll return! Make yourselves at home!

(And with that, he walked out leaving Derek feeling uneasy.)

DEREK: He is too troubled for words!

MANDIKA: He aint the only one!!!

(She glared at the shame-faced Lefiat.)

LEFIAT: But...

MANDIKA: How dare you...

(Getting increasingly wound up by her selfishness, Derek scowled angrily.)

DEREK: For pities sake, Mandika, for once in your life will you please stop thinking about yourself???

(Mandika gaped, stunned by his audacity.)

MANDIKA: You can't talk to *me* like that!!!

DEREK: Yes I can!!! Our friend needs us! Stop dwelling on your own problems and spare a thought for Flaxley!

(She looked ashamed and hung her head as his words sank in.)

MANDIKA: Yeah, you're right. Sorry!

LEFIAT: Yeah, I'm sorry too, Mandika!

(Not about to capitulate twice, Mandika frowned.)

MANDIKA: I'll deal with *you* later!

(As Lefiat clammed up, Derek looked to his silent comrades and smiled.)

DEREK: Thank you, chaps!

(At this point, Flaxley thundered back in and marched towards the kitchen.)

FLAXLEY: Have you had coffee?

DEREK: No!

FLAXLEY: Would you like one?

(Before anyone could reply, he disappeared into the kitchen. Shocked by his immensely swift march-by, Derek, Lefiat and Mandika shrugged at one another before receiving quite a start as Flaxley thrust his head back round the door.)

FLAXLEY: Well? Would you?

(Receiving three 'eager to please' nods, Flaxley then shrunk away from the doorway without

a word.

With a permanent frown stamped on his forehead, Flaxley used the inferno magic, Derek had taught him on his last visit to relight the kitchen fire and grabbed a pail to hang over it. As he reached for the coffee beans that Kritz had stolen from a passer-by in Azagotse, one thought echoed through his mind. He didn't have time for this.

Two minutes later, looking pale and unsettled, Flaxley returned to the living room with four cups of steaming hot coffee. Having handed out the drinks, he then took a seat and stared down at the table in frustration.)

DEREK: Thanks, Flaxley.

MANDIKA: Thank you.

LEFIAT: Yeah, thanks.

(Receiving no acknowledgement from their reluctant host, they then proceeded to sit there in uncomfortable silence for several minutes, not knowing what to say to one another. As the discomfort grew with every passing second and nervous eyes started to pass around the table, Lefiat trembled, unable to bare the tension any longer. Desperate to take his mind off the situation, he stooped and dunked his lips in his cup. At once his eyes bulged and he yelped in pain.)

LEFIAT: Ow! That's hot!

MANDIKA: It's coffee, you tit!

(Remembering they weren't supposed to be arguing, they both grinned at Flaxley then went back to sitting in silence. Giving them both a brief frown, Derek then attempted to start a conversation.)

DEREK: So, Flaxley... nice weather here in Tifaeris!

(Again nobody spoke. In fact, the silence continued unabated for quite a while longer until Flaxley sighed and wolfed down his coffee in one swig.)

FLAXLEY: Look, this is all very nice, chaps, but I don't have time for this! The clock never stops ticking and I've got a million things to do!

(Looking ready for action, he stood up and grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: What's more, that coffee burnt my tongue!

(Before he could head away, Derek swiftly jumped up and stood on the table.)

DEREK: Flaxley! Wait! Let us help you!

FLAXLEY: What?

LEFIAT: Yeah, let us help, Flaxley!

MANDIKA: Yes! Let them help you!

DEREK: We'll *all* help!

(Mandika frowned.)

MANDIKA: Hey, you misheard me!

LEFIAT: Come on, Mandika!

MANDIKA: Belt up, mistake boy!

LEFIAT: Mistake boy?

(Deeply hurt by her phrasing, Lefiat pouted at her and folded his arms. Finding a degree of amusement in their behaviour, Flaxley then let his guard down and allowed himself a half smile.)

FLAXLEY: I admit, it's great to see you all again! Kritz would have loved this!

(Upon mentioning her name, his face clouded over.)

FLAXLEY: Damn the Trepe!

(Derek gave him a consoling look.)

DEREK: Hang in there, Flaxley! We're all here to help, just tell us the plan.

(Oblivious to the breakthrough they'd made with Flaxley, Lefiat continued to glare at Mandika.)

LEFIAT: Why did you call me mistake boy?

(Having moved on to more important matters, like those in hand, Mandika ignored him.)

LEFIAT: You've annoyed me now!

(With that, he stood up in an angry rush and accidentally knocked a vase off the table. As it smashed into tiny fragments, Flaxley grimaced and held his head.)

LEFIAT: Sorry!!!

MANDIKA: See? Mistake boy!

(Looking mortified, Flaxley went over to the pieces of broken vase and knelt before them.)

FLAXLEY: I gave this to Kritz on our wedding day!

(Lefiat gaped like a fish and started to cry.)

LEFIAT: Oh no, I'm so sorry!

FLAXLEY: Stupid little...

(As Flaxley leapt to his feet and turned the air blue, Lefiat's eyes bulged, unable to believe any man could recite so many obscenities without pausing for breath. Equally astonished by his outburst, Mandika covered her ears. When Flaxley finally ceased his verbal assault, over a minute later, Lefiat frowned defensively.)

LEFIAT: I said I was sorry!

(Hating every second of his friend's suffering, Derek frowned and decided to take decisive action. Looking determined, he stood akimbo and called out to him from the table top.)

DEREK: Flaxley?

(Flaxley turned to face him looking close to breaking point. Derek nodded sternly his way.)

DEREK: Tell us what you want us to do! Your wish is our command, my friend!

FLAXLEY: In that case, Derek, you can start by taking these two clowns back to the circus!

MANDIKA: Mean!

DEREK: I'm serious, Flaxley! Just tell us how we can help and we will!

(At first, the troubled knight bit his lip and said nothing. Looking slightly bewildered, he just scanned everyone's faces. Moments later, however, a feeling of deep compassion washed over him. Realising they meant well, something a knight could never criticise, he took a deep breath and relented his anger towards them. Offering them a forgiving shrug, he then filled them in on exactly what was going on.)

FLAXLEY: Well, okay. If you really want to help... the elder is attempting to raise one million Lig while I'm preparing our defences and trying to train an army! To make things worse, there's only seventy two hours to do it in!

DEREK: One million lig? Why?

(With heavy heart, Flaxley went on to relate the events of the Trepe's visit that morning in great detail. From Jazzu's snarling face to her anger towards Kritz, he left no stone unturned. Once he'd clued them in to exactly what was going on, he then shrugged and threw up his arms.)

FLAXLEY: And if the elder hadn't talked me out of it, there'd have been bits of Trepe littering the countryside for miles around, but he was right... it was too risky. So, we decided I'd look for a way to beat them while he tries to raise the money.

(Looking focussed and ready for anything, Derek nodded.)

DEREK: I see! But you'd rather defeat them than pay them, right?

(Flaxley nodded sternly.)

FLAXLEY: Defeating them, and I mean well and truly destroying them, is the only way we can guarantee they'll never return!

(Feeling Flaxley's sorrow, Lefiat hung his head and sighed apologetically.)

LEFIAT: I really am sorry about the vase, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: It's okay, Lefiat! Accidents happen when you're around! Besides, symbols of Kritz are meaningless if she isn't here!

MANDIKA: And I'm sorry I said I hated her! I guess I was just missing our friendship that's all! Since you left with Kritz, I've missed you terribly, Flaxley!

(Looking tearful, she then upped from her seat and gave him a warm hug. Flaxley squeezed her warmly in return then stepped back looking focussed and ready.)

FLAXLEY: So you all want to help?

DEREK: Just tell us what to do, Flaxley and we're there.

MANDIKA: Within reason.

LEFIAT: I'll try my best, even if my best *is* crap!

FLAXLEY: Excellent! Right! Derek, go and help the builders finish the wall!

DEREK: Okay. And I'll also try to perfect the new magic I've been working on!

FLAXLEY: New magic?

DEREK: Yeah, it could be pretty useful; unfortunately it casts itself on everyone, including the one who cast it! It could be of some use to us if I can iron out that flaw!

FLAXLEY: Excellent, in the meantime head for the building site! And... thanks, Derek!

DEREK: It's okay, Flaxley! This is what friends do!

(Flaxley gave him a grateful smile then turned to face Mandika.)

FLAXLEY: Mandika, princess?

MANDIKA: At your service!

(She shuddered.)

MANDIKA: Now there's a phrase I never thought I'd ever say!

(Flaxley smiled.)

FLAXLEY: Don't worry; I won't set you anything difficult to do!

MANDIKA: Or tiring!

(Feeling slightly ashamed by her laziness, she gave him a cheesy grin.)

FLAXLEY: Don't worry, princess! Find the elder and give him a hand collecting the money!

MANDIKA: Righto! I can do that... or sweet talk others into it! Either way, I'm your girl!

(Lefiat frowned.)

LEFIAT: You're supposed to be *my* girl!

(Wearing a belittling glance she faced him and scoffed.)

MANDIKA: Yeah, but look at ya!

(Fed up with her meanness, he screwed up his face and looked away. As Lefiat thought about all the horrible names he'd never dare call her, Flaxley spoke up.)

FLAXLEY: And you, Lefiat!

(Dropping his sour demeanour, he turned to Flaxley, excited to be able to help out.)

LEFIAT: Yeah?

FLAXLEY: Don't touch anything!

(With that, Flaxley turned away from him and looked to Derek again. Quite upset about being left out of the loop, Lefiat frowned.)

LEFIAT: Hey! Be fair, Flaxley! There must be something I can do!

(Tempted to say "You'd have thought so, wouldn't you?" Flaxley turned to face him then released a reluctant sigh.)

FLAXLEY: Fine... go with Derek but don't get in anyone's way!

(Glad to be accepted, Lefiat beamed.)

LEFIAT: Thanks Flaxley, you won't regret it!

FLAXLEY: I've heard that before!

(With that, he started to head for the door.)

FLAXLEY: So how's old Bonson these days? Still as miserable as buggery or has retirement mellowed him?

(As the others proceeded to follow him, Mandika sighed.)

MANDIKA: He's getting more and more bitter with age, Flaxley.

LEFIAT: And more and more sarcastic!

FLAXLEY: Even miserable in retirement, eh?

MANDIKA: More so!

(Flaxley smiled.)

FLAXLEY: Still, it would have been nice to see the old fella again.

DEREK: And you will. Fascinating stuff actually, we got waylaid on the way here by Daman Siria.

(Flaxley stopped short of the door and gave him a sideways glance.)

FLAXLEY: Really?

(Derek smiled to him.)

DEREK: Really! I'll explain on the way! Let's go!

(Before they could pass through the door, however, a hesitant Mandika raised a nervous finger.)

MANDIKA: Wait! Before we go, Flaxley, can I ask you something?

FLAXLEY: What's up, Mandika?

(Looking nervous, she bit her fingernails and glanced up at him through her hair.)

MANDIKA: It may sound nasty but I have to ask!

FLAXLEY: Go on!

(She whimpered.)

MANDIKA: Do you promise you won't get angry?

(Flaxley looked to her blankly for a moment then replied in a slow, unconvincing tone.)

FLAXLEY: Okay.

MANDIKA: Well... Kritz is a Trepe, yeah?

FLAXLEY: She was!

MANDIKA: So, and forgive me for asking but, how can you be certain she didn't plan this all along?

DEREK: Mandika, that's an awful thing to say!

(Struggling to maintain his calm, Flaxley furrowed his brow at her.)

FLAXLEY: How can I be certain she didn't plan *what* all along?

MANDIKA: You said you wouldn't get angry!

FLAXLEY: I'm *not* angry! I'm bloody livid!

MANDIKA: Why? It's a perfectly valid question! She might have been working for the Trepe on the inside all this time!

FLAXLEY: Doing *what* exactly?

MANDIKA: Spying on Tifaeris!

(Flaxley snarled.)

FLAXLEY: Spying on *what* exactly??? Before *she* came to Tifaeris there was nothing to spy on, you halfwit!

MANDIKA: Yeah, but...

FLAXLEY: But nothing! There's no reason to be suspicious of her whatsoever! It's not like she gave the Trepe high-fives when they came here earlier, then skipped back to their village with them singing merry songs about springtime in lesbian land! They abducted her!

MANDIKA: Which is a bit suspicious in itself, don't you think? Abducted by her *own* tribe!

FLAXLEY: *Former* tribe!

MANDIKA: Or is it?

(As Mandika grinned at him innocently, Flaxley snarled.)

FLAXLEY: Listen, Mandika, she's *not* a bloody Trepe!

LEFIAT: Obviously! She's broken every Trepe law in the book! They're not even allowed

to fall in love, never mind get married! There's no way she's still a Trepe.

DEREK: Exactly! Her marriage entirely annuls her validation as one!

FLAXLEY: Precisely!

(Mandika smiled apologetically.)

MANDIKA: Fair enough, sorry to question her, Flaxley, but I needed to know!

(Flaxley glared at her for a moment then relented from his angry stance and puffed out.)

FLAXLEY: No need to apologise, Mandika, I understand!

DEREK: You do?

(Mandika whimpered.)

MANDIKA: Do you though? Be honest. You hate me now, don't you?

(Flaxley sighed and shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: No, of course not.

(He then shrugged and offered her a smile.)

FLAXLEY: To be honest, I half expected *somebody* to say something like that. She *was* a Trepe after all and I'm sure you're not the only one who'll be suspicious of her. Her Trepe roots have always been a source of ammunition to her doubters.

(He then bit his lip and looked to the ceiling.)

FLAXLEY: Living here in Tifaeris with the Trepe symbol tattooed on her arm, hasn't been easy for her. In the first week after we came back here, she got into fights six times with distrusting locals. Admittedly, she started five of them, but even so, doubt is something she's had to live from the moment we walked through the broken down gates.

(He then looked to Mandika and stood tall.)

FLAXLEY: She deserves better than that! She's worked extremely hard to help rebuild this town, harder than most people in fact. She's bent over backwards to prove herself and I, for one, trust her one hundred percent!

DEREK: Me too. I read her mind before she left with you, and she had absolutely no love for the Trepe tribe anymore. She just wanted to be with *you*, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: Exactly! With *me*, not with *them*. Fucking Trepe bitches!

(Lefiat looked stumped.)

LEFIAT: That's what I don't get. If she can no longer be a Trepe warrior why did they even bother kidnapping her?

FLAXLEY: I fear they'll punish her as an example to other Trepe women who're thinking of not returning to the Tribe after their training!

DEREK: I thought they didn't have to!

FLAXLEY: Officially they don't, but this Jazzu rules with an iron fist I feel!

DEREK: Then the sooner we save her, the better!

FLAXLEY: Precisely!

(Flaxley then stood tall and clenched a fist.)

FLAXLEY: I aim to defeat the Trepe when they come, then go to their village and rescue her, burning it down in the process! When I've finished with them, the Trepe will be nothing but a bad memory.

MANDIKA: Good for you, Flaxley!

(Flaxley offered her a smile then gestured to the door.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, let's get busy! Every second counts, remember that!

(With that, he turned and paced out of the house, followed closely by his three friends.)

(Looking determined, Flaxley led Mandika to the elders house, then pointed Derek and Lefiat towards the building site. Barely offering them any kind of farewell, he then strode away from them purposefully. They'd been assigned their jobs and now he was going to do his.

As far as he was concerned, there'd been too much time wasted through talking already.

Walking at almost a jogging pace, he hurried past his neighbour's homes and across the town square towards the inn. Not about to waste any more time, as he approached the building, he lowered his head and snarled to hurry himself along. Maintaining his determined gait, he then thrust open the door and strode inside confidently. Following a brief glance across the saloon, he paced up to two large men at the bar.)

FLAXLEY: Mulberry? Cashew?

(The two men turned away from the bar looking pleased to see him.)

MULBERRY: Ah, Flaxley!

(He turned to the maid behind the bar.)

MULBERRY: An ale for Sir Flaxley, wench!

(The maid looked livid.)

MAID: Excuse me?

MULBERRY: I meant, Jasmine. An ale for Sir Flaxley, Jasmine.

MAID: That's better!

FLAXLEY: Sorry men, no time for drinking, I need your help!

CASHEW: What's up, Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: The Trepe are on the march again, I need you to help me defeat them!

(There was silence for a moment or two then they both burst out laughing.)

MULBERRY: Nice one! You nearly fooled us for a second there!

FLAXLEY: I'm not joking!!!

(The seriousness in his voice stunned his friends into silence, leaving them in little doubt that he meant business.)

FLAXLEY: Meet me outside in 10 minutes, go and get your swords!

CASHEW: Swords?

MULBERRY: I haven't got a sword!

FLAXLEY: Fine, I'll lend you one! I'll meet you back here in a minute!

(With that, he about turned and headed out of the door as his two friends looked bemused at each other.)

CASHEW: He was joking right?

MULBERRY: I should imagine so, but it won't hurt to humour him!

(In the meantime, in the elder's kitchen, the elder was enlightening Mandika as to how he planned to visit *every* home in Tifaeris and collect as much lig as possible. Seeing several huge buckets lined up on the stone floor, Mandika's heart sunk.)

MANDIKA: Won't they get heavy?

ELDER: Only if you keep lugging them around, if it gets too heavy bring it back!

(Sensing the buckets would already be too heavy before she even started, Mandika sighed.)

MANDIKA: You know I have very delicate hands, right? I probably won't be able to carry much. Not until my butler comes, at least.

(The elder gave her a sideways glance.)

ELDER: Your butler? You shouldn't need a butler, this is very easy work.

(Mandika whimpered.)

MANDIKA: Stop saying that word!

ELDER: What? Work?

MANDIKA: Yes!

(The elder shook his head at her.)

ELDER: Has nobody ever told you that work is good for the soul?

(Mandika looked peeved and placed her hands on her hips.)

MANDIKA: And has nobody ever told you that work is bad for my delicate hands? Not to mention the strain on my back! And it's sunny out there, that'll play havoc with my perfect complexion!

(Looking defiant, she then glanced away nonchalantly.)

MANDIKA: We should wait until my butler comes.

(Her defiant demeanour then drained and she hung her head.)

MANDIKA: Not that he'd help. He's retired and he doesn't like me.

(The elder gave her a sarcastic glance.)

ELDER: He doesn't like you? I find that a little hard to believe, how could he possibly not?

(Mandika nodded and held out her palms.)

MANDIKA: I know, right?

(She bit her lip.)

MANDIKA: Well, it's not that he doesn't like me... he kind of does... he'd never help me with anything like this though.

ELDER: He shouldn't have to. It's very easy w... to do.

(Mandika sighed.)

MANDIKA: It'd better be.

ELDER: Look, Mandika...

MANDIKA: Please. Call me, "your highness".

ELDER: Fine, your highness. If you didn't want to help, why did you come?

(Mandika shrugged.)

MANDIKA: I don't know. It's not that I don't want to help. I just don't want to exert myself in doing it. Making an effort is such an imposition.

ELDER: Well, sometimes if you want to help someone, that's just what you have to do.

(Mandika hung her head.)

MANDIKA: Fine. I guess so.

(She then nodded to herself with an air of reluctant acceptance.)

MANDIKA: Okay, I'll do it. Flaxley *is* very dear to me I suppose.

(She then snarled and glanced to one side.)

MANDIKA: He'd better be bloody grateful though!

(As Mandika continued to worry about the coming indignity of actually doing some work, Derek and Lefiat arrived at the building site. Glancing around at everyone as they busied themselves erecting the town wall, Derek placed his hands on his hips and called out to them.)

DEREK: Who's in charge here?

(At once, all the builders turned to face the tiny green alien and looked scared half to death.)

BUILDER 1: W-what's that thing???

BUILDER 2: It spoke!!!

(As they cowered away in fear, Derek sighed and raised his voice.)

DEREK: Look, Flaxley sent me; we're going to help you build this wall of yours!

BUILDER 1: Flaxley, you say?

(Upon hearing Flaxley's name, they immediately seemed to calm down.)

BUILDER 1: Well, if *he* sent you, that's fine!

BUILDER 2: You know how to build a wall, do you?

DEREK: Yes I do. Watch!

(And without any prompting, he grabbed a large boulder and set about placing it in the wall, before hurrying back for another one. Watching him dive into the job like a crazy man, the

head builder reached out to him.)

BUILDER 1: Slow down! Your technique looks good but you'll never keep up that speed; you'll be exhausted in no time!

DEREK: Wanna bet?

(While Derek continued at a frenetic speed, the builder turned to face Lefiat.)

BUILDER 1: You've come to help too, have you?

LEFIAT: I'll have a go. I've never done it before though.

BUILDER 1: Not a problem. You can be a labourer!

(With that, he bent to pick up a bucket and passed it to him.)

BUILDER 1: Here, take this bucket and fetch us some sand from the beach!

(Grabbing the bucket, Lefiat nodded enthusiastically and dashed away.)

LEFIAT: You've got it!

(Two seconds later, he stopped and about turned.)

LEFIAT: Um... the beach?

(The builder frowned and thrust out a pointing hand.)

BUILDER 1: That way!!!

(Turning to see the beach dominating the horizon, he grinned and scuttled off immediately.

Like everyone else, Lefiat felt an ingrained sense of responsibility to do his best in his friend's time of crisis. Unfortunately, however, his attainment as always failed to live up to his efforts. Within an hour of setting out to eagerly gather a bucket full of sand, the builders had given up on him returning and had sent someone else to do it for him. Where the enthusiastic halfwit had disappeared to they had no idea.)

(While the building continued apace without Lefiat anywhere to be found, his long-suffering royal girlfriend, Mandika, set out to do *her* bit for the Tifaeris cause. Having been given advice on what to say to people without scaring them half to death, she paced nervously along a cobbled street looking far from enthused. The very thought of knocking on doors with her delicate hands and asking peasants for money was horrifying and as far as she was concerned, beneath her. Not about to let Flaxley down however, she fought back the temptation to hide out of sight all day and set about her work. With a collection bucket in one hand, she stepped up to the door of a cottage and knocked nervously upon it with the other. Half tempted to flee, she then stood there with terrified eyes, staring at the door in desperate hope that the peasant who owned it wasn't home. Much to her despair, however, a few moments later, the door cranked open and a middle aged woman stood before her, smiling warmly.)

ALICE: Can I help you, young lady?

(At once, fear gripped Mandika's body and she promptly forgot everything the elder had told her. Having a morbid fear of ordinary townsfolk, or as she called them, "the unwashed masses" all she could do was gape like a fish.)

ALICE: You okay, love?

(Again, Mandika could barely muster a whimper.)

ALICE: Right then, I'll go inside and if you remember what you wanted, knock again.

(As she proceeded to close the door, Mandika's heart stopped racing and the panic stricken expression on her face subsided. Feeling somewhat foolish, she shook her head and mumbled to herself.)

MANDIKA: That was pathetic.

(Not about to show her face at *that* door ever again having made such a fool of herself, she then sloped away and stepped up to the next door. Fearing a repeat of her previous panic-induced inaction, she took a deep breath and tried to reaffirm herself.)

MANDIKA: They're just people... unclean and uneducated ones, but even so, I can do this.

(With a positive nod, she then thumped on the next door. Taking several breaths to keep herself calm, she bounced on the balls of her feet to psych herself up in readiness to strike up a conversation with whoever answered. As the door slowly crept open, however, all her fears immediately returned. As an elderly gentlemen stood before her in the doorway, her words eluded her again and all she could do was stare.)

ALBERT: Can I help you, love?

(Overcome with terror, she struggled desperately for words. Frantically battling her fears in a bid to muster up some kind of sentence, she fought the urge to flee and held the collection bucket in front of her face.)

MANDIKA: Bucket!

(As she stood there trembling, sweat pouring from her brow, the old man beamed.)

ALBERT: Thanks, I'd love one.

(With that, he grabbed the bucket from her grasp and closed the door. Left empty handed, she dropped her arms to her side and whimpered.)

MANDIKA: I can't do this.

(With her head hung low, she then trudged away, back towards the elder's house. Dreading having to tell the elder that after only two houses she'd need a new bucket, she sighed to herself and mumbled under her breath.)

MANDIKA: I want to go home.

(Just then, the elder's voice rose up from in front of her and she froze in dismay.)

ELDER: Mandika? Your highness, rather. Why are you coming back? And where's the bucket I gave you?

(Burning red with embarrassment, she lifted her head and pouted.)

MANDIKA: A peasant stole it.

ELDER: Stole it?

(She shrugged.)

MANDIKA: Don't look so surprised, it's what peasants do.

(The elder sighed and raced back towards his house.)

ELDER: I'll get another one. You wait there, we can go together.

(Mandika hung her head and nodded.)

MANDIKA: Fine, but you can do the talking. And carry the bucket.

(She ruffled her neck and allowed herself an affirming nod.)

MANDIKA: Don't see why I should do *all* the work.

(The elder yelled back from his doorway.)

ELDER: Don't you mean *any* of it?

(She looked away and shrugged.)

MANDIKA: If you want to be precise, yes.

(When the elder returned a few moments later, he placed a bucket by Mandika's foot and glanced up at the sun.)

ELDER: Another scorcher. Not a good day for carrying heavy buckets around. This is going to be tiring work.

MANDIKA: Shall we give it a miss then? We could go and relax on the beach. I'm good at that.

(The elder frowned at her coldly.)

ELDER: No. We've got work to do.

MANDIKA: I'll only slow you down though. You'll do much better if I go and sunbathe instead.

ELDER: Mandika, this is for Flaxley remember? You told me you wanted to help him.

MANDIKA: I do, but...

(She sighed and slumped her shoulders.)

MANDIKA: Fine.

(She then snarled under her breath.)

MANDIKA: And it's "your highness" to you. How many times?

ELDER: Fine.

(The elder then nodded and offered her a smile.)

ELDER: Now, we have a bucket each...

(He gestured to the one he was holding then the one by Mandika's feet.)

ELDER: If we can fill both of these then we've made a good start.

(With that, he headed away with a determination in his step. In stark contrast, Mandika picked up her bucket and slowly followed on with an empty look on her face.)

ELDER: So, princess...

(He gestured to the first house she'd knocked at and raised a curious eyebrow.)

ELDER: Did you try this one?

(Mandika bit her lip.)

MANDIKA: Sort of.

ELDER: Sort of? Did you or didn't you?

MANDIKA: Kind of... it's complicated.

(The elder rolled his eyes.)

ELDER: It really isn't.

(With that, he paced up and knocked upon the door. Looking mortified, Mandika swiftly ran up and stood behind him as the door crept open.)

ELDER: Hello there, Alice.

(Alice beamed.)

ALICE: Elder? What a pleasant surprise.

(She peered around him at the trembling Mandika and smiled.)

ALICE: Hello again, young lady.

(She stood straight and looked to the elder with uncertainty.)

ALICE: A friend of yours?

ELDER: Kind of, yes.

ALICE: Oh, okay. Well, please... come in, both of you.

(As she stepped aside to allow them both to enter, Mandika's hair stood on end and fear filled her heart once more.)

MANDIKA: No! Anything but that!!!

(The elder glared at her.)

ELDER: Don't be so rude.

(Terrified to her core, she backed away and trembled.)

MANDIKA: I can't go in there.

ELDER: Why the devil not?

MANDIKA: I might catch something.

(Alice glared at her bitterly.)

ALICE: Excuse me? I'll have you know I take great pride in my home. It's perfectly clean.

(Mandika remonstrated with her through terrified eyes.)

MANDIKA: Yeah, by peasant standards! What does that mean though? You only defecate on certain parts of the floor? Your rugs only harbour five of the ten major diseases? What?

ELDER: That's quite enough.

(Mandika looked to him with fear coursing through her veins.)

MANDIKA: I know you tried to tell me that townsfolk were just ordinary people and that I'd be perfectly safe, but we both know that's not true. 'Ordinary people' is just another way of saying 'peasants'. Admit it. If I go in there I'll get the plague... or murdered even!

ALICE: I've never been so insulted.

ELDER: I doubt anyone has!

ALICE: You won't get the plague!

ELDER: Or murdered!!!

MANDIKA: No? You've heard about the link between crime and poverty, right? The peasants are at it all the time, killing and mugging each other.

ELDER: Mandika, not all poor people are criminals!

MANDIKA: No, but all criminals are poor people. I'm a princess, I'm not supposed to get murdered.

(She burst into tears.)

MANDIKA: I want to go home!!!

(The elder nodded firmly.)

ELDER: I want you to go home too.

ALICE: Motion carried!

ELDER: Go back to my house and wait for me there, Mandika. I think it's best if I collect the money and you count it. I'd imagine you're a dab hand at that.

(Calming slightly, Mandika panted heavily and spoke through broken breaths.)

MANDIKA: Thank you, thank you. And it's "your highness".

(The elder rolled his eyes.)

ELDER: I must say, in all my years on the planet I've never met anyone so...

MANDIKA: Refined?

ELDER: Rude!

MANDIKA: I'm not rude. I just don't want to go into filthy houses and fraternise with peasants. If you were as magnificent as me, you'd understand.

ELDER: Just go, princess.

(Mandika nodded with relief etched all over face.)

MANDIKA: I'm gone.

(The elder watched her go then glanced at Alice.)

ELDER: You *don't* defecate on the floor, do you?

(As the door slammed in his face, he adjusted his collar and paced off after Mandika.)

ELDER: Right. Not clever, Elder.

(He then called out to Mandika.)

ELDER: Princess, wait.

(Stopping in her tracks, Mandika looked to him uneasily.)

MANDIKA: Yes?

ELDER: There are some very large houses up on the top of the hill. The people there have butlers and maids. Perhaps you'd be happier going up there to collect?

(Mandika's face lit up.)

MANDIKA: Really?

ELDER: Yes, collecting the first bucket load might take a while and there's no point you sitting around waiting for me.

MANDIKA: Cool. I wonder if any of them will have the imported tea I like.

(And without further instruction she strutted off towards the hill in search of big houses.

Buoyed by the thought of meeting some like minded people and berating the needy, she was now looking forward to her afternoon's work. As he watched her go, the elder shook his head and sighed.)

ELDER: Now I know why Flaxley was so quick to retire and come back here to Tifaeris.

(With that, he shuddered then paced off down the street to start his collection.)

(Outside the inn in the centre of town at this time, Sir Flaxley was busy putting his battle plan

into action. Determined to fight the Trepe rather than meet their demands, he'd met up with his two friends Mulberry and Cashew with a view to teaching them some important fighting skills with the swords he'd leant them. Unfortunately for him, however, his two drinking buddies hadn't quite grasped the seriousness of the situation. Half cut and half paying attention, they weren't making his job easy. Getting frustrated with it all, he found himself watching them duel as if they were re-enacting a scene in a play, laughing and making outlandish comments as they did so.)

MULBERRY: I, the duke of Cleethorpes, shall smite thee with my nobly blade.

CASHEW: Oh, really? Well, I, the earl of Runcorn mock your nobly blade and invite you to taste my noble one.

(Mulberry started to giggle.)

MULBERRY: Did I say nobly?

CASHEW: Yeah you did.

(As they then proceeded to circle around one another, chuckling as they twiddled their blades at each other, Flaxley sighed and threw his hands into the air.)

FLAXLEY: What the hell are you doing?

MULBERRY: Stand back, Flaxley, my sword is nobly and unreliable.

(As the two men staggered about in a drunken fit of hysterical laughter, Flaxley clenched his fist.)

FLAXLEY: This is serious, you idiots. Our lives are at stake!!!

(At once, they both stopped staggering and grinned at him.)

CASHEW: I love a bit of steak, me.

MULBERRY: Peppered, of course.

(Cashew glared at him in disgust.)

CASHEW: Fuck off! Peppered indeed.

(Mulberry matched his disgust.)

MULBERRY: Yes, peppered. Only a gay eats steak without pepper.

CASHEW: You calling me gay?

MULBERRY: No, you called yourself gay when you slated pepper.

CASHEW: If anyone's gay, it's you... who's this an impression of?

(He placed his hands to his eyes and faked a crying action.)

CASHEW: Barmaid, barmaid, my beers got too much froth on it, I want my mummy.

MULBERRY: I don't like froth!

CASHEW: And I don't like pepper!!!

(They glared at one another for a moment then dropped their angry stances.)

MULBERRY: Yeah, because you're gay.

CASHEW: Right! That's done it!!!

(With that, they both dropped their swords and a fight broke out. As they circled each other in a pathetic huddle, trying desperately to land punches on one another, Flaxley's face started to burn red.)

FLAXLEY: You pair of arseholes!!!

(He then rushed and pulled them apart. As they stood there catching their breath with anger burnt into their faces, Flaxley bellowed at them furiously.)

FLAXLEY: The Trepe are coming in a few days to raze Tifaeris to the ground again and you two pricks want to fight each other instead???

(The two men looked alarmed.)

CASHEW: You were serious about that?

FLAXLEY: Of course I was. Like I'd let you two idiots touch any of my swords if I wasn't.

(He seethed.)

FLAXLEY: When they come through the gates of the town to destroy the place they'll be

focussed and out to kill everyone they see. They're not going to waddle in pissed and batter each other over a disagreement about anchovies. If we want to beat them we need to be as focussed and ready to kill as they are.

MULBERRY: It was pepper, Flaxley, not anchovies.

FLAXLEY: That's hardly the point!!! Get this through your thick heads. The Trepes intend to kill us all and we need to be ready to stop them! Got it???

(Mulberry looked stunned.)

MULBERRY: So this was like... proper sword training?

FLAXLEY: Yes!!! The penny drops at last.

CASHEW: Right so, we'd better prepare like... you know, stuff and that.

MULBERRY: Yeah, right now in fact.

(With that, Cashew and Mulberry both took to their heels and fled.)

FLAXLEY: What the hell? Where are you going?

(They both yelled back over their shoulders as they sprinted away.)

CASHEW: You know, to fetch armour and such.

MULBERRY: Yeah, can't go into battle unprepared.

FLAXLEY: But... it's only training... you don't need armour to...

CASHEW: Don't worry, Flaxley, we'll meet you back here in a minute.

MULBERRY: Aye, you wait there, we won't be long!

(As he watched them race away, Flaxley frowned.)

FLAXLEY: You'd better *not* be long!!!

(As soon as they were out of Flaxley's earshot, Cashew looked to Mulberry in terror.)

CASHEW: I aint bloody staying here if them bitches are coming, they're bloody psychotic!

MULBERRY: Aye, I'm heading for the hills!

CASHEW: Right, let's grab our stuff and bugger off.

MULBERRY: Bloody right.

(Looking thoroughly fed up, Flaxley gathered up their swords and sighed to himself.)

FLAXLEY: I suppose it makes sense that they'd want to practice with armour on...

(With that, he stood tall and folded his arms.)

FLAXLEY: Fine, I'll wait.

(Having spent much of his time standing on sentry when he was a private in the Guevina army, standing in wait was something Flaxley wasn't unaccustomed to. Unmoved, he remained on the spot as the hour passed with barely a flinch. As a further 30 minutes came and went, however and his friends still hadn't returned, his nostrils visibly started to flare and his eyelids started to twitch.)

FLAXLEY: Wankers!!!

(He mused to himself.)

FLAXLEY: Drunken morons probably fell asleep somewhere.

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Better give them a wake up call, bloody idiots.

(He clenched his fist and snarled.)

FLAXLEY: Time's wasting, damn it...

(With that, he raced off towards the beach wearing a face of pure rage. Teaching them to fight was a matter of extreme urgency and he was absolutely livid that they'd failed to take him seriously. Looking forward to beating some responsibility into them, he charged down to the sea front and scanned the beach with his eyes. With his two friends nowhere to be seen, he growled then raced off to search the avenues and thoroughfares for them. Like a dog with a bone, he was determined to find them and give them a piece of his mind. Much to his annoyance, however, as he searched every nook and cranny for them, the clock slowly ticked onwards until before he knew it, the sun had started to set. Still, he raged on, vowing to find

them and at least make a start in his bid to raise an army. Alas, a full hour after darkness had descended, something finally dawned on him. Maybe his friends didn't want to be found. With this thought echoing through his head, he paced along a road near the top of the beach and threw his hands up in defeat.)

FLAXLEY: Pair of fuckers. If I ever see them again, I'll rip their limbs off.

(With that, he started to wander away downhearted when an exhausted voice rose up from the darkened direction of the sea.)

LEFIAT: Flaxley? Is it really you?

(Recognising the voice immediately, Flaxley spun around and looked towards the bucket carrying silhouette staggering towards him.)

FLAXLEY: Lefiat? Is that you?

(Lefiat staggered into the moonlight and plopped his bucket on the ground.)

LEFIAT: It *is* you. Praise be!

(With that, he fell to the ground, exhausted.)

FLAXLEY: You okay, Lefiat?

(He rushed and knelt by his side.)

LEFIAT: It all went plum-shape, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: Pear-shaped, you mean?

LEFIAT: Some sort of vegetable anyway.

(He lifted his head slightly and winced.)

LEFIAT: When Bonson hears about this...

FLAXLEY: Bonson isn't here, Lefiat.

LEFIAT: Promise you won't tell him, please, I beg you.

FLAXLEY: Okay, okay, you have my word.

(He helped prop Lefiat into a seated position then glanced at the bucket.)

FLAXLEY: You have a bucket.

LEFIAT: Yeah, I went to collect some sand. Then it all went mango-shaped.

(Flaxley gave a stifled laugh.)

FLAXLEY: Again with the fruit.

LEFIAT: It's not funny.

(He shook his head and sighed miserably.)

LEFIAT: I really wanted to help, Flaxley. Instead I did nothing and nearly died. Twice.

(Flaxley rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: So, what's new?

LEFIAT: This was a very simple task, Flaxley. Even *I* should have been safe enough.

FLAXLEY: Lefiat, rumour has it you fell out of a castle window once while putting your socks on, nothing is safe enough for you.

LEFIAT: Maybe. It was terrifying though. I thought my number was up.

(He sighed.)

LEFIAT: Again.

FLAXLEY: So, what happened? Tell me.

(He looked sadly into Flaxley's eyes then hung his head.)

LEFIAT: Well, I set off to get some sand, you know, from the beach...

FLAXLEY: Obviously.

LEFIAT: I was heading straight for the sea, it should have been so simple... then it all went...

FLAXLEY: Tropical fruit salad shaped, yes, I got that, Lefiat. How?

LEFIAT: Well, just before I reached the beach this cat jumped out on me. Scared me half to death it did...

(Flaxley raised a curious eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: It jumped out on you?

LEFIAT: Well, not exactly. It ran past me, hissing.

FLAXLEY: If you're going to tell me a cat stole your bucket...

LEFIAT: No, a cat didn't. Some kids did.

FLAXLEY: Kids?

LEFIAT: Yeah, I was so shocked by the cat, I panicked and dropped the bucket.

(Flaxley winced and held his forehead in his palm.)

FLAXLEY: Go on.

LEFIAT: Well, like I said, some kids pinched my bucket. They ran off with it and called me names like gangly face and stick boy. So, I chased them.

(Flaxley sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Let me guess. You chased them and somehow managed to get lost in this not so large town *all* day.

LEFIAT: Not exactly no.

(Flaxley sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Then what?

LEFIAT: Well, I chased them and they ran up onto some cliff tops just out of town, then they...

(He sighed in despair.)

LEFIAT: They lobbed the bucket off the cliff and ran away laughing.

(He nodded sternly.)

LEFIAT: But I'm a knight, right?

FLAXLEY: Apparently.

LEFIAT: So, that wasn't going to stop me. I knew what I had to do. I climbed down the cliff after the bucket.

FLAXLEY: Climbed down or...

(Lefiat rolled his eyes.)

LEFIAT: Fine, I fell down and twisted my ankle.

(He ruffled his neck muscles and nodded.)

LEFIAT: But that wasn't going to stop me. I waited until my ankle felt better then I filled my bucket with sand like they told me to. Anyway, it was too heavy to pick up, so I emptied it again. I figured it'd make more sense to fill it up when I was a bit nearer, then I wouldn't have to carry it so far.

FLAXLEY: Fair enough.

LEFIAT: So yeah, I started to head back and...

(He pouted.)

LEFIAT: That's when it all went horribly...

FLAXLEY: Pineapple?

LEFIAT: Yeah.

(He sighed.)

LEFIAT: I noticed it was a different beach, not the one I'd been heading to. The tide had come right in and there were cliffs all around me. I was trapped on all sides, Flaxley.

(Flaxley nodded knowingly.)

FLAXLEY: You were on the thin strip of beach the other side of the headland.

LEFIAT: Headland? What's that?

FLAXLEY: Where the land pokes out into the sea... that's not important, we both know where you were. That beach is dangerous.

LEFIAT: Right. So there I was, cliff behind me, cliff to the right and a cliff to the left. And the sea coming at me!!!

(He pouted and clenched and anguished fist.)

LEFIAT: I thought I was done for, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: How did you get out? The cliffs there aren't high but they're too steep to climb and the current can be deadly.

LEFIAT: Well...

(He looked relieved and smiled.)

LEFIAT: Luckily these two men happened by in their fishing boat. They rescued me.

FLAXLEY: That was a stroke of luck.

LEFIAT: Yeah, anyway, they picked me up and took me with them. They said they didn't want to take me back to dry land yet because they only had a few hours free time and didn't want to waste it. So, I was stuck on the boat with them until they were done.

(Flaxley nodded and folded his arms bitterly.)

FLAXLEY: So, essentially, what you're telling me is... while everyone else was working hard, you went fishing for the afternoon!

(Lefiat gave him a cheesy grin.)

LEFIAT: That's one way of looking at it.

FLAXLEY: For heaven's sake, Lefiat!

LEFIAT: Don't be angry, Flaxley. It wasn't intentional. You know how much I hate the sea. Being on that little boat was torture. I've only just got used to ships!

FLAXLEY: So, having been sent to perform the simple task of filling a bucket with sand, you almost died falling off a cliff...

LEFIAT: No not really, like you said, the cliffs aren't steep.

FLAXLEY: You got stranded and could have drowned though.

LEFIAT: I know. Like I told you, I almost died twice.

FLAXLEY: You admitted the cliffs weren't steep, how does that make twice?

(Lefiat looked stumped.)

LEFIAT: Didn't I mention the cuddyfinkle?

FLAXLEY: What? No!

LEFIAT: Oh... that's why I fell off the cliff. I started to climb down when I saw this cuddyfinkle charging at me.

(He shuddered and held his head in his hands.)

LEFIAT: It was horrible. Why do these things keep happening to me?

(Flaxley sighed and took pity on him.)

FLAXLEY: Doesn't matter, Lefiat. These things happen... to you. Look on the bright side, despite your ordeal you've still managed to achieve your goal.

LEFIAT: My goal?

FLAXLEY: To fetch a bucket of sand.

(Lefiat spanned his forehead and groaned in despair.)

LEFIAT: Oh crap, I knew there something I forgot to do!

(He looked up and saw Flaxley burning red with rage.)

FLAXLEY: I'm going to slap your curly mop right off of your head! Can't you do anything right?

(Looking scared half to death, Lefiat jumped up and swiftly grabbed his empty bucket.)

LEFIAT: I'll do it now!!!

(With that, he took off back towards the beach like a fear-propelled rocket. Watching him flee, Flaxley seethed to himself and bit his lip.)

FLAXLEY: Why did I waste my time listening to that idiot?

(He clenched a fist.)

FLAXLEY: Drunken morons and halfwits; how do I get lumbered with these useless people?

(He snarled and paced away.)

FLAXLEY: I have to do something. Time's wasting and I'm getting nothing done.

(Angry that he'd failed to make any headway with his attempt at training his two friends, he

headed for the building site looking crestfallen. With Kritz gone and his plan to raise an army failing miserably, helping out with the wall was the only thing he could think of to take his mind off of things.)

TIFAERIS – MONDAY NIGHT

(Many hours later, at shortly before midnight, after an exhausting days graft, the weary builders finally called an end to their shift and dispersed all over town to head for their homes. Last to leave the site, Flaxley, Derek and Lefiat headed back to Flaxley's home to be surprisingly greeted by Mandika with several tall glasses of fruit juice. Much to their amazement, having been back for a good few hours, she'd adorned the porch seats with cushions and also prepared some snacks. Having made little to no effort to collect money all afternoon, then slacked off all evening, she knew she'd have to do something to appease her guilty conscience. It was a side of Mandika that few ever got to see. She rarely appeared to even have a conscience but from time to time, her fondness for Sir Flaxley would bring out her human side. She knew she'd let him down and a niggling feeling that she'd dishonoured their friendship had started to plague her. And so, she'd set about trying to give everyone something nice to come back to. It was the least she could do, but to Mandika, the least she could do was more than enough.

Grateful for her efforts, Flaxley greeted her with a warm smile and placed himself down on a porch seat before gesturing for the others to do the same. At once, they all sat and took a deep soothing breath, just glad to take the weight off of their feet.)

DEREK: That was some shift we put in.

LEFIAT: It was... eventually.

(He hid his face.)

FLAXLEY: No, Lefiat. You did well. You must have made at least 25 trips and carrying sand buckets up hill can't have been easy.

LEFIAT: It was the least I could do.

FLAXLEY: And thanks for the drinks, Mandika. It's appreciated.

MANDIKA: You're welcome.

(As they sat out on the porch making the most of the cool night breeze and a cold beverage, Derek and Lefiat felt a proud sense of achievement. Having completed a selfless hard days graft on their friends behalf, they felt a good night's sleep had been well-earned. Flaxley, however, was still understandably frustrated and couldn't even begin to relax. Thinking long and hard to himself as he finished his drink, he puffed out and shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: The lads weren't taking me seriously! That's a whole day just wasted; they didn't even try! I'll never make morons like *them* into fighters.

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: I ought to just abandon the plan and go and rescue Kritz myself, right *now*!

(Mandika looked alarmed.)

MANDIKA: You can't, there'll be trouble if you do!

FLAXLEY: I know! My head says stay but my heart says go!

DEREK: You'll do as the head suggests knowing you, Flaxley! You're a knight, it's not in your nature to be impetuous!

(Flaxley sighed once again.)

FLAXLEY: This is true! Man, why are we wasting time sitting around? We've gotta get busy!

MANDIKA: Even *you* need your rest, Flaxley!

(Well aware he wasn't thinking straight, he nodded to himself.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, I know you're right, I just can't concentrate!

(Sharing his concerns, Mandika sighed.)

MANDIKA: I can't see us raising one million lig you know! Even if I *had* gone to more than two houses!

(She looked sheepish and scratched behind her head.)

MANDIKA: Which I did, obviously.

DEREK: It's a ridiculous amount!

LEFIAT: No-one has that sort of money, not even millionaires!

MANDIKA: Of course they do, why do you think they're called millionaires? Idiot!

(Lefiat frowned and looked away.)

LEFIAT: You've been horrible today!

MANDIKA: Yeah well, that's 'cause...

(Sounding more than a little angry, Derek interjected.)

DEREK: Pack it in will you; at least you still have each other!

(He gestured towards Flaxley, who was sitting with his head in his hands, feeling utterly despondent.)

MANDIKA: It'll be okay, Flaxley!

(Flaxley let out an anguished sigh.)

FLAXLEY: I just stood there!

DEREK: Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: They took her away in front of me and I just watched her go!

LEFIAT: You couldn't help that!

FLAXLEY: I can still see her face as they led her out of the gates!

MANDIKA: You'll get her back!

FLAXLEY: I see her face every time I close my eyes, so much for the great Sir Flaxley of Tifaeris! I've never felt so helpless!

DEREK: Flaxley, my friend, shall I cast sleep magic on you tonight, you need your rest and frankly, I can't see you sleeping tonight!

(Flaxley stood up looking restless.)

FLAXLEY: Later maybe, I dunno, I need to think!

(With that, he walked down the steps from the porch sighing as he went.)

DEREK: Where are you going, Flaxley?

(He replied without looking back.)

FLAXLEY: For a walk! I told you, I need some time to think! Alone!

DEREK: Shall I come?

FLAXLEY: I said alone! And besides I'd rather you weren't reading my thoughts right now!

DEREK: What do you mean by that?

(Offering no reply, Flaxley headed towards the cliff tops and out of sight.)

DEREK: What *did* he mean by that?

MANDIKA: I don't know I'm not a mind reader!

DEREK: I am, yet his thoughts are really confusing today!

LEFIAT: What did you expect? If someone took Mandika away I'd be irrational too!

MANDIKA: Nice try, I still aint talking to you!

(Derek rubbed his chin apprehensively, concerned by Flaxley's state of mind.)

DEREK: He headed towards the cliffs didn't he?

LEFIAT: Yeah... hey, he wouldn't....would he?

MANDIKA: Wouldn't, would he what?

LEFIAT: Jump off!

(Derek sounded doubtful but not convinced.)

DEREK: No way, I'd have read *that*!

MANDIKA: Do you think we should go after him?

LEFIAT: What? Follow him?

DEREK: No, let him be, if he says he needs to be alone to think, we'll have to respect that!
(They all nodded in stifled agreement for a few moments. Looking uncharacteristically coy, Mandika then smiled at Derek.)

MANDIKA: Um... Derek?

DEREK: Yes?

MANDIKA: Can you cast sleep magic on *me* later?

DEREK: I don't think you'll need it, princess; you look pretty tired as it is! I'm gonna cast it on myself though, if I sleep tonight I'll be able to work to my optimum tomorrow!

LEFIAT: Let's wait for Flaxley first, I'm worried!

MANDIKA: He'll be okay! He's strong!

DEREK: Poor chap; I've never seen such inner turmoil!

(A short while later, up on a moonlit cliff edge just outside the town, Flaxley paced forth solemnly, his suffering made evident by the miserable look on his face. As the cool night breeze blew gently against his face, he walked slowly with his hands on his head despairing at the days events. With his thoughts devoted solely to Kritz, he sighed continuously as he headed onwards. The world seemed a cruel place right now and he couldn't quite get his head around just how quickly his perfect life had turned sour. That morning he'd been in paradise, and yet now, he felt like he was in hell.

As his spirits continued to sink, he trudged forth, glancing out to sea, when a solemn, male voice rose up from the cliff edge just before him.)

ULRICH: Couldn't you sleep either, Flaxley?

(Flaxley glanced down to where one of the townspeople was seated on the cliff edge.

Shrugging emptily, he stopped walking and shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: I haven't tried. Not that there'd be much point. I don't see me sleeping tonight.

(As the townsman nodded in full agreement, Flaxley sighed then raised a curious eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: So, what brings you out here...

(He looked stumped.)

FLAXLEY: Umm... townspeople?

ULRICH: It's Ulrich.

(Flaxley looked enlightened.)

FLAXLEY: Of course.

ULRICH: I must have told you that five times.

(Flaxley shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: Never mind that. What brings you out here, not thinking of jumping are you?

ULRICH: Good god, no! You?

FLAXLEY: Of course not. I just came out here to think.

(Ulrich nodded.)

ULRICH: Me too. Though, thinking at a time like this kinda sucks.

FLAXLEY: Yeah, I'm beginning to realise that too.

(He forced a smile then gestured to the cliff edge.)

FLAXLEY: Mind if I join you?

ULRICH: Please do. Left alone with these thoughts for much longer and I might *well* jump.

(Flaxley sat down a good few feet away from him and stared out to sea.)

FLAXLEY: What a crap day!

ULRICH: The worst.

(He then bit his lip.)

ULRICH: Well, not quite the worst. That still goes to that day twelve years ago when the Trepe appeared from nowhere and razed Tifaeris to the ground without the merest provocation. For no good reason, they just appeared in the night and slaughtered every bugger they saw.

FLAXLEY: Yeah, when it comes to shitty days, that one takes the biscuit.

ULRICH: It takes the biscuit then pokes you in the eye with it.

FLAXLEY: Then rams it down your throat and tries to choke you.

ULRICH: I'll never understand it. Even if I live to be a hundred. We did nothing to them, I mean, I didn't even know there *was* a settlement five miles down the coast. It was just so needless. Even then, Tifaeris was a peaceful town, as you know... it was a good place, with nice people in it. Then without warning, and as far as I can tell, just for the hell of it... they came...

(They then released a simultaneous groan and shook their heads.)

ULRICH: You know, I saw the whole thing this morning, Flaxley. The Trepe turning up, you standing up to them, them taking Kritz away, the whole thing. And yet when I warned everyone I work with, they didn't believe me.

FLAXLEY: They didn't?

ULRICH: Not a word of it. Half the town seem to be going about their business without a bloody clue as to how much danger they're in.

(He sighed.)

ULRICH: It's not the first time there's been talk of a Trepe attack, you see?

FLAXLEY: It isn't?

ULRICH: No. There's been rumours a few times down the years. You know, idiots making claims that the Trepe are coming. Spreading lies that they're coming to finish us off just to get attention.

(He shook his head.)

ULRICH: And now they really *are* coming, nobody believes it.

(Flaxley furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: That's ridiculous. The elder's been knocking door to door all day, raising money to pay them off with, surely they believe *him*.

ULRICH: Doubtful. He was one of them who spread the rumour *last* time, you see. He fell for it hook, line and sinker last time so nobody's going to believe a word he says on the matter.

(He sighed sorrowfully.)

ULRICH: I can see it now, Flaxley, the Trepe will turn up in readiness to destroy us all and nobody's going to be ready for them.

(Flaxley snarled.)

FLAXLEY: Wanna bet?

ULRICH: Except *you*, obviously.

FLAXLEY: *You're* not going to stay and fight?

(Ulrich gave him a sideways glance.)

ULRICH: Us two against the entire Trepe army? Are you insane?

FLAXLEY: I'm hoping there'll be others, Erik...

ULRICH: Ulrich!

FLAXLEY: Him too! I've been trying to raise an army.

(He then sighed emptily.)

FLAXLEY: But at the rate it's going, it'll just be myself, an alien and a complete moron taking them on.

(They both sighed then sat silently for a moment before Ulrich sat back and grimaced)

uncomfortably.)

ULRICH: You know what really sucks?

FLAXLEY: You want me to make a list?

ULRICH: No, I can make my own list. Top of which would be my family.

FLAXLEY: Your family suck?

(Ulrich gave him a sideways glance.)

ULRICH: Excuse me?

(Flaxley shrugged and offered him a sorrowful glance.)

FLAXLEY: Forgive me, I'm distracted. What were you trying to say?

(Ulrich looked out to sea and puffed out.)

ULRICH: I certainly wasn't saying my family suck. Far from it. What's happening to them now, *that* sucks. You see, my wife and I were away for the night when Tifaeris was razed to the ground twelve years ago.

FLAXLEY: So was I.

ULRICH: I remember. You came back to town shortly after we did.

(He winced.)

ULRICH: The carnage. I remember it like it was yesterday.

FLAXLEY: Yeah, me too. It's not something I'll ever forget.

ULRICH: Absolutely.

(He sighed.)

ULRICH: Anyway, life was hell for the next few months. So much grief, so many funerals. It was just horrid. Tifaeris was done for. It couldn't be our home anymore and like everyone else, we decided we'd move away as soon as we got the chance.

(He then glanced skywards.)

ULRICH: We never did though. We always planned to but it never happened.

(He then nodded to himself.)

ULRICH: We survived by subsistence farming. With so few survivors, there was no economy anymore, obviously, so we just did what we needed to do to stay alive. Our house was habitable, just. I'm a builder by trade, you see, and what few homes were salvageable, myself and the two other surviving builders fixed up. So, we had a roof over our heads at least. But... that was *all* we had. There was no work, so like I said, we had to survive by farming our own food and getting by on the bare minimum.

(He sighed.)

ULRICH: I *could* have let the wife go and work in one of those seedy Azagotse clubs, a few guys did that, but there's no way I was going to subject my woman to that kind of life. We'd both rather struggle than have her demean herself. So we stayed.

(He puffed out.)

ULRICH: Had any *other* kind of work opportunity appeared, we'd have been out of this place in a flash but it never did. I tell you, given half a chance to move, we'd have grabbed it with both hands.

(He smiled.)

ULRICH: Then my wife got pregnant. My little girl, Phisele, came along and that was it. With an extra mouth to feed there was no time to look for a way out. We worked our arses off to keep ourselves fed and clothed and we had no time for anything else.

(He shrugged.)

ULRICH: We resigned ourselves to a life of farming and never getting to enjoy life's little luxuries ever again.

(He then glanced at Flaxley, nodding with respect for him.)

ULRICH: Then you and Kritz came along.

(Flaxley looked to him, absorbing every word as he spoke with wonderment in his voice.)

ULRICH: Tifaeris went from being a series of farmer's shacks to being a town again. My family and I got a brand new start without even having to go anywhere. I went from being a self-sufficient farmer to being a builder again. After years of struggling I was doing the job I loved again and life felt great. I tell you, everything changed for the better. Shops opened up, the school was rebuilt and at long last I had an inn to grab a much deserved ale in after a day's graft. But best of all, in fact above and beyond all of that, Phisele finally had a decent place to grow up. She's my world, Flaxley.

(He then shook his head.)

ULRICH: So, yeah, you wanna know what sucks? As a family we've just got our lives back on track and now the Trepe are planning to take it away again.

(As Ulrich stared out to sea sorrowfully, Flaxley watched him for a moment then puffed out.)

FLAXLEY: That really brings it home, Henrik.

ULRICH: Ulrich!

FLAXLEY: Indeed. Nobody should have to go through it twice.

ULRICH: That's why I'm sitting here now, Flaxley. I'm thinking about taking my family away before the Trepe come on Thursday morning. And I mean for good. I won't lose Phisele or her mother, I just won't.

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: After all you've been through; I can't say I'd blame you. Family is everything.

(He growled.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz is my family and them Trepe bitches took her away.

ULRICH: Yeah, I know. That's gotta suck.

FLAXLEY: You have no idea.

(He shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: That woman is my world. She's my inspiration for getting up in the morning.

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: *And* going to bed at night. Damn them Trepe whores.

ULRICH: Exactly, they've ruined everything.

FLAXLEY: They're gonna try to, you mean.

(He then snarled venomously.)

FLAXLEY: I didn't come back here and work this hard to rebuild the town just to have them destroy it all. I'm not going to rest until I've killed every single one of them.

(As Flaxley seethed quietly, Ulrich smiled to him.)

ULRICH: You know, on behalf of all of us who survived that massacre twelve years ago and stayed in Tifaeris afterwards, I wanna say thank you. Even if it all goes in the crapper, we can never repay you for what you've done for us these last eighteen months.

(Flaxley nodded to him.)

FLAXLEY: You're welcome.

(Ulrich then grinned.)

ULRICH: You know, when you first came back into town, I didn't even recognise you.

FLAXLEY: No?

ULRICH: Not one bit. You were always tall but twelve years ago you weren't the brick shithouse you are today. It was kind of intimidating to see this muscle bound, giant strolling about holding a sword as big as a tree.

FLAXLEY: It's not quite as big as tree.

ULRICH: Yeah, but you know what I mean.

(Flaxley grinned.)

FLAXLEY: Yeah well, those first few days were pretty intimidating for me too.

ULRICH: They were?

FLAXLEY: Well, yeah! I left for ten years, didn't I? You guys never did. Kritz and I were

the new guys in town.

(He shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: Let's be honest, we were strangers. People were wary of us, I was very much aware of that.

ULRICH: Of course, they were. You just turned up and started building a house. People couldn't wait to leave Tifaeris, and yet there you were, this giant of a man and his beautiful wife, suddenly turning up and starting to settle. It didn't make sense.

(He then bit his lip.)

ULRICH: Then when people found out Kritz used to be a Trepe...

FLAXLEY: Yeah, that wasn't an easy time for her at all.

ULRICH: I remember.

FLAXLEY: To be honest, I thought her Trepe tattoo would be the first thing people noticed, but it wasn't until our second night that anyone spotted it.

(Ulrich nodded.)

ULRICH: That's right. I'd been talking to you both for well over two hours and I hadn't noticed it.

(He gave a stifled laugh.)

ULRICH: Though to be fair, Flaxley, Kritz's upper arm is never going to be the first thing a bloke notices about her.

(Flaxley sighed longingly.)

FLAXLEY: I know, it's her eyes, isn't it?

ULRICH: Her eyes?

(He grinned.)

ULRICH: There speaks a man who's very much in love.

FLAXLEY: I'm kidding, Olaf. We both know you're referring to her chest.

ULRICH: It's Ulrich! And yeah, we do. That said, I also noticed her backside and her acute lack of underwear before I spotted the tattoo.

(He puffed out.)

ULRICH: It has to be said, Flaxley, she is one extraordinarily hot woman.

(He then whimpered.)

ULRICH: If you don't mind me saying.

FLAXLEY: Mind? Of course I don't mind. You're right, Kritz is an incredible beauty.

(He then puffed out in frustration.)

FLAXLEY: And every second away from her is a kick in the teeth.

(He then laid back and stared up at the stars.)

FLAXLEY: You know, she was due to return to the Trepe tribe ten months ago?

ULRICH: What do you mean?

FLAXLEY: On a Trepe's twenty first birthday they have to leave the village and survive on their own in the world for an entire year then return on their twenty second birthday. Kritz was twenty two ten months ago. We marked the day by getting married down on the beach.

ULRICH: Ah yes, that was the only time I've ever seen her in anything other than a leather mini-skirt. It was quite the let down.

(He shrugged.)

ULRICH: That said, I've never seen a wedding dress that skimpy before either. She looked as sexy as hell.

FLAXLEY: Yes well, when you're done drooling over my wife, I'll come to the point.

ULRICH: Sorry.

FLAXLEY: It's fine. My point is, she never even gave returning to the Trepe a second thought. That part of her life was history, you know? We had the whole future planned out together, a future for Tifaeris, together we were going to...

(He clammed up and an enlightened expression crossed his brow. As if he'd had something of an epiphany, he then climbed to his feet looking assured and confident.)

ULRICH: Are you going?

FLAXLEY: Yes, I am. Our families are relying on us to be strong and decisive. Well, sitting here feeling sorry for ourselves isn't going to get it done.

ULRICH: No, I suppose it isn't.

FLAXLEY: Thanks, Ulrich...

(He paused and raised a waiting eyebrow at him.)

ULRICH: Thanks for what?

FLAXLEY: Really? I was waiting for you to correct me.

ULRICH: No, no, you got it right this time.

FLAXLEY: Excellent. Now where was I?

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: That's right. Thanks, Cedric; you've made me see sense.

ULRICH: It's Ulrich.

FLAXLEY: Probably is, but that's beside the point. Talking to you I realise that Tifaeris can be rebuilt any time, families however, well, once they're destroyed you don't get a second chance. I wasn't thinking straight before but I can see clearly now and my next move is obvious.

(With that, he paced away towards town. Watching him go, Ulrich sighed to himself then stared out to sea again.)

ULRICH: Happy to help.

(A few minutes later, as Sir Flaxley approached his home, Derek spotted him emerging from the darkness and shuffled uneasily in his porch seat.)

DEREK: He's here!

MANDIKA: Thank heavens.

(Derek smiled and called out to Flaxley as he headed for the porch.)

DEREK: You okay, Flaxley? You had us worried for a moment.

(Flaxley nodded to him gratefully as he stepped up onto the porch.)

FLAXLEY: Don't worry about me, I'm done being miserable. I'm going to bed, we've got a busy day ahead of us!

DEREK: Should I cast sleep magic on you, my friend?

FLAXLEY: No!

DEREK: But?

FLAXLEY: Just leave it, Derek!

(Derek sighed.)

DEREK: Okay!

(With that, Flaxley paced on towards his front door.)

FLAXLEY: Night all!

MANDIKA: Wait, where should *we* sleep?

FLAXLEY: There's plenty of beds, pick one!

(With that, he went inside, leaving Mandika looking saddened.)

MANDIKA: He's not normally that cold with me!

(Derek offered her a consoling smile.)

DEREK: He's not normally this stressed out, Mandika.

MANDIKA: I guess.

DEREK: Come on, let's get some shut eye. We've a busy day tomorrow!

(Knowing they were unequipped to do any more for their friend right now, Derek, Mandika

and Lefiat then trudged inside the house. Over the last year, Kritz had somehow managed to acquire several beds and long sofas, all of which were set around the walls of the large living room on the off chance they should one day have visitors. Not stopping to consider the irony that on the first day they'd be required she wasn't even there, they all laid themselves down for the night.)

(Within the hour, the sounds of heavy snoring filled the main room of Flaxley's home. Shattered from their exertions, Lefiat and Mandika lay sprawled out on their beds very much out for the count. Heavily dosed with his own magic, Derek too, lay flat on his back, snoring like a buffalo. Unfortunately however, the deep sleep they'd sunken into was only to be short lived. Only an hour or so later, in the dead of night they were all woken by a loud hammering on the front door. Looking baffled, Derek sat upright and glared at the door.)

DEREK: What? Should have used a stronger dose!

(Half asleep, he struggled to his feet and staggered over to yank open the door.)

DEREK: What?

(Standing the other side, the elder took one look at him and screamed.)

ELDER: Argh!!!

DEREK: I'm an alien, get over it! What do you want?

ELDER: Y-you're green!!!

(Annoyed at being woken, Mandika stepped up behind Derek to see what the commotion was about.)

MANDIKA: Who is it, Derek?

(Derek shrugged.)

DEREK: Some babbling old fool!

(The elder gaped in the doorway.)

ELDER: What are you???

DEREK: An alien! How many times? Now, do you want something?

(Unable to take his eyes off the tiny green man, the elder tried to compose himself.)

ELDER: I heard Flaxley's friends were staying with him!

MANDIKA: And now you know!

(At this point, Lefiat stepped up behind them yawning.)

LEFIAT: What's all the racket?

MANDIKA: The elder's drunk!

(The elder looked most offended.)

ELDER: I never drink!

DEREK: Doesn't look like it!

ELDER: I just didn't expect a three foot tall green alien to answer the door, it threw me!

LEFIAT: What do you want then?

ELDER: It's Flaxley!!!

DEREK: Flaxley?

ELDER: Yes, the muscular chap who lives here, you're friend!

DEREK: I know who he is, what about him?

ELDER: I couldn't stop him; he headed out of town in all his battle gear towards Trepe village!

(At once, everyone sighed with frustration.)

DEREK: Damn it!

MANDIKA: We should have seen that coming!

LEFIAT: Should we go after him?

ELDER: No! You'll get yourself killed!

(Lefiat sighed inwardly.)

LEFIAT: Heard about me, have you?

ELDER: Not you, personally!

(Derek sighed with frustration.)

DEREK: Mandika's right.

MANDIKA: Well, duh.

DEREK: We really should have seen this coming... or at least *I* should have.

(He shook his head.)

DEREK: He hurried past us and off to bed so I didn't have time to read his mind and figure out what he had planned.

(He scoffed.)

DEREK: When he said he was going to bed because we've got a busy day ahead of us, he just wanted *us* to go to bed so he could sneak out and rescue Kritz without us interfering.

MANDIKA: Looks that way.

LEFIAT: What are we gonna do then? We should go after him surely.

ELDER: No, that would be suicide.

(Derek look to the elder and furrowed his brow.)

DEREK: Then what do *you* suggest?

(The elder shrugged.)

ELDER: I suggest doing nothing... there's nothing you *can* do.

(Mandika looked somewhat miffed by his reply.)

MANDIKA: Then why bang the bloody door down in the middle of the night and tell us he's gone? If there's nothing we can do about it, it could have waited until morning, surely.

(The elder shrugged sheepishly.)

ELDER: I panicked... I don't know. I had to tell someone!

LEFIAT: So... what then? Are we not going to go after him? I wanna know.

MANDIKA: I guess not.

LEFIAT: But... if we could catch him up, we could talk him out of it.

ELDER: You'd never catch him up; you don't even know the *way* to Trepe Village.

DEREK: Actually, seeing as it's five miles away along the coastline, surely you just follow the beach.

ELDER: Okay then, you *do* know the way.

DEREK: Then that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to catch him up!

(The elder shook his head.)

ELDER: There's no point! He left half an hour ago.

(Derek looked livid.)

DEREK: Half an hour ago??? And you're telling us *now*???

ELDER: Hey, don't yell at me! Just a minute ago you were telling me off for not waiting until morning to tell you!

DEREK: *I* did nothing of the sort!

MANDIKA: Yeah, that was me!

ELDER: Even so.

DEREK: Even so, nothing! Why didn't you come here straight away???

(The elder sneered.)

ELDER: Because I raced after Flaxley for almost a mile, trying to convince him not to go! He didn't even acknowledge me!

(He puffed out in frustration.)

ELDER: Then I came back here and paced up and down for a bit before I remembered he had guests. It just seemed right to come and tell you as soon as I remembered.

(Derek nodded to himself then puffed out.)

DEREK: Okay... fair enough. Then I guess going after him would be pointless.

ELDER: Quite, you'd never catch him. And even if you did, you might turn up just in time to ruin whatever he's got planned.

LEFIAT: So... just gonna stay here then are we?

ELDER: That would make sense.

(Derek sighed.)

DEREK: Okay, fine. I guess the best thing we can do for Flaxley is stay here and complete the jobs he gave us!

MANDIKA: Works for me!

DEREK: But if he's not back by tomorrow lunch break, I'm going to look for him.

ELDER: I wouldn't recommend that.

DEREK: Tough. I'll give him until one pm tomorrow then I'm going.

ELDER: Fine.

(As they all looked about themselves feeling helpless, Lefiat raised an eyebrow.)

LEFIAT: Hey, what's this?

(They turned to see him pick up a note from the table by the door.)

LEFIAT: He's left us a note!

MANDIKA: Give me that!

(Without a second's hesitation, she snatched it from his grasp.)

LEFIAT: Hey!

MANDIKA: Shut it, you!

(She unfolded the paper and started to read.)

MANDIKA: Gone to rescue Kritz! PS, tell Lefiat not to touch anything!

(There was silence as everybody mused to themselves.)

DEREK: And that's it?

MANDIKA: Yeah!

LEFIAT: Did it really say that bit about me?

MANDIKA: Yes, read it yourself if you don't believe me!

(She sneered.)

MANDIKA: Oh no, that's right, you can't!

LEFIAT: Hey, don't be mean.

(He sighed.)

LEFIAT: Why does Flaxley always tell me not to touch anything? I wasn't even going to.

DEREK: Nobody cares, Lefiat.

LEFIAT: Yeah, but he's *always* telling me that! All the time.

(Derek shrugged and looked to the elder.)

DEREK: So that's it! We'll just go back to sleep then do our jobs in the morning as normal.

ELDER: Yes.

(Elder sighed and shook his head.)

ELDER: If only I could have stopped him!

MANDIKA: Yeah, what are you, lame or something?

(Derek frowned at her then tried to console the elder.)

DEREK: Hey, it's okay! There's nothing you could do! You know what Flaxley's like when he's made his mind up! Don't feel bad! There's no way you could have stopped him.

Nobody could and I mean that literally.

ELDER: But I can't *help* feeling bad! We only have tomorrow and the day after to save this place and our best hope of salvation, Flaxley, has lost his marbles and bugged off! I just wish I could have done something, you know?

(As the elder sighed again, Derek looked him dead in the eye.)

DEREK: Are you a religious man, Elder?

ELDER: Yes... why?

DEREK: Then there *is* something you can do for Tifaeris and Flaxley!

ELDER: Really?

DEREK: Yes... go home and pray!

(The elder nodded then started to pace away from the doorway.)

ELDER: Yes, I'll do that. Thank you... alien.

(As the elder wandered out of sight, Derek shook his head.)

DEREK: And while he's wasting his time doing that we can go and get a good night's sleep. I have a feeling we're going to need it.

TREPE VILLAGE – TUESDAY, SMALL HOURS

(Inside Trepe village on this warmest of nights, the vast number of guards on duty were on high alert. All leave had been cancelled and the usual amount of sentries had been doubled, all keeping vigil for Dim Lee and the Tang Yul army coming by sea. Flaxley and the army-less people of Tifaeris, not even registering as a valid threat.

With their very existence under threat, the Trepe elders had spent the day working tirelessly in search of some sort of contingency plan should Tifaeris fail to raise the money Dim Lee demanded. Stuck for ideas and in urgent need of information and answers in regard to their neighbouring settlement, they finally turned to the one person in the village who knew Tifaeris better than anyone. Long after midnight, having spent the entire day rotting in a jail cell, Kritz was brought before Jazzu and cast onto all fours in front of her throne. As she crashed onto her hands and knees, she sneered up at the snarling Trepe leader with hate filled eyes. Caring very little for Kritz's disdain, Jazzu scoffed at her coldly.)

JAZZU: Here she is, the little turncoat!

KRITZ: You won't get away with this!

(Jazzu scoffed.)

JAZZU: You're a silly girl, aren't you?

(Kritz climbed to her feet angrily.)

JAZZU: I don't think so!

(With that, Jazzu nodded to her guards, prompting them to throw the unfortunate Kritz, violently back down on all fours again. Such was the force used, her forehead smacked into the floorboards making her wince and look up furiously.)

KRITZ: Ow! What the fuck was that for?

JAZZU: Don't make me angry, Kritzeveltia! It's the middle of the night, I've had a long day and I might just decide to hurt you, okay? Now tell me about the financial situation in Tifaeris!

(Not about to help this most despicable of women, Kritz didn't reply, settling for holding her hateful stare and snarling. Far from impressed, Jazzu sighed and gestured for another guard to slap her around the head with a gauntlet. As always, the guard carried out her order with unrestrained brutality.)

KRITZ: Ow! You bitch! That fucking hurt!

JAZZU: Good! Now, will you answer the question?

KRITZ: Kiss my arse, you old battle-axe!

JAZZU: Slap her again!

(As the guard stepped forward, Kritz swiftly covered her head.)

KRITZ: Okay, okay, whatever you say!

(Jazzu smiled arrogantly.)

JAZZU: That's better! Funny, I didn't expect it to be so easy!

(Rubbing her painful head, Kritz got into a kneeling position and raised an embittered eyebrow.)

KRITZ: Can I ask *you* something first?

(Jazzu shrugged nonchalantly.)

JAZZU: Go ahead!

KRITZ: Why have you kidnapped me?

(Jazzu looked peeved.)

JAZZU: We haven't kidnapped you, we've reclaimed you! You didn't return on your twenty second birthday!

KRITZ: I didn't have to! Trepe law categorically *states* that we have the option to either return to the tribe on our twenty second birthday or leave the tribe forever!

(Jazzu sneered.)

JAZZU: Well, that *was* the rule once! I've decided to change that though. Trouble is, you see, too many of you young prima donnas are not coming back! And seeing as you left to marry some foolish man, I thought I'd make an example of you to any other future warriors thinking of abandoning the tribe!

KRITZ: That's not the Trepe way!

(Slowly shaking her head, Jazzu sighed with disdain for her.)

JAZZU: Oh, Kritzeveltia, your insolence is becoming tedious! You'll spend the next ten years in jail, then if I decide to release you, you'll be brainwashed back into the fold!

(Looking mortified, Kritz raised a fist in protest.)

KRITZ: You can't do that!

JAZZU: I can! Get used to it, you will never leave this village again!!!

(Looking like she was about to explode, Kritz leapt to her feet again. Immediately, the guards swarmed on her.)

KRITZ: You won't get away with this; Flaxley won't rest until he's saved me!

(She continued arguing as three guards tried to wrestle her to the floor.)

KRITZ: I'll be out of here before you know it, Jazzu; you've bitten off more than you could chew by messing with me!!!

(Finally, the guards managed to throw her to the ground and pacify her by way of holding her down by the neck. Again, Jazzu scoffed.)

JAZZU: Oh, Kritzeveltia....

KRITZ: I told you, it's Lady Flaxley of Tifaeris to you!

(Jazzu's eyes welled up with hatred and she jumped to her feet.)

JAZZU: You're a Trepe!!!

KRITZ: No I'm not, I'm from Tifaeris!

JAZZU: This Flaxley has warped your mind!

KRITZ: No, he hasn't! Even without him I'd be Kritz of Tifaeris, you kidnapped me when you killed my family!!!

JAZZU: Kidnapped you? We spared you!!!

KRITZ: I swear, bitch...

(She then stopped remonstrating and threw up on the floor. Jazzu winced and turned her head.)

JAZZU: Ooh, that doesn't look healthy!

(Kritz had gone extremely pale and looked very much like she was about to pass out. Jazzu rolled her eyes.)

JAZZU: Silly cow! Someone cast sleep magic on her, we'll continue this another time!

(As ordered, a guard cast sleep magic on her immediately and those restraining her released her neck. Reacting instantly, she toppled over sideways and started to snore.)

JAZZU: Get her to the medicine woman, will you? I'm going to get some sleep!

(The guard nodded.)

GUARD: Yes, ma'am!

(Jazzu then looked thoughtful.)

JAZZU: Oh, and be sure to rub her face in her sick for a while before you go. I know it's petty but I really hate that brat.

GUARD: Consider it done.

JAZZU: Excellent. Right, I'm off.

(Giving Kritz one final scornful look, Jazzu then headed from the room followed by a small group of grovelling attendants. Left behind to deal with the situation, four guards scooped up the sleeping Kritz via a limb each then dragged her towards the door.)

GUARD 01: Wait... we didn't rub her face in the vomit.

GUARD 02: We're not going to either, that's gross.

GUARD 01: Fair enough.

GUARD 03: But if anyone asks...

GUARD 02: Yeah, yeah... we rubbed her nose in it good and proper.

(Just then, the guard holding Kritz's left leg let go of her and mused outwardly.)

GUARD 04: If we're not actually gonna do it, you girls go ahead and I'll clean up the sick.

GUARD 01: Works for me.

GUARD 02: Yup, me too. Let's go.

(With that, the guard at the rear grabbed both of Kritz's legs and they hurried her out of the door.)

(With Kritz hanging off them like a floppy corpse, the guards rushed across the moonlit main square, past the well and up to the door of the medicine woman's quarters. Having made their way inside the bizarre smelling, dimly lit cabin, they then laid her upon on a long table in the centre of it.)

GUARD 03: Okay, now what?

GUARD 02: Now, we find Vooda, I guess.

(Just then, a tall and facially scarred lady, dressed in a black hooded cloak, approached from the darkened corner of the room, almost as if she'd materialised from thin air. Immediately, two of the guards scarpered, leaving their ally trembling, unable to take her eyes off of this most intimidating of women.)

VOODA: What have you brought me?

(The guard whimpered.)

GUARD 01: She's a prisoner. Jazzu asked us to bring her here.

(As the bizarre medicine woman stood over Kritz, the guard smiled apprehensively.)

GUARD 01: So... um... she's all yours, Vooda!

(Vooda replied with a snarl.)

VOODA: I see! You will wait.

(Hoping she'd be excused, the guard sighed then watched on disappointed as Vooda ran her hands over Kritz's body, mumbling indecipherable words as she did so.)

VOODA: Hasi naam, Hasi naam, Chie...

(After only a few seconds, however, Vooda stopped and looked to the guard.)

VOODA: How old is this girl?

GUARD 01: I don't know...um, ma'am! It was either 22 or 23, I don't remember!

(Vooda nodded solemnly.)

VOODA: Either way, I must see Jazzu!

GUARD 01: She's gone to bed, ma'am!

(Without a word, Vooda just glared at the guard aggressively. Flinching for a moment, the

guard reeled back and fled for the exit.)

GUARD 01: I'll just get her!

(With that, she took off out of the door at a rate of knots. Although very much in fear of how Jazzu would react to being woken, like most of the Trepe, she feared Vooda's wrath a lot more.)

Luckily for the guard, she managed to catch a relatively contented Jazzu before she'd fallen asleep. Spared any undeserved wrath, she was given a message to deliver to Vooda then dismissed. Feeling somewhat hard done by, she then raced back across the square again to deliver the message to Vooda.)

GUARD 01: I'm a trained warrior and they treated me like a bloody messenger.

(She sighed.)

GUARD 01: I should have stayed in Azagotse working as a stripper. The money was better and so were the hours. This is humiliating.

(As she approached Vooda's cabin, she spotted the daunting silhouette of the medicine woman waiting in the doorway and grimaced.)

GUARD 01: Oh, boy.

(With that, she raced up to Vooda and saluted.)

GUARD 01: I have a message from Jazzu, ma'am?

VOODA: Where is she?

GUARD 01: Ma'am... she told me to ask you to come to her quarters immediately.

(Having been expecting the guard to bring Jazzu back with her, Vooda snarled angrily and killed her with a powerful blast of lightning before storming across the square towards Jazzu's quarters.)

VOODA: Incompetent whore.

(A short while later when the angry Vooda entered Jazzu's room, she found the impatient empress staring back at her from her bed. Eager to get to sleep, she folded her arms bitterly and raised an unimpressed eyebrow.)

JAZZU: I don't like being kept waiting, Vooda.

VOODA: And I don't like being dragged away in the middle of the night because you're too lazy to get out of bed.

(Jazzu sneered.)

JAZZU: Don't talk to me like that! I'm your leader!

VOODA: You're nothing!

JAZZU: Why you...

VOODA: I could kill you with the blink of an eye! Empresses come and go, Jazzu. I've served under thirty empresses over the past few centuries, all of whom were far greater leaders than you. You *will* respect me.

(They shared a snarl then Jazzu sat back and held out her palms.)

JAZZU: What do you want, anyway? What's so important that it couldn't wait until morning?

VOODA: Something you asked me to inform you of immediately should it ever happen!

JAZZU: I'm listening!

VOODA: The young lady you sent me...

JAZZU: What about her?

VOODA: She is with child!

(Jazzu paused for a moment to think then nodded acceptingly.)

JAZZU: She's 22! Invoke regulation 17!

(Vooda bowed.)

VOODA: Very well!

(Looking dutiful and dedicated, Vooda turned immediately and headed out of the door. As the door slammed shut, Jazzu shook her head.)

JAZZU: If she wasn't so indispensable... bitch.

(With that, she snuffed out her lantern then laid her head down for the night.)

(Gathering two guards along the way, Vooda bounded across the square towards her quarters. Making a deliberate exhibition of pointing the two guards to the body of their fallen comrade in her doorway, she left them in little doubt what they could expect for any sign of defiance. Satisfied the guards had got the message, she then ordered them to wait outside as she thrust open her cabin door.)

GUARD: Yes, m-ma'am! Just y-yell if you need us!

(Slamming the door in their faces as if they were scum not worthy of her time, Vooda immediately snuffed out the lantern and stepped up to where Kritz lay spark out on the table. There was perfect darkness for a moment, when suddenly, a ball of fluctuating blue light from Vooda's hands, illuminated both her and the horizontal Kritz. As the glow lit every scar on her demonic looking face, Vooda then begun to chant in a strange tongue for a few seconds before sending the tiny energy ball flashing into Kritz's stomach. Job done, she then drew her hands back and the room fell back into darkness. Seconds later, she relit the lantern and yelled at the door.)

VOODA: Guards!!!

(Immediately, the terrified guards burst in and awaited her orders extremely attentively.)

VOODA: Get this whore back to her cell!

(Without a moments pause or hesitation, the guards immediately yanked Kritz from the table and rushed out of Vooda's quarters with her. A few minutes later, once they'd placed her back on her bunk, the two guards mopped the sweat from their brows and returned to their posts, relieved to be alive.)

(Despite the threat that loomed large over the Trepe at this time, the village was extremely quiet. At this late hour, there would usually be the odd faint sounds of soldiers conversing, but on this night there was virtually silence. Although the numbers of guards on duty was much larger than normal, fears about what might lay ahead had rendered many of them speechless. For the guards on duty in the main square this silence felt extremely daunting. From their position it was impossible to see out to sea and they'd be relying on others to raise the alarm should Dim Lee return earlier than anticipated. At least if there was a relaxed hum of voices in the background they'd know all was well. As it was, the silence was more than a little discomfoting. As they stood on sentry trying not to show any outward signs of nervousness, many of them would have given anything for some kind of distraction. Anything to take their minds of off things; an argument, a minor fracas between two guards or indeed, a rampaging Flaxley, hell bent on revenge.

Little did these Trepe guards realise, they were in luck, for just outside the open Trepe village gate, Flaxley was indeed lurking in a bush waiting for an opportunity to make his move. Trying to see over the defensive wall and into the Trepe compound, the brave, yet misguided knight craned his neck and mumbled out loud.)

FLAXLEY: Right... what building would it be? How many guards are there? And why am I talking to myself?

(Creeping sideways like a stalking ninja, he got into a good vantage point and took some mental notes.)

FLAXLEY: Four guards at the gate, a big well in the centre... which building could it be? Could it be that tall one? Why *am* I talking to myself?

(Hampered by the darkness, he looked around some more.)

FLAXLEY: Get a grip, Flaxley!

(Just then, he spotted a building with what looked like bars in the window.)

FLAXLEY: Hmm, is that the one? How should I know? Well, it must be! No, it can't be!

(Looking annoyed with himself he frowned and shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: Now I'm arguing with myself!

(Satisfied he'd seen enough, he nodded to affirm himself then mumbled in a bitter tone.)

FLAXLEY: There's only one way to do this. Brute force. Violence is the only thing these bitches understand. I'll cull the lot of them, steal their keys and break into the jail, killing every Trepe bitch I come across.

(Looking extremely determined, he gritted his teeth and pulled a menacing sneer.)

FLAXLEY: Brace yourself, Kritz, here I come!!!

(With that, he leapt from the bush and charged towards the gates. With his heart set on raising hell, he dashed at full speed, towards the first two guards he saw. Raising his sword aloft as he charged into the compound, he eyes bore the look of a madman out for blood.)

FLAXLEY: Die, Trepe scum!!!

(Not even allowing him the dignity of taking his intrusion seriously, however, the two Trepe guards nonchalantly cast sleep magic at him. Immediately starting to doze off, he staggered, half asleep, another 15 feet, before his legs gave way making him topple head first into the well at the front of the square. As he disappeared from view, one of the guards raised a curious eyebrow.)

GUARD 1: That was different!

(Following a splash, the four guards on gate duty surrounded the well waiting for Flaxley to emerge.)

GUARD 1: What if he drowned? He was asleep!

GUARD 2: I think that water may have woken him up, don't you?

GUARD 1: This is true! Get ready to arrest him, ladies!

(Slowly, Flaxley's top half emerged from the ladder in the well. He looked more than a little baffled and bewildered.)

FLAXLEY: What's going on?

(He then spotted the waiting guards.)

FLAXLEY: Trepe???

(Hell bent on wreaking havoc, he immediately leapt from the well and raised his sword to attack, but was immediately hit by another dose of sleep magic.)

GUARD 1: Yes, mate!

(Desperately trying to fight the effects, he wobbled a bit then staggered backwards until he fell back down the well again. The leading guard shook a contemptuous head and sighed.)

GUARD 1: Arresting this idiot might take a while from the looks of things!

(Next time he emerged, however, they had the presence of mind to send him to sleep far enough from the well that he didn't fall in. As he hit the ground and snored like an elephant, the guards all stood over him.)

GUARD 1: Who is this idiot, anyway?

GUARD 2: That's that Sir Flaxley bloke from this morning!

GUARD 3: Sir Flaxley of Tifaeris?

GUARD 2: Handsome, isn't he?

GUARD 3: Grow up! You're worse than Suma!

(Guard 2 frowned furiously.)

GUARD 2: You take that back!!!

GUARD 1: Enough!!! Let's sling him in jail and we'll report this to Jazzu in the morning!

GUARD 4: We can't *all* go! We're supposed to be on gate duty!

(The lead guard rolled her eyes.)

GUARD 1: Obviously! Look...

(She gestured to the guard on her right.)

GUARD 1: We'll cover the gates, and you two can take him to the jail.

(The guard to her right nodded with relief.)

GUARD 3: I like that idea.

GUARD 2: Yeah, I figured you might.

(As the lead guard led her subordinate away, the other two guards looked to one another then glanced down at the sleeping Flaxley.)

GUARD 4: You take his arms, I'll get his feet!

GUARD 2: No way! Why do *I* have to carry the heavy end?

GUARD 4: Because you can't be trusted with the bottom half!

(The guard looked most perplexed.)

GUARD 2: What are you implying? You saying I have a foot fetish?

GUARD 4: You have *every* fetish!

GUARD 2: I do not!

GUARD 4: Yes, you do. Like Kia said, you're worse than Suma.

GUARD 2: I'm gonna slap you in a minute!

GUARD 4: Never mind that, let's get shifting him before he wakes up.

GUARD 2: Fine, but once our shift is over, I'm gonna batter you.

(With that, they both got into position then attempted to lift him. At once, his feet raised off the ground but his back remained firmly on the cobbles.)

GUARD 4: Lift him, will you?

GUARD 2: I'm trying to!

GUARD 4: You're rubbish!

GUARD 2: You try this end then!

(At once, they both fell silent.)

GUARD 2: Maybe we should just drag him by the arms then.

GUARD 4: Agreed.

(Sneering at each other, they took their positions, lifted his hands then finally, started to drag his fair bulk off to jail.)

GUARD 2: This is much easier.

GUARD 4: Whatever. You're still rubbish.

GUARD 2: Oh, piss off.

TUESDAY MORNING – DAWN

(As the sun rose from over the sea to once again bless Tifaeris with its magnificence, all in the township was quiet. Apart from the songbirds and the odd early riser, all the avenues were still and peaceful. Unlike in Guevina, when Tifaeris awoke, it did so at its own pace. There was no leaping out of bed and rushing to work, only gentle rising and a casual start to the day. Mornings in Tifaeris were far from something to get grumpy about. The people started their day when they were ready to start it and not a moment earlier. To many, this seemed like a bizarre attitude but in reality, it was a very productive way to go about things. The people never worked when they were half asleep; instead they only put in their full day's graft once they had all their wits about them.)

Not used to such a way of life, sadly, Derek and Mandika had risen to the infuriating sound of the cock crowing and were far from at their sharpest. Looking like she was at death's door, Mandika sat yawning at the table in Flaxley's living room staring straight ahead of her while Derek did his best to make them breakfast in the kitchen.

The last to wake up, Lefiat sat up in horror at the sight of unfamiliar surroundings, before spending several minutes looking for his socks. Upon realising he'd slept in them, he looked mightily relieved then approached the yawning Mandika as she sat wearily at the living room table.)

LEFIAT: Morning, Mandika.

(He stooped to kiss her only for her to lean away.)

MANDIKA: Gross, you have morning breath.

LEFIAT: Eh?

(He gave her a baffled look and sat at her side.)

LEFIAT: What's morning breath?

MANDIKA: You smell like a dog.

(He sighed and stared at the table.)

LEFIAT: I was only being friendly.

MANDIKA: So are dogs, that doesn't mean I want to be licked by one first thing in the morning.

LEFIAT: I wasn't trying to lick you; I was trying to kiss you.

MANDIKA: Well don't.

(He sighed.)

LEFIAT: Fine.

(Just then, Derek strolled in from the kitchen holding two plates.)

DEREK: Breakfast's up. I didn't have much to work with, so I had to cook what I could find.

(He placed a plate in front of both Lefiat and Mandika then headed back towards the kitchen.)

DEREK: I'll just fetch the coffee. Oh, and *my* plate obviously.

(As Derek headed away, Lefiat and Mandika stared down at their plates and grimaced with discomfort. Being careful not to offend Derek, Lefiat prodded the meat on his plate and whispered to Mandika.)

LEFIAT: What the bloody hell's that, Mandika?

(Looking thoroughly disturbed, Mandika glanced back at him and returned his whisper.)

MANDIKA: I haven't got a clue. I've never seen such an abomination before in all my life.

LEFIAT: Taste it.

(She glared at him in utter contempt.)

MANDIKA: Fuck off, *you* taste it.

(He reeled back in horror at the thought.)

LEFIAT: I don't wanna.

(Just then, Derek wandered back in carrying his plate and three cups of coffee on a tray.

Looking deeply troubled, Lefiat and Mandika watched uneasily as he settled the tray down before taking his place at the table with them.)

DEREK: Not a bad spread, even if I do say so myself.

(Feeling the weight of their eyes staring into his soul, he looked up and raised a suspicious eyebrow.)

DEREK: Something wrong?

(Lefiat and Mandika looked at one another then offered him unconvincing smiles.)

LEFIAT: No, it's delicious.

MANDIKA: Mortifying.

(She shook her head.)

MANDIKA: I mean nourishing. Yummy.

(Derek rubbed his chin and glared at them.)

DEREK: You haven't even taken a bite yet.

MANDIKA: Um... yeah, well, see... we were waiting for you, that's only polite.

(Derek gave her a distrusting glance.)

DEREK: Right...

LEFIAT: What is it, anyway?

(Derek shrugged and reached to his plate.)

DEREK: Not sure entirely, some kind of meat obviously. I'm not overly familiar with animal or meat names on this planet.

(Mandika shuddered and sat back from the table.)

MANDIKA: And where did you find these animals exactly?

DEREK: In the kitchen.

(He sighed and shook his head.)

DEREK: Look, it's not like I went out and butchered some poor woman's pet cat; I just cooked what was in the kitchen.

(Feeling quite comforted by his words, Mandika slid herself forwards again and nodded.)

MANDIKA: Okay, so it's definitely food then?

(Derek took a bite of his meat and nodded.)

DEREK: Yes. And it's tasty too.

(Comforted by Derek's demonstration, Lefiat tucked into his meat and beamed.)

LEFIAT: It's rabbit!

(He looked shifty and blushed.)

LEFIAT: Or pork, I never could tell the difference.

(Finally reassured, Mandika too, took a bite of her breakfast.)

MANDIKA: Hmm, chewy... but nice. Pretty sure it's rabbit.

(She blushed.)

MANDIKA: Sorry to doubt you for a minute there, Derek. I've only ever had rabbit in a casserole before and I had no idea what it was.

LEFIAT: Yeah, and it's so funny looking we thought...

DEREK: You thought I'd killed somebody's cat or dog, I know. I can read minds, remember?

(As Mandika and Lefiat grinned at him innocently, Derek allowed himself a chuckle.)

DEREK: Still, no harm done.

(He smiled.)

DEREK: So... rabbit, is it? I'll remember that.

MANDIKA: Pretty certain it's rabbit, anyway. You should ask Flaxley when we see him next though, just to make sure.

DEREK: I will. This stuff is lovely.

(For the next few minutes, not a word was spoken as the three of them devoured their food and supped down their coffee. First to finish, Derek pushed his plate away and exhaled happily.)

DEREK: Excellent way to start the day.

LEFIAT: I'll say.

DEREK: Fresh meat, wonderful.

(Mandika took her last bite then gave him a sideways glance.)

MANDIKA: Fresh?

DEREK: Yeah. Not that gutting and skinning weird alien creatures is a pleasant way to start the morning, but it was worth it.

(Mandika pulled a disgusted face and shuddered.)

MANDIKA: Kritz keeps the livestock in her kitchen? That's unsanitary.

(She shrugged acceptingly.)

MANDIKA: But then Kritz *is* unsanitary I suppose, what with her being a peasant an' all.

(All of sudden, Derek's relaxed demeanour evaporated and he sat tall with a determined glint in his eye.)

DEREK: Right. Now we're all fully refreshed, we've got work to do. I'll tidy the breakfast up; you two sort out the bedding. Flaxley might not be here but he's counting on us to do our jobs. Right?

(Lefiat nodded firmly.)

LEFIAT: Right!

MANDIKA: Fine! Hop to it, Lefiat.

LEFIAT: He said both of us!

MANDIKA: I don't care! He's not the boss of me but I *am* the boss of *you*. Do it.

LEFIAT: Oh for pity's sake. Fine. Always bloody picking on me.

(As Lefiat headed away Mandika looked to Derek and pouted.)

MANDIKA: I'm worried about Flaxley. Why isn't he back yet? Do you think something went wrong?

(Derek sighed.)

DEREK: Maybe... but you know, I have faith in Flaxley.

(He nodded to affirm his thinking.)

DEREK: And like I said, if he isn't back by one this afternoon, I'll go to Trepe village and look for him. In the meantime, we have jobs to do.

MANDIKA: Can't you go to look for him now?

DEREK: No. Like the elder said, he might have gone to Trepe village with a plan. I don't want to risk heading over there and screwing it up. Give him time.

MANDIKA: But...

DEREK: Mandika. Try to relax. I'm sure Flaxley knows what he's doing. Let's give him until one o'clock, okay?

(She hung her head and sighed.)

MANDIKA: Fine.

DEREK: Good. Now let's finish tidying and get busy. You've got money to collect and Lefiat and I have a wall to build. Let's just focus on that.

(With that, he jumped from his seat, scooped up the plates then paced out into the kitchen. Left behind on her own Mandika sighed, hung her head then mumbled to herself.)

MANDIKA: This sucks.

(In the Trepe village at this time, the unfortunate Kritz was waking up to her first full day as a prisoner of her former tribe. Following a small flavourless breakfast, she sat motionlessly upon her bunk and stared at the wall, counting her blessings. She felt empty inside and it was all she could do try and keep her spirits up. Her inactivity, however, soon came to an end when Jazzu entered the prison block. Watching her through the cell bars, Kritz's eyes glazed over with hatred, her foot tapped furiously and she shook with rage. Feeling a mutual disgust, Jazzu approached her cell and taunted her through the cell bars.)

JAZZU: How's my favourite little prisoner?

(Trying not to give her the satisfaction of seeing she was getting to her, Kritz just scoffed and looked away.)

KRITZ: Go fist yourself, Jazzu!

JAZZU: Interesting choice of phrase, Kritzeveltia!

(Rapidly losing her composure, Kritz growled at her angrily.)

KRITZ: It's Kritz, ya fat old boot!

JAZZU: Hostile little one, aren't you? Can't say I'm impressed!

KRITZ: Fuck off then!

(Knowing she held all the cards, Jazzu gave her a defiant scowl.)

JAZZU: You should be careful how you talk to me, Kritzeveltia!

KRITZ: It's Kritz!

JAZZU: Whatever!

(She scoffed.)

JAZZU: Still, even *that's* better than Lady Flaxley of Tifaeris!

(Kritz just sneered at her and said nothing.)

JAZZU: I just came to tell you, you were right! He did come to rescue you!

(Kritz raised a curious eyebrow.)

KRITZ: Flaxley did?

JAZZU: Yes! He's a card, isn't he? Fancy launching a one man invasion! He's in another cell block. We'll be executing him later!

(Confident her beloved Flaxley would never do such a stupid thing, Kritz shook her head and scoffed.)

KRITZ: You must think I was born yesterday!

(Not willing to entertain her lies any further, Kritz looked away and pretended to ignore her.)

JAZZU: Oh, and um... still feeling sick?

(Keen to let Jazzu think she'd never break her, Kritz forced a smile.)

KRITZ: No... despite that excuse for a breakfast you gave me, I feel fine!

JAZZU: Good, you *know* the law! You have to be 30 to have a child in *this* tribe!

(Failing to grasp her point, Kritz gave her a condescending glance.)

KRITZ: What? What's that got to do with anything?

(Wearing the most evil of grins, Jazzu winked and looked her dead in the eye.)

JAZZU: Don't worry! Vooda removed the offending foetus!

KRITZ: Vooda can kiss my...

(At once, Kritz's face became a picture of horror as the terrible meaning of Jazzu's words sunk in. The colour drained from her face and she came over all dizzy. Rocked to her very core, she spoke in a lost voice.)

KRITZ: I was pregnant?

JAZZU: You *were*, yes!

KRITZ: You removed the child? You killed my...

(Jazzu stood tall and yelled down at her defiantly.)

JAZZU: You're a Trepe, Kritzeveltia!!! You will obey our law like everyone else!!!

(Consumed with rage for a moment, Kritz leapt to her feet.)

KRITZ: I'm *not* a Trepe!!!

(As the horrible revelation continued to hammer home, she screamed out in distress.)

KRITZ: No!!! You killed my... why???

(Jazzu scoffed, clearly amused by her suffering.)

JAZZU: What a pitiful sight you are!

(Feeling like her entire world had been torn asunder; Kritz staggered a single step then collapsed onto all fours. She then cried uncontrollably for the first time since she was a little girl. Watching her fall apart, Jazzu beamed with delight.)

JAZZU: Pathetic trollop.

(On her knees and inconsolable, Kritz forced back her tears just long enough to look at Jazzu through sodden, agony-filled eyes. Her face told a tale of anguish and pain as she looked Jazzu in the eye and made her a solemn promise.)

KRITZ: I *will* kill you for this, if it's the last thing I do!

(In no fear of her whatsoever, Jazzu scoffed.)

JAZZU: No you won't! We'll soon have you thinking like a Trepe again, then you'll realise what a favour I've done you!

(Unable to take any more, the broken Kritz crawled across the floor and pulled herself up onto her bunk to lay face down and cry out the rest of her pain. Jazzu beamed, overjoyed by her morning's work.)

JAZZU: Farewell, Kritzeveltia!

(Before heading out of the door victoriously, she stopped and turned to Kritz one last time.)

JAZZU: Oh, and by the way, for what it's worth, Vooda says it would have been a boy anyway!

(With that, she walked out, beaming all over, leaving Kritz in a state of utter distress.)

KRITZ: This can't be! A boy? Flaxley's precious son! *My* Flaxley's precious son!!!

(Determined not to let Jazzu destroy her, she got to her feet and looked upwards before speaking softly through her tears.)

KRITZ: I don't know what happened to you... son....

(She wiped away a tear and composed herself.)

KRITZ: I swear on your memory, I *will* kill Jazzu... your death will *not* go un-avenged!

(In that moment, her bitterness towards the Trepe turned into a concentrated hatred of Jazzu. Laying there upon her bunk feeling empty and lost, she remembered her time in the tribe and how much her peers had all feared Jazzu's tyrannical leadership. What many had said about her was true, her heartlessness knew no bounds. She was beyond merely callous or cold, she was downright evil. Letting her anger flow, she sat physically shaking with rage as she focussed all her negative energy towards Jazzu and Jazzu alone.)

DAMAN SIRIA'S HOME – TUESDAY MORNING

(Blissfully unaware of the plight his five friends had found themselves in, Bonson was having a wonderful time. It would be no exaggeration to say that he'd never been so relaxed, a stark contrast to how his friends were feeling at this moment in time. With Tifaeris less than 48 hours away from judgment day, he was sitting back comfortably on a easy chair in Daman Siria's lounge, sipping merrily at a cup of coffee with a more than contented smile on his face.)

BONSON: This is the life, eh?

DAMAN: See? It pays to be wise, Bonson!

BONSON: It does, I'm a lucky chap!

DAMAN: Luck has nothing to do with it, Bonson!

BONSON: No? Then explain this, I came from a poor family in East Edea, I wasn't well educated or anything, yet I find myself retired and living in a castle being paid to do nothing!

DAMAN: Your wisdom took you a long way Bonson, plus a little help from the high council of course!

BONSON: Really?

DAMAN: Yes! I too came from a poor family, us wise folk always do. Luck had little to do with it, like you I was guided by the council of the wise.

(Bonson raised his eyebrows and puffed out.)

BONSON: Well I never.

DAMAN: Comes as quite a shock to find out you've been guided, doesn't it? A little hard to believe at first.

BONSON: Indeed.

DAMAN: *I* was guided, *you've* been guided and one day *you'll* have someone to train...

BONSON: And they'll have been guided to, I suppose.

DAMAN: Of course. Like us, they'll come from nothing and end up being well paid with time on their hands! Not by luck, but by guidance.

(Bonson mused for a moment then a baffled look crossed his face.)

BONSON: Hmm... so, surely not!

DAMAN: What is it, Bonson?

BONSON: Lefiat! He's from a poor family, yet he lives in castle! He has no strength or intelligence and yet he's a royal knight! And he's going out with a beautiful princess!

DAMAN: So, what's your point?

BONSON: Surely *he's* not being guided and groomed to become a wise man, is he?

DAMAN: No, in Lefiat's case it *is* just down to good luck!

BONSON: He must have a guardian angel or something to be that lucky!

DAMAN: Or maybe, Bonson, his good character and kindness towards others have got him where he is today!

(Bonson looked extremely sceptical.)

BONSON: No way, he's just a jammy little bugger!

(Taking a final sip of his coffee before laying his cup down, Daman savoured the taste then let out a deep breath and rubbed his hands together.)

DAMAN: Anyway, old chap; let's recap what we've learned so far!

(Feeling quite relaxed, Bonson nodded and nestled into his seat.)

BONSON: Okay, Daman, fire away!

DAMAN: If I said to you, soft weed and jersey petals, you'd say?

(An empty expression enveloped Bonson's brow.)

BONSON: I'd say what the hell are you talking about, man?

(Daman frowned with annoyance.)

DAMAN: Oh, come on Bonson, we've been over this a hundred times!

BONSON: Um... sorry, the minds a blank!

DAMAN: They're the ingredients for Glacier magic!

(Given the answer, Bonson looked enlightened.)

BONSON: Oh... Soft weed! I thought you said softies!

(Daman sighed.)

DAMAN: How about aquatic moss and hazel stems?

BONSON: Ah, that's easy, that's H2O magic!

DAMAN: Excellent, now we're getting somewhere! How about fleur rouge and grange peppers then?

BONSON: That's um... Inferno magic!

(Wearing a look of frustration, Daman shook his head and groaned.)

DAMAN: No! That's what we had for dinner yesterday!

(Bonson wasn't at all impressed by the deviation and folded his arms angrily.)

BONSON: That was a nasty trick, ask me a proper question!

(Daman chuckled to himself.)

DAMAN: I was joking, you were right, it was inferno!

(As Bonson's face dropped, a bitter tone crept into his voice.)

BONSON: Joking?

DAMAN: Of course, us wise people *are* allowed to make japes you know!

(Bonson made no effort to disguise the fact that he was a little bit peeved.)

BONSON: Yes. What a king size, epic mountain of a joke it was too! The gods themselves are pissing in their trousers as we speak!

DAMAN: Don't be like that, Bonson. I was just trying to lighten proceedings with a little humour!

BONSON: Humour, eh? Is that what it was?

(Embarrassed by Bonson's scorn, Daman cleared his throat and swiftly changed the subject.)

DAMAN: Ahem! Anyway, we can come back to magic. First, let me tell you about the key of peace!

BONSON: That bloody thing?

DAMAN: Yes! Do you know what happens to anyone who declares war?

BONSON: If the key is still in the hands of a pacifist, you mean?

DAMAN: Or indeed, as it is, safely at the bottom of the sea, unsoiled by a witch's hand!

BONSON: No idea. But then I don't know what it does when it's *not* in the hands of a pacifist either.

DAMAN: Well, we needn't worry ourselves about that. Fact is, the key is active and it's on our side.

BONSON: Fair enough. So what *does* it do if someone declares war?

DAMAN: Well, Bonson let me enlighten you.

TREPE VILLAGE – MONDAY, MID-MORNING

(Having woken up, bemused and embarrassed in a Trepe village jail cell, Flaxley had spent the morning conjuring up what he considered to be a cunning plan. It left him with a moral dilemma, but he decided to proceed with it anyway. Putting his plan into action, he sat in his cell, staring at the guard through the bars. Gradually feeling more and more uncomfortable, the guard soon started to run out of places to look away. Sensing she was beginning to feel rattled, Flaxley then added a few winks and knowing smiles until she could stand it no longer. Abandoning her post, she swiftly paced up to his cell and remonstrated with him angrily.)

SUMA: Hey! Stop staring at me!

(Giving her a romantic glance, Flaxley immediately turned on the charm.)

FLAXLEY: Sorry, I can't seem to help it!

(With that, he stood up and walked to the edge of the bars.)

FLAXLEY: So what's a beautiful young thing like *you* doing in a place like this?

(Thrown by his compliment, Suma shrugged.)

SUMA: Well... I work here!

FLAXLEY: Oh!

(Stuck for a continuation, he muttered to himself in annoyance.)

FLAXLEY: What a feeble line!

(Not about to give up that easily, however, he composed himself and tried again.)

FLAXLEY: Has anyone ever told you that you're probably the most beautiful girl in the world?

(Being made incredibly self-conscious by his attention, Suma frowned and looked away.)

SUMA: Shut up!

FLAXLEY: Sorry, I'm just telling it as it is!

SUMA: Stop talking!

FLAXLEY: Why? It's allowed!

SUMA: Stop talking to *me*, I meant!

(Sensing he was getting somewhere, Flaxley stepped up a gear.)

FLAXLEY: So, what's your name?

SUMA: S... it's guard to you!

FLAXLEY: Look, I'm gonna be executed soon, the least you can do is be nice to me!

(Suma looked unsure. She wanted to be professional, but couldn't help being flattered by the Adonis before her.)

SUMA: Um... I guess I *could* be nice!

FLAXLEY: So... name?

(She blushed.)

SUMA: Suma!

FLAXLEY: It's a pleasure to meet you Suma, I'm...

SUMA: Flaxley, I know!

(Flaxley nodded and leant against the bars to give off a relaxed aura.)

FLAXLEY: So... Suma... got a boyfriend?

SUMA: A what?

FLAXLEY: You know. A sex slave!

(Suma went red and looked at her feet.)

SUMA: Stop teasing me!

FLAXLEY: Well, have you?

(Not wishing to discuss her unfulfilled desires, Suma flapped and didn't know where to look.)

SUMA: No! Look, shut up!

(Spying her discomfort, Flaxley faked a shocked look then made his move.)

FLAXLEY: You mean to tell me, that even with your incredible beauty, you've never been touched?

(Highly embarrassed, Suma winced and rubbed her neck.)

SUMA: Don't say things like that!

FLAXLEY: Sorry, Suma! It's just that I can hardly believe a lady with your fine attributes has never been gently kissed on the back of her neck, while having her breasts fondled softly by her man's... firm... hands!

(As a hot flush raged through her body, Suma rubbed and scratched herself erratically.)

SUMA: Stop it, stop it!

(Flaxley, however, just kept coming.)

FLAXLEY: I can't really believe you never writhed with your legs apart while your man fills every inch of you with his big... hard... manhood!

(Barely able to contain herself, Suma covered her ears and implored him.)

SUMA: Stop it, just stop it!

(Stepping back nonchalantly, Flaxley shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: Sure, okay!

(Not knowing whether she was coming or going, Suma looked into his eyes and blurted out her thoughts desperately.)

SUMA: No, don't! Keep talking!

(Mission accomplished, Flaxley smiled at her in a provocative manner and nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Talk is cheap, Suma! I'm a man of action!

(Suma looked at him, desperate for him to continue teasing her vocally.)

SUMA: Please! I've never...

(As she looked away and clammed up in embarrassment, Flaxley stepped right up to the bars.)

FLAXLEY: It could all be yours, Suma! Right now!

(Her eyes portrayed her heart, filling with hope.)

SUMA: It could?

(Forgetting herself completely, she ran up to his cell and cast open the door before throwing herself at him in a loved up trance.)

SUMA: I want it all! Kiss me, fondle me... take me!

(With his plan heavily reliant on keeping Suma happy, he had no option but to oblige her lusty advances and held her tight in his arms.)

FLAXLEY: Together at last. I knew no mere prison cell door could stand in our way.

SUMA: And it never will!

(With that, she pulled back from his grasp, yanked down his trousers then threw herself down, spread eagled on the bed.)

SUMA: I'm ready. Show me heaven, Sir Flaxley!

(Flaxley nodded to himself and mumbled quietly.)

FLAXLEY: Right. Remember, Flaxley, you're doing this for Kritz!

(Desperate for some much overdue loving, Suma looked up as she lay on the bunk.)

SUMA: Hurry to me! Take me, right now! I want...

(As her eyes caught sight of his manhood, however, she fell silent and gushed with excited anticipation.)

SUMA: Wow!

(As Flaxley set about the deed in hand, he couldn't believe Mandika's seduction technique had actually worked. She'd fallen for it hook, line and sinker and now she was putty in his hands. As he set about indulging her desires, Suma immediately went cross-eyed. Having never before experienced a pleasuring, let alone one anywhere near as sensuous as the one she was now receiving, she felt like she was in paradise. She was so ecstatic, in fact, that by the time Flaxley had finished servicing her, she was starry-eyed and head over heels in love with him, just as he'd planned.)

SUMA: I never knew life could feel so great!

(Slipping himself away, Flaxley climbed to his feet and gave her a loving smile.)

FLAXLEY: And we could have it forever, Suma! Just you and me... and my um... friend Kritz!

SUMA: Kritz?

FLAXLEY: Um... yes... let's all run away together!

(Suma was clearly puzzled.)

SUMA: Isn't Kritz one of my prisoners?

FLAXLEY: Yes! I'm a great knight sent to rescue her! If we free her my work will be done. Then we can run away and start a new life together!

(Suma clutched her heart and pouted lovingly.)

SUMA: I want that!!!

(Allowing himself a wry smile, Flaxley outstretched his hand to help her up.)

FLAXLEY: Let's go then! And let's not forget to collect my sword along the way.

(Desperate to start her new life with this man, Suma followed him in rushing to the door.)

SUMA: I'm so happy!

(And with no more ado, the two of them made their way towards Kritz's cell with Suma opening the doors along the way. Having grabbed Flaxley's sword from the lockers where the prisoner's belongings were held, they rushed hand in hand down a long corridor, both gushing romantically.)

SUMA: We're going to be so happy, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: I missed you, Louise.

SUMA: Louise? It's Suma!

FLAXLEY: I was talking to my sword!

(Receiving a sideways glance, Flaxley offered up a cheesy grin and winked.)

FLAXLEY: It's a knight thing, beautiful.

(As Suma exhaled lovingly, Flaxley nodded to reaffirm himself. As much as he hated being unfaithful to Kritz, the success of his mission was heavily reliant on him keeping Suma deluded as they ran through the cell blocks. With this in mind, he offered her another loving smile.)

FLAXLEY: Has anyone ever told you, you have nice ears?

(Suma blushed.)

SUMA: No.

(Flaxley looked annoyed at himself.)

FLAXLEY: Well, of course they haven't. It's a bloody stupid thing to say. For one, I can't even see them under all that hair.

SUMA: You *like* my hair?

FLAXLEY: Yes! That's far more intelligent!

SUMA: What?

FLAXLEY: Um... don't mind me, a man tends to waffle when he's in awe of great beauty.

(As Suma burned red again, Flaxley gave a sigh of relief and released her hand.)

FLAXLEY: I'll bring up the rear, beautiful one. When mounting an escape running side by side is asking to get caught!

SUMA: It is?

FLAXLEY: Yes! Trust me, I'm a knight.

(Suma sighed joyously.)

SUMA: Okay.

(As Suma raced forth in front of him, Flaxley chastised himself in his mind. Having always been something of an ace with the opposite sex, he couldn't believe that at this most crucial of moments, he'd actually done something as stupid as complimenting her ears. Making a mental note to think before he spoke next time, he nodded to himself then glanced down at Suma's pert bottom. At once, a thoughtful look crossed his brow as he marvelled at how despite the short skirts the Trepe wore, none of them believed in underwear. Seconds later, however, an angered look crossed his brow and he mumbled quietly to himself.)

FLAXLEY: Focus, Flaxley, you idiot!

(With that, he looked up at the back of her head and furrowed his brow determinedly, only for his eyes to drift slowly back down to her peachy rear end almost immediately. Unable to help himself, his eyes remained permanently transfixed on the tight leather that was hugging Suma's perfect backside, all the way through the maze of prison corridors and into the high security block. As soon as they reached Kritz's cell however, he promptly forgot all about Suma's posterior and his heart jumped for joy.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz!

(Upon hearing his voice, she turned her head quickly and leapt from her bunk.)

KRITZ: Flaxley?

(Desperate to start her new life with Flaxley, Suma thrust open the door.)

SUMA: Come on, we're escaping!!!

KRITZ: Thank heavens!

(Looking pale and upset, she raced out of the cell and into Flaxley's arms.)

FLAXLEY: Thank the gods you're okay!

KRITZ: Oh, Flaxley!

(Reunited, they clung onto each other tight, both closing their eyes and feeling a world of relief.)

KRITZ: I knew you'd come for me. I'm so lucky to have you.

(Safe in the delusion that Flaxley was *her* man, Suma allowed Kritz her fantasy for a moment, then spoke up.)

SUMA: Come on, we've got to hurry!

(Stepping back from the embrace, Kritz looked somewhat surprised to be receiving help from a Trepe.)

KRITZ: Who's she?

(Flaxley had to think quickly.)

FLAXLEY: Um... she helped me escape!

KRITZ: Then we'd better give her sanctuary; Jazzu will kill her if she finds out!

SUMA: C'mon, let's get out of here!

FLAXLEY: Agreed.

(With Suma in tow, escaping was easy. They simply headed out of the jail building and sneaked up to the main gates, where Suma stood chatting to the guards while Flaxley and Kritz sneaked out.)

KRITZ: Freedom!

(As soon as they were out, Suma too ran through the gates and caught them up. It had been the world's easiest escape. No fuss, no fighting. They'd simply walked from the cell block and sneaked out of the compound. Now all they had to do was run home without being spotted. With this in mind they kept their heads down and made their way along the beach towards Tifaeris.)

SUMA: I hate running on sand!

FLAXLEY: Me too, but there's less chance of us being spotted this way!

SUMA: Even so, it's tiring.

FLAXLEY: Not as tiring as getting caught, whipped then hung from a tree.

SUMA: Good point.

(Flaxley and Kritz stared dead ahead, fully focussed on getting as far away as they could as soon as humanly possible. They were incredibly relieved to see each other again, but they knew they weren't safe yet and wouldn't be relaxing for a moment until they were back in Tifaeris. Suma, however, had no such focus. She was in a dream state and drooling over Flaxley.)

SUMA: Hurry darling, if we're quick, we can get rid of *her* and be on north island by nightfall!

(Having given the unsuspecting Suma a most unpleasant glare, Kritz turned her head towards Flaxley.)

KRITZ: She called you darling!

FLAXLEY: No she didn't!

KRITZ: Yes, she did!

FLAXLEY: No, I told her I was called Darwin, that's what she said!

(At this point Suma pinched Flaxley's behind and made a kissy face at him. Fearing Kritz would see, Flaxley cringed.)

FLAXLEY: Don't!

(Alas, Kritz was not blind. Looking livid, she ground to a halt and bellowed at Suma.)

KRITZ: Hey!!!

(Suma also came to a halt.)

SUMA: What?

FLAXLEY: Uh-oh!

(Fearing the onslaught of one of Kritz's violent episodes, Flaxley swiftly raced between them and spoke up.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz, trust me, I'll explain later! Just keep running for now!

(Looking very much on the verge of exploding, Kritz snarled furiously and raced on.)

KRITZ: Fine! But your explanation had better be a good one!!!

(Flaxley watched her go and gulped.)

FLAXLEY: This isn't going to end well for me.

SUMA: Hey, don't worry. As long as we have each other, it'll be fine, my love.

(With that, she started to race on up the beach after Kritz. Alone at the back, Flaxley whimpered and looked to his feet.)

FLAXLEY: Suddenly, getting whipped then hanged from a tree doesn't sound so bad.

(With that, he too raced off up the beach.)

TIFAERIS –TUESDAY MIDDAY

(Somehow, despite Suma's obvious intentions towards Flaxley, the fleeing trio made it to Tifaeris without any kind of unsavoury incident occurring. Satisfied they hadn't been followed or spotted the tired threesome then raced through the front door of Flaxley's and Kritz's home feeling immensely relieved that they could finally stop ducking and running. Little did they know, however, their return hadn't gone unnoticed by all.

Looking somewhat shady, two men stepped from out of the shadows of a nearby tree as soon as they'd entered the house. Unbeknown to Flaxley, Kritz or Suma, they'd been watched by the king of Guevina's two spies, who'd arrived in Tifaeris that morning.)

POYNES: See that?

REEFE: I did! That must have been Sir Lefiat!

POYNES: Well the royal coach is here and that bloke was dressed like a knight, it has to be him!

REEFE: That's a relief!

POYNES: Right, now we've established who he is and where he's staying, we can do our jobs!

REEFE: Excellent!

(Satisfied they'd identified their man, they gave each other a knowing smile then sat down to watch the house.

Inside the aforementioned house at this time, Flaxley was having a hard time explaining the amorous Suma to Kritz. Suma's eyes bore the look of a woman very much in love, basking in the joy of knowing that her love for her man was mutual. Flaxley's eyes, however, bore the look of a man about to be cast into a fiery pit of hell. Standing between them, very much acting as a buffer between the lusty tribeswoman and her husband, Kritz looked extremely suspicious, not to mention angry. She could clearly see Suma couldn't wait to run her lusty paws up and down Flaxley and she could tell from the look on his face that Flaxley desperately wanted to head for the hills rather than stay there and explain himself.)

KRITZ: Well? What the hell's going on?

(Flaxley looked to her and whimpered.)

FLAXLEY: Nothing! We escaped and everything is groovy!

KRITZ: Groovy?

FLAXLEY: Never mind that! The main thing is, we're all free...

(Suma gushed.)

SUMA: Yes! Free at last and now we can be alone together forever, Flaxley!

(As if every single one of Flaxley's darkest nightmares were all realised in one horrifying moment, Suma then stared at him with a loving glint in her eye before gesturing for Kritz to sling her hook.)

FLAXLEY: Oh, crap! I can explain...

(Unfortunately for Flaxley, however, before he could even begin to think of an excuse for Suma's behaviour, Kritz put two and two together and fumed furiously.)

KRITZ: Flaxley!!! You've got some explaining to do!

(Looking less than enthusiastic about that idea, Flaxley whimpered and pointed at the door.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, I have! But, first I'd better help them finish the wall!

(He then attempted to scarper.)

KRITZ: Not so fast, mister!

(Unfortunately for him, Kritz had grabbed the top of his chest plate and almost strangled him as he tried to run.)

FLAXLEY: Careful!

(In no mood for games, Kritz released him then put one hand on her hip and gestured angrily at Suma with the other.)

KRITZ: Well? Who the hell *is* this person and why is she getting funny ideas???

(Realising there'd be no escape, Flaxley squirmed uneasily.)

FLAXLEY: Who is she? Why, she's... Suma!

KRITZ: I know that!!! Why is she getting funny ideas???

FLAXLEY: Well, she... you know... she's a Trepe, they have funny ideas all the time.

(Kritz was far from amused by his reply and raised her voice furiously.)

KRITZ: Flaxley???

(Flaxley could only gape and shrug.)

KRITZ: Answer the question!!!

FLAXLEY: What question?

KRITZ: Flaxley!!!

FLAXLEY: Look, there's no need to get upset, Kritz. It's all very innocent, you know!

(The last thing Flaxley needed right now was for Suma to step up and take his arm.

Unfortunately for him, however, that's exactly what she did.)

SUMA: If you must know, we're lovers! We're eloping together!

(As the desperate Flaxley was reduced to offering her a cheesy grin, Kritz blew a fuse.)

KRITZ: What???

FLAXLEY: I can explain, it's all very innocent, really!

(Looking primed and ready to spill blood, Kritz turned to face Suma and glared hatefully into her eyes.)

KRITZ: Eloping together???

SUMA: Yeah!

KRITZ: Who told you that???

SUMA: He did...

(At this point, Flaxley started to perspire rapidly.)

SUMA: ... right after we had sex!

(Unsurprisingly, as Kritz exploded into a fit of rage, Flaxley felt an overwhelming sense of wanderlust and started to sidle away.)

KRITZ: I'm gonna kill you!!!

(Suma cowered in terror.)

SUMA: Who?

KRITZ: Him!

(She then glared at her shrinking other half. To make matters worse, as Flaxley stopped sidling and opted to gape uncomfortably instead, Suma came out in his defence.)

SUMA: Leave him alone, Kritz! I mean, what's he to you, anyway?

(Kritz retorted angrily, clearly not knowing which one of them to hit first.)

KRITZ: He's my husband, you dopey cow!

(All at once, Suma's face started to screw up and her heart broke into tiny little fragments. Then, she too, rounded on Flaxley.)

SUMA: You bastard! You lied to me!

KRITZ: How could you be unfaithful to me???

(Instinctively Flaxley started backing away as the two angry ladies bared down on him.)

FLAXLEY: Like I said, I can explain!

KRITZ: Go on then, now this I've got to hear!

SUMA: Yeah!

(Taking a deep exasperated breath, Kritz composed herself and turned to Suma.)

KRITZ: I apologise for my husbands conduct, Suma!

SUMA: Why? It aint your fault he's a philandering pig!

(Feeling it was somewhat unfair for him to be saddled with the role of the villain of the piece, Flaxley protested.)

FLAXLEY: Hey! So much for hearing *my* side of the story!

KRITZ: Go on then, we're listening!

SUMA: Yeah! Let's hear it, Flaxley.

(The two furious ladies then stood angrily, arms folded in front of him demanding an explanation. Knowing running away would be futile but refusing to rule it out, Flaxley looked at them both nervously then scratched behind his ear.)

FLAXLEY: I came to save you, Kritz, but I got captured...

KRITZ: You? Captured? How?

FLAXLEY: I'd rather not go into that if you don't mind, it was a bit embarrassing! Anyway I was going to be executed, so as a last desperate attempt to escape and rescue you, I seduced Suma!

(He sighed then looked to Suma.)

FLAXLEY: I apologise for hurting you, Suma, but I love my wife and I'd do anything to save her!

(Suma hung her head and sniffed back a tear.)

SUMA: You said you loved me!

(Flaxley scratched his head with shame etched onto his face.)

FLAXLEY: I didn't... I merely implied things of that ilk!

SUMA: Now what am I gonna do, I can't go back to the Trepe, can I? Not now I helped two prisoners escape.

(Holding her husband entirely responsible for the incident, Kritz sighed then offered her a smile.)

KRITZ: You could just tell them Flaxley kidnapped you!

(Flaxley gave Kritz a sideways glance then furrowed his brow as Suma.)

FLAXLEY: Why would you want to go back to that pit of human indecency anyway?

SUMA: My whole life is there! I don't know anything else.

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: I suppose!

(Kritz gave her a consoling smile.)

KRITZ: Don't worry, next time the Trepe come, pretend we kidnapped you! You'll be fine.

(Suma nodded and tried to force a smile.)

SUMA: Yeah, that should work! I'll look an idiot, but I'm the laughing stock already, so it doesn't matter! Thanks Kritz!

(She then glared at Flaxley.)

SUMA: Bastard!

(As she sat down on a sofa feeling sorry for herself, Flaxley turned to Kritz wearing a sorry expression.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz, I really am sorry about this, but it was the only way I could think of getting us both out of there. I never wanted to hurt you, you have to believe that. I can't live without you, so I just did what I felt I *had* to do.

(Fully understanding that he'd only done it out of desperation to rescue her, Kritz hung her head and sighed. His actions may have hurt her greatly and she wanted to punch him until her arms fell off, but in her heart she knew she couldn't condemn him for acting rashly when his deeds were driven purely out of love for her.)

KRITZ: Flaxley... darling... I *do* understand, my love. I do. That doesn't make it hurt any less though.

(Flaxley sighed.)

FLAXLEY: I know it doesn't. But all I could think about was that the Trepe had you and I might never see you again, it was driving me insane.

(Hating seeing her husband look so crestfallen, Kritz offered him half a smile.)

KRITZ: Well, I'm back now.

(She looked uncertain.)

KRITZ: But for how long?

FLAXLEY: What do you mean?

KRITZ: You don't think the Trepe are just going to let us get away with this, do you?

(Contemplating her words silently for a moment, Flaxley looked enlightened then slapped his forehead in despair. He'd just made a realisation that he *would* have made a long time beforehand, had he been thinking straight.)

FLAXLEY: Crap! As soon as they see we're missing they're going to come straight here looking for us, aren't they?

(He clenched his fist and growled under his breath.)

FLAXLEY: I'm a fucking idiot. What was I thinking?

KRITZ: Hey, it's okay. We'll cross that bridge when we come to it. Besides, it was my mistake too. I was so emotional I didn't think of it either, I just ran with you.

FLAXLEY: But a knight is supposed to realise these things in advance.

KRITZ: Maybe... look, forget that for now and just hold me, will you? I've had a shitty twenty four hours.

(With that, they embraced one another longingly before embarking on a passionate kiss. For both of them, being together like this was everything their hearts desired. Right now, they felt like they were in heaven, a stark contrast to how Suma was feeling. Failing to share their sense of joy as she sat a few feet away from them, watching them kiss, Suma burst into tears. This was the final insult.)

SUMA: Why would you do that in front of me???

(As she poured her heart out, the front door then burst open and Lefiat, Derek and Mandika bounded eagerly through it. Having been frantically worrying all morning, the sight of Flaxley and Kritz was quite the sight for sore eyes.)

LEFIAT: They're here!!!

DEREK: Thank the stars! Are you two okay?

FLAXLEY: We're fine, Derek! Hope I didn't worry you.

DEREK: Actually...

(Before he could continue, Kritz threw her arms up in bewilderment and cut him off mid sentence.)

KRITZ: What brings you guys here?

FLAXLEY: They're here to help!

DEREK: Well, we *were* here just to visit, but once we found out...

KRITZ: Well, for whatever the reason, it's great to see you guys again.

(Just then, Mandika bounced for joy.)

MANDIKA: Kritz!!!

(Inexplicably, she then ran up to Kritz and hugged her like a long lost sister.)

MANDIKA: Thank god you're here. My hair's been impossible all morning!

(Kritz hugged her back and smiled sympathetically.)

KRITZ: Don't worry, babe. I'll help you sort it out in a minute.

MANDIKA: I knew you would.

(Having had to listen to Mandika bang on for hours about how much she hated Kritz, Lefiat furrowed his brow.)

LEFIAT: So that's how she greets people she hates, is it? What would she have done if she actually liked her?

(Derek rolled his eyes.)

DEREK: She doesn't hate her, Lefiat.

LEFIAT: Clearly!

(Derek then looked to Mandika and frowned with disdain.)

DEREK: She doesn't *like* her much either! She just likes having someone around who doesn't mind helping her with her hair.

(At once, both Kritz and Mandika turned their heads and glared at him.)

MANDIKA: It's important!

KRITZ: Hair matters!

(As Derek reeled away, Lefiat chuckled to himself.)

LEFIAT: Don't let Bonson hear you say that.

(They all laughed for a moment then Derek smiled.)

DEREK: That's only the second time I've ever heard you make a joke, Lefiat! The last time you made one was back in Marlboro eighteen months ago.

(Lefiat sighed.)

LEFIAT: Actually, it was pretty much the same joke, Derek. A cheap shot at Bonson's bald head.

(As they both nodded to themselves, Kritz stepped back from hugging Mandika and approached them both with a smile.)

KRITZ: Hi, Lefiat. Hey, Derek!

LEFIAT: Hello!

DEREK: Hi, Kritz! It's good to see you're safe!

(Kritz sighed.)

KRITZ: Yeah, at least safe for now. This isn't over yet, I feel!

(Lefiat looked thoughtful then decided to take a leaf out of Mandika's book and give Kritz a hug. Anything to score kudos points with his embittered royal girlfriend.)

LEFIAT: We missed you!

(As he threw his arms around her and squeezed her tight, Kritz stood rigid and raised a baffled eyebrow.)

KRITZ: Um... Lefiat?

(Continuing to squeeze her, Lefiat glanced towards Mandika then whimpered. He hadn't won himself the kudos he coveted but he most certainly *had* won Mandika's attention.)

MANDIKA: Hey! Get off of her, you pervert!

LEFIAT: *You* did it!

MANDIKA: I'm allowed, I'm a girl!

(Lefiat frowned as he released Kritz from the hug, annoyed at always being in the wrong.)

LEFIAT: I was only doing it to please *you*!

MANDIKA: Rubbish! Your face lit up like a chamber full of lanterns and you couldn't wait to wrap your arms around her! Which begs the question, why are *you* so pleased to see her anyway?

(She snarled.)

MANDIKA: You missed ogling her boobs, didn't you???

LEFIAT: I never! I already told you! I only hugged her to please *you*! I haven't missed her one bit! Personally, I couldn't give a crap whether she's safe or not!

(An eerie silence ensued, as many cold stares came his way.)

LEFIAT: Obviously I *do* give a crap, but... you know... stupid words!!!

(With that, he turned tail and fled out of the front door as fast as his legs would carry him.)

KRITZ: He hasn't changed then!

(Mandika smiled.)

MANDIKA: He didn't mean to be...

KRITZ: I know! He panicked and did...

(They spoke at the same time.)

MANDIKA & KRITZ: A Lefiat!

(Once they'd all stopped laughing at the poor hapless lad in question, Derek launched into Flaxley.)

DEREK: As good as it is to see you're safe again Kritz, what the hell were you thinking of, Flaxley?

(Flaxley frowned, quite taken aback by his attitude.)

FLAXLEY: Don't use that tone with me!

DEREK: Idiot!!! You do realise there's less than 48 hours left to find a way to save this town, don't you?

FLAXLEY: I'm well aware of that!

DEREK: Really? Only, the way I see it is, if we do save this place, it'll be despite you!

FLAXLEY: Don't piss me off Derek, I aint in the mood!

DEREK: Look, this needs saying! We've all been out there working our skin off for you, and what the hell have you been doing?

FLAXLEY: I was doing what I thought was right at the time, saving Kritz.

DEREK: Why? Chances are they'll be back for her in a minute, you idiot!

FLAXLEY: Don't you think I've figured that out already?

(He snarled.)

FLAXLEY: I'm well aware that I fucked up, Derek; I don't need you to hammer home the point.

DEREK: Good! Only, you do understand that while you're bugging about and running around in circles like a headless chicken, time is running out, don't you?

FLAXLEY: I realise that.

DEREK: I hope so, Flaxley, because your lack of focus could end up costing us dear!

(He sighed angrily.)

DEREK: If you weren't back yet I was going to go to Trepe Village to look for you. That would have been more time lost.

FLAXLEY: Well, I'm back now, so you won't have to!

(He nodded defiantly then folded his arms.)

FLAXLEY: I'm back and *this* time, I have a plan.

(Derek gave him a distrusting look.)

DEREK: Oh yeah? So what *is* this plan then, Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: Well, the way I see it is....

(As he caught sight of the Trepe, Suma, in the corner of his eye, he clammed up.)

FLAXLEY: I'll tell you later!

(At this point, Lefiat sneaked back through the front door, trying desperately not to be noticed. Having just inadvertently told Kritz he didn't care whether she was safe or not, he feared there'd be reprisals and very much hoped his return would go unseen. Unfortunately for him, however, his stealth skills needed a lot of work. Before the front door could even close, Mandika spotted him and rolled her eyes.)

MANDIKA: Here comes mistake boy!

LEFIAT: Oh god!

(Undeniably rumbled, he froze on the spot and started to sweat.)

LEFIAT: Um... Kritz... I didn't mean what I said before!

(Kritz shrugged.)

KRITZ: I know!

LEFIAT: I meant, I do give a crap, but not about you...

(He spanned his head and rolled his eyes.)

LEFIAT: Why do I even bother?

(Kritz grinned.)

KRITZ: It's okay, I get it! You care about us all equally!

(Lefiat smiled, relieved that she understood.)

KRITZ: I know Mandika tried to insinuate that you like staring at my chest, but I know you don't think of me that way!

(Forgetting himself for a moment, Lefiat scoffed and gestured to her chest.)

LEFIAT: Are you kidding? I'd trample all over my own mother to kop a handful of those...

(At once, his eyes bulged and he started to gape, his anguish not helped by Kritz's furious expression. Barely able to believe he'd said his thought out loud, and well aware he was in deep trouble, he sighed then plonked himself down next to Suma looking like a naughty schoolboy awaiting the headmaster's wrath.)

LEFIAT: Go on; yell at me, I deserve it.

(Kritz rolled her eyes and gave a stifled laugh.)

KRITZ: Pillock!

(Mandika, however, wasn't so forgiving.)

MANDIKA: How dare you be unfaithful to me???

LEFIAT: I wasn't!

MANDIKA: Your eyes were and so was your dirty mind!!!

(Lefiat whimpered.)

LEFIAT: They didn't mean to be!

(Mandika then shook her head and glanced away.)

MANDIKA: You wait until my father hears about this!

LEFIAT: Oh no!

(Mandika then glared at Kritz.)

MANDIKA: As for you, would it really hurt to wear some clothes now and again?

KRITZ: I *am* wearing clothes!

MANDIKA: Rubbish! I wear more than that in the bath!

KRITZ: Then you have yours baths severely overdressed!

MANDIKA: I didn't mean it literally!!!

KRITZ: Then how did you mean it?

MANDIKA: Figuratively, obviously!

(Kritz scoffed.)

KRITZ: Yeah, right. You can't just make up words and expect people to take you seriously, Mandika!

(Mandika just stared at her for a moment then rolled her eyes.)

MANDIKA: My bad. I forgot you were an idiot. Just... forget it.

KRITZ: Luckily for you, I already have, babe.

(With a forced smile, Kritz then looked across at Derek, who was deep in conversation with Flaxley. At once, her face turned extremely serious and she felt an aching in her heart. Not only did she not know how to tell Flaxley about his son, but something Derek had said earlier was starting to echo around her head, niggling at her. They didn't have much time and Tifaeris needed Flaxley to be focussed. It was a focus he hadn't found simply because of her. Running the thought over and over in her mind, whilst blocking out the sound of Mandika chastising Lefiat, she bit her lip then resolved herself to what she'd have to do. She'd have to talk to him and make him realise that he needed to be completely focussed only on stopping the Trepe. Tifaeris couldn't afford to have him obsessing about *her* and making mistakes because of it. If the Trepe took her again, which she fully expected them to do, she knew she'd have to convince him to play it very differently this time.)

(As lunch was served some twenty minutes later, Kritz tried to put her worries aside and enjoy the chance to catch up with the others while getting a good meal inside her. Emulating Kritz's show of bravado, Flaxley also tried to put his woes to the back of his mind as he chewed on a chicken leg and chatted to Derek. Too heartbroken to face food at this moment, Suma just watched them from the sofa with a miserable pout on her lips.)

FLAXLEY: So, how's the building coming on?

DEREK: Not long to go now, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: Really?

LEFIAT: It's true; Derek's a really fast worker!

(Derek grinned to himself.)

DEREK: That's because if I ever need an extra pair of hands I just use my feet!

(He laughed a hearty laugh by himself until everyone else's scornful silence, sent him shrinking in his chair.)

DEREK: Stop staring at me!

LEFIAT: Even I never laugh at my own jokes!

MANDIKA: Nobody laughs at your jokes!

(Lefiat looked unusually defiant.)

LEFIAT: They laugh at *you*, you're a joke!

(Mandika, of course, was livid.)

MANDIKA: Right! That's it; you're seriously in the dog house now!

LEFIAT: That'll make a change from being in the dog house *anyway*!

(Unconvinced by the animosity between them, Kritz scoffed.)

KRITZ: Oh behave, you two. You love each other...

MANDIKA: Oh, shut up, you tart!

(Although Kritz had mellowed a little over the last eighteen months, there was still one thing you shouldn't ever call her if you wished to retain your teeth and that was a tart.

Immediately, she leapt to her feet snarling like the vicious Trepe of old.)

KRITZ: Tart???

(Looking fed up to the back teeth, Derek swiftly intervened.)

DEREK: For the love of life, you lot!!! All we need now is Bonson sitting there insulting Lefiat and we'll be right back to where we were when we first met!

KRITZ: She called me a tart!!!

DEREK: Then ignore her! Put up with it! Tolerate it! Like friends ought to! Holy crap, I thought we'd come a long way since we first met, but if everyone's just going to snipe and bait each other then I guess I was wrong! I really thought we were over that!

(He shook his head.)

DEREK: Honestly, you humans never seem to know how lucky you are!

FLAXLEY: What do you mean?

DEREK: If my time on this planet has taught me anything, it's that friendship is the most important thing in the world. And friendship means putting up with sly digs here and there. There's absolutely no need for all this flying off the handle and ranting at each other over the slightest little thing!

(He shook his head.)

DEREK: We need to be together, *especially* at times like these! So let's stop bitching and get along, shall we?

(Knowing he was right, Mandika offered Kritz an apologetic smile.)

MANDIKA: Yeah, sorry Kritz! I know you hate being called a tart, but sometimes, I can't seem to resist it!

KRITZ: Then try! If not for yourself then for your father! I hear state funerals are expensive.

MANDIKA: Fine, I'll try, okay?

(Giving her a sour glance, Kritz then slowly sat back down. Stunned by what she saw before her, Suma scoffed.)

SUMA: Wow, I thought you people we're friends!

FLAXLEY: We are Suma, we are! Everyone's just stressed, that's all.

SUMA: Who asked you? You dirty, low down...

(Before Suma could turn the air blue, Derek gave her a baffled glance and cut in.)

DEREK: What? Who...

(He furrowed his brow.)

DEREK: This Trepe a friend of yours?

(Kritz scowled at Flaxley.)

KRITZ: It's a long story!

(As Flaxley hid his face, Derek nodded understandingly.)

DEREK: I see!

KRITZ: Derek!!!

(Remembering how much Kritz hated his mind reading ability, Derek offered her a smile.)

DEREK: Sorry, Kritz!

(Carried away by the air of concession in the room, Lefiat turned to Mandika.)

LEFIAT: And I'm sorry Mandika, darling! You're not a joke!

MANDIKA: I'm still not speaking to you!

LEFIAT: But, Mandika...

MANDIKA: It's "your highness" to you!

(Lefiat looked a little depressed and folded his arms.)

FLAXLEY: Chin up Lefiat, she loves you really!

MANDIKA: Don't *you* start!!!

(Hating seeing Lefiat so glum, Flaxley smiled and leant on the table, eager to give the lad's self-esteem a lift.)

FLAXLEY: I have a job for you, Lefiat!

LEFIAT: For me?

FLAXLEY: Yes, if you think you can handle it.

MANDIKA: 100 lig says he fucks it up!

(Flaxley furrowed his brow at her.)

FLAXLEY: He'll do fine.

LEFIAT: You say that, Flaxley, but I reckon the smart money...

(Flaxley rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Do you want the job or not?

(Always eager to help, Lefiat nodded.)

LEFIAT: Yes, please.

FLAXLEY: Top chap. It's nothing difficult. I just need you to show our guest, Suma here, to the spare room.

KRITZ: What spare room?

FLAXLEY: Our bedroom! I just need her to be elsewhere for a bit.

KRITZ: Oh... okay then.

FLAXLEY: Well, Lefiat?

(Satisfied that even he couldn't make a mess of such a task, Lefiat beamed.)

LEFIAT: Leave it to me, Flaxley!

(With that, he got to his feet and looked to Suma.)

LEFIAT: Come on Satsuma...

(He then pointed the way with his arm.)

LEFIAT: It's this way!

MANDIKA: That's the front door, you...

(Kritz pointed to the bedroom.)

KRITZ: Take her through *that* door, Lefiat.

LEFIAT: Oh... sure, I knew that. Come on, Satsuma.

SUMA: My name's Suma!

LEFIAT: Sorry, come on!

(With that, she climbed to her feet and Lefiat led her away.)

SUMA: You're not very bright, are you?

LEFIAT: Obviously! What's your point?

(As they left the room Flaxley watched them intently then swung to face Derek.)

FLAXLEY: Right, now *she's* gone, Derek, here's the plan.

(He nodded firmly then spoke up with pride in his voice.)

FLAXLEY: The Trepe are likely to come back for Kritz some time soon and when they do, we're gonna kill them all then go over there and destroy their village!

(Derek looked at him blankly and replied in slow motion.)

DEREK: Right!

FLAXLEY: What do you mean, "right"? I know it's not the most complicated plan in the world but by golly it's a good one!

(Derek held his forehead in his palm and sighed.)

DEREK: You make it sound so simple!

FLAXLEY: Well... isn't it?

DEREK: No! Even if we *could* beat them when they come here, they'll still have hundreds of soldiers back at Trepe Village!

FLAXLEY: Point being?

DEREK: Who's going to fight them all? Us two?

FLAXLEY: And Kritz!

DEREK: They're heavily trained warriors Flaxley, I mean you're good but come off it!

(Flaxley looked thoughtful.)

DEREK: We may strike some of them down but the odds are unthinkable!

(Flaxley looked stunned and stared into space.)

FLAXLEY: Oh for the love of god, that's exactly the same plan the elder and I already rejected! And for good reasons!

DEREK: Like the fact that if we lose they'll burn Tifaeris down for certain?

FLAXLEY: Exactly!

(Flaxley sighed and hung his head.)

FLAXLEY: What's wrong with me? I used to be so good at this kind of thing!

DEREK: Don't be down-hearted, Flaxley. You haven't had to think like a knight for quite a while now; you're bound to be a bit rusty!

FLAXLEY: A *bit* rusty? If I was any rustier you could punch a hole right through me!

(He shook his head and looked to the floorboards.)

FLAXLEY: What's going on, Derek? First I run off and rescue Kritz, without even considering for a moment that they'll just come back and take her again. And now... my plan... hell it wasn't even a plan, was it? It was just an intended outcome.

(He sighed and looked to Kritz.)

FLAXLEY: Then I don't know what to do. The Trepe are going to come for you again, I'm certain of that.

KRITZ: So am I.

(She nodded firmly.)

KRITZ: And if they do, let them take me.

FLAXLEY: What???

KRITZ: I mean it! And while I'm gone, you can figure out a way to defeat them. That's what you do best.

(He gave her an uncertain glance.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz, I...

(Kritz leant forwards and looked deep into his eyes.)

KRITZ: Flaxley, I can handle whatever they have in store for me, okay? You don't need to worry about me!

FLAXLEY: You sure about that?

KRITZ: I'm positive. The reason you can't think straight is because you're worrying about me all the time.

(She smiled.)

KRITZ: I love the fact that I mean so much to you, but you have to change your mindset. Let me go and start thinking like the Flaxley I fell in love with.

FLAXLEY: What... and just let them take you away?

KRITZ: Yes! And while I'm away, you can figure out a plan to defeat them. Forget about me, I'll be fine. Focus... find a way to win. Then kick their arses from here to kingdom come! And *then*... come and get me, okay?

FLAXLEY: But...

KRITZ: But nothing. Your love for me has been a distraction until now, Flaxley. You can't let things go on that way. Channel everything you have into finding a way to destroy them instead. And then, when it's over, when we've won, being together again can be our reward. Make me your goal, darling, not your obsession... or your downfall. After all, your failure will spell the end for Tifaeris and I don't want to be responsible for that. Our love should be a power, not the thing that destroys everything we've worked for.

(She leant forward then spoke softly.)

KRITZ: Okay?

(Flaxley stared back into her eyes for a moment then replied in a firm tone.)

FLAXLEY: Okay.

KRITZ: I believe in you, my love. You can do it.

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: I won't let you down. Though the gods only know *how* we're going to defeat them.

(Derek offered him a consoling smile and nodded.)

DEREK: Don't worry, Flaxley. I'm sure if we put our heads together we can think of something!

(At this point, Lefiat returned, having left Suma sobbing in the bedroom.)

LEFIAT: Any chance of a cup of tea, I'm parched.

DEREK: No, actually. Us three have work to do, Lefiat!

(Lefiat glared at him bitterly.)

LEFIAT: You're mean!

DEREK: You drank two cups already!

LEFIAT: Did I?

DEREK: Yes, one of them was mine!

LEFIAT: Whoops!

DEREK: Now come on!

(With that, Derek climbed down from the table and peered up at Flaxley.)

DEREK: If you need us, we'll be over at the building site, Flaxley.

(With a sigh, Mandika also climbed to her feet.)

MANDIKA: Fine. Back to the grind for me too, I suppose. See you later, guys!

FLAXLEY: See you later. And thanks for everything, chaps.

DEREK: Don't thank us, Flaxley. It's the least we can do.
MANDIKA: Speak for yourself, Derek, I like being thanked.
DEREK: Yes, well... never mind. Come on.

(And with that, the three of them headed back outside into the scorching Tifaeris sunshine.
As he watched the door slowly creep shut being them, Flaxley couldn't help but smile.)

FLAXLEY: You know, it's really good to see them again!

KRITZ: It is!

(He then turned to Kritz.)

FLAXLEY: It's great to see *you* again!

KRITZ: I missed you!

(With that, they both got up from the table then stepped in one another's arms, holding each other tight for a good few minutes as they savoured every silent second of being alone together. When she eventually pulled back from the embrace, Kritz stared despairingly into Flaxley's eyes then whimpered sorrowfully.)

KRITZ: Now we're alone, darling... there's something I need to tell you!

FLAXLEY: Really? You sound serious!

KRITZ: I am!

(She whimpered miserably.)

KRITZ: I don't know how to tell you this...

(She clammed up and bit her lip.)

FLAXLEY: What is it, my love?

(Struggling to find the right words, she sighed and her bottom lip started to protrude.)

KRITZ: I... I was... pregnant!

FLAXLEY: Was?

KRITZ: But... by Trepe law you have to be at least 30 to have a child... so they...

(She put her head on his chest, trying desperately to hold back her tears.)

KRITZ: Sorry!

(Hating seeing her so down, Flaxley spoke back tenderly.)

FLAXLEY: What's wrong, Kritz?

(Knowing there was absolutely no way she could soften the blow, she screwed up her fists then looked him straight in the eye.)

KRITZ: They removed the child!

(With that, she burst out crying and held onto Flaxley for dear life as she spoke through her tears.)

KRITZ: I... couldn't... stop them... they put me to sleep!

(Flaxley looked utterly devastated and spoke in a lost voice.)

FLAXLEY: Removed the child? How?

KRITZ: They have a powerful medicine woman... she took our son away!

FLAXLEY: Our son?

(Putting her needs first, Flaxley held onto Kritz giving her as much comfort as he could while trying to hold back his own grief.)

KRITZ: Flaxley?

(She stood back from him and wiped her teary eyes.)

KRITZ: I love you!

(Looking deep into her eyes, Flaxley gently ran his fingers across her cheek.)

FLAXLEY: I love *you*, Kritz!

(Pouring out her heart, she hugged him again.)

KRITZ: I'm so sorry!

(Flaxley replied through gritted teeth.)

FLAXLEY: Hey, don't *you* be sorry. This isn't *your* doing! I can hardly tell you the pain I feel right now, but I promise you this... Jazzu *will* pay for this!

KRITZ: You don't have to *tell* me, my love. I can see the pain in your face!

FLAXLEY: Yes, this helmet's far too tight! I've been meaning to buy a new one!

(Kritz shook her head.)

KRITZ: Don't! You know you don't have to hide your feelings from *me*!

FLAXLEY: I know that, my love. And I also know that as long as we're together we can get through this!

(Stepping back from the hug again, she sniffed back a tear and nodded sternly.)

KRITZ: And we will!

(She then looked sadly to the floor again.)

FLAXLEY: Hey, don't let it beat you, darling. You said yourself, we can get through this!

KRITZ: I know... it's not that... it's...

(She pouted.)

KRITZ: As much as I love you and I understand why you did it, I can't stop thinking about you and Suma, doing... our dance!

(Flaxley gave her a questioning glance.)

FLAXLEY: Having sex, you mean?

(Realising what he said, his hair almost stood on end. Luckily for him, however, Derek came back into the room and interjected before Kritz could say anything.)

DEREK: Sorry to interrupt, chaps. Kritz, I have something for you! I forgot to give it to you earlier.

(He approached her with a small piece of golden jewellery in his palm.)

KRITZ: For me? Thanks Derek, that's so sweet!

(Upon reaching her, Derek placed the jewellery in her palm and smiled. In return, she stooped and kissed him on the top of his head, almost bringing forth an extra terrestrial heart attack.)

DEREK: What??? I never touched her, Flaxley! She tried to seduce *me*!!!

(Flaxley smiled.)

FLAXLEY: It's okay Derek! It's a thing human women do, nothing sexual!

DEREK: Better not be!

(Ignoring his panic, Kritz looked at the item and smiled.)

KRITZ: It's a bracelet?

DEREK: Um... it's an anklet, actually!

KRITZ: Really?

DEREK: Yes, a mystic anklet, it contains lightning magic!

(Kritz looked most impressed.)

KRITZ: Cool! How do I use it?

DEREK: The same way you use a magic armlet.

(He shrugged.)

DEREK: I figured the Trepe would confiscate a magic armlet though. So an anklet makes more sense. With your boots on, no-one will detect it!

KRITZ: That's superb! Cheers, Derek!

DEREK: Just remember to use it wisely, you know... when it's the right time!

KRITZ: And when's that?

DEREK: You'll *know* when it's the right time.

KRITZ: I will?

DEREK: Well, I'm guessing but, I think you're too wise to start shooting all the Trepe with it the minute they come for you! You can use it to defend yourself with if things get desperate once your back with the Trepe.

KRITZ: Ah, okay. Sweet. Thanks, Derek!

DEREK: You're welcome.

(He nodded then started to turn away.)

DEREK: I'll be off then.

(As Derek paced out of the front door, Flaxley smiled to Kritz then tried to remember what they were discussing.)

FLAXLEY: Where were we?

(As the conversation they'd been having came back to him, however, he very much wished he hadn't said anything.)

FLAXLEY: Bugger!

(At this point, Suma came back from the bedroom looking thoroughly miserably.)

FLAXLEY: And double bugger!

SUMA: I don't want to sit in there anymore, it smells of you two having sex!

(She looked flustered.)

SUMA: Hey, where did everyone go?

(As Kritz took a seat at the table, giving Suma filthy looks, Flaxley's wanderlust rapidly came to the fore once again.)

FLAXLEY: Um... I'll just be in the kitchen!

(Not about to let him off that easily, Kritz frowned and pointed him to a seat.)

KRITZ: Sit down, you! The three of us are going to discuss this like adults!

(As Kritz sat there giving him a fiery glance, Flaxley hung his head then skulked towards the table.)

FLAXLEY: Yeah, okay.

KRITZ: You too, Suma, you...

(She clenched her fist then pushed away her anger.)

KRITZ: Sit. Please.

(Just as Flaxley had done Suma reluctantly took a seat and glanced at Kritz nervously.)

SUMA: What's to discuss?

(Kritz looked hard at her and scowled.)

KRITZ: Like you don't know!

(She growled under her breath then shook her head at her.)

KRITZ: Fine, look... I know it wasn't your fault but when I look at you I just wanna hit you!

(Flaxley attempted to speak up in his own defence but failed to even make a single syllable before Kritz glared at him and cut him off.)

KRITZ: *And* you!

FLAXLEY: Yeah, okay.

KRITZ: This is serious, Flaxley. If the Trepe come soon and take us both away, that's fine. But if they don't... I mean, if she's here for much longer, there's likely to be a violent episode.

(Suma whimpered.)

SUMA: I don't like violence.

KRITZ: Well don't panic just yet, I haven't decided which one of you I'm gonna batter yet!

(Flaxley gave her a sorrowful pout.)

FLAXLEY: Be fair, Kritz. A moment ago, you said you understood why I'd done it.

SUMA: And you said it wasn't *my* fault!

(Kritz snarled.)

KRITZ: And that still stands! It doesn't make me any less heartbroken though!

(She nodded to affirm her words.)

KRITZ: I'm upset and I'm angry, so we're gonna talk about it.

(Flaxley looked stumped.)

FLAXLEY: And say what exactly?

KRITZ: Whatever it takes to clear the air and make me feel better!

(Offering her the world's cheesiest grin, Flaxley pushed his luck.)

FLAXLEY: Well... we could always pretend it never happened, that works for me!

(Before she could even begin to scold him, however, Suma cut in.)

SUMA: I don't see what the problem is, Kritz, you know exactly how to resolve this!

(Kritz looked sheepishly from side to side as Suma continued.)

SUMA: The Trepe have had a tried and tested way to deal with adulterers for centuries! You *are* familiar with the Trepe punishment for an adulterous sex slave, right?

FLAXLEY: I'm not her sex slave!

SUMA: No, but you *are* her man!

(Flaxley looked extremely peeved.)

FLAXLEY: Well what about *you*? I'll be buggered if we're going to sit here discussing *my* punishment while you get away scot-free!

(Suma whimpered.)

SUMA: You broke my heart! That should be punishment enough.

FLAXLEY: Yes, you'd like that, wouldn't you?

(Kritz sighed.)

KRITZ: She does have a point, actually!

FLAXLEY: Yes, a bad one!

KRITZ: No, not at all. *She's* hurting already. And *she* didn't wrong me, *you* did! She can go to hell for all I care, but you, Flaxley, you I love. It's your actions that hurt me, not hers. It's *you* I need to sort this out with.

(Suma looked relieved then nodded firmly.)

SUMA: Then you know what you have to do! The Trepe method for punishing adulterous men is exactly what's required.

FLAXLEY: Now hang on a minute...

KRITZ: Be quiet, Flaxley!

(Kritz sighed then looked to Suma.)

KRITZ: Normally I'd agree with you, Suma, but I understand that he only did it for *me*! It wouldn't be right to put him through that kind of torture! It's too much!

(Flaxley's eyes bulged and he held his groin.)

FLAXLEY: Torture?

SUMA: It'd solve the problem!

KRITZ: Even so, I love him, how could I do *that* to him?

FLAXLEY: Well said, Kritz!

SUMA: He did it to you!

(Flaxley was baffled.)

FLAXLEY: What?

KRITZ: It's a *Trepe* tradition anyway, and I don't care for *their* ways anymore!

SUMA: It'd work though!

KRITZ: Of course it would, but I couldn't do it to him!

FLAXLEY: Damn right! If you think I'm just gonna sit there while you torture my genitalia, you're very much mistaken!

KRITZ: No-one's gonna torture your genitalia!

FLAXLEY: I know! I just said as much!

KRITZ: It's far worse!

FLAXLEY: Then what is it? Not that I'll let you do it!

KRITZ: Well... you aint gonna like this!

(Stumbling over how to say it, she could barely bring herself to tell him. The aggrieved

party, Suma, however, had no such problem.)

SUMA: The Trepe punishment for adulterous men is to make them watch while you have sex with the same person *they* were unfaithful with!

(Not sure he'd heard her properly, Flaxley tried not to show his joy.)

FLAXLEY: Did you just say...

(He gestured from Kritz to Suma and back again.)

SUMA: Yup!

FLAXLEY: You mean, you two? Doing it? Together? With each other? While I watch?

(Kritz sighed and shook her head.)

KRITZ: Yes, but I couldn't do that to you!

(Singing inside, Flaxley hid his emotions well.)

FLAXLEY: You could, I suppose!

KRITZ: No! I love you too much! No-one deserves such a punishment!

FLAXLEY: Oh, go on!

(Baffled by his enthusiasm, Kritz did a double take.)

KRITZ: What?

(Fearing he'd been rumbled, Flaxley desperately tried to think.)

FLAXLEY: Um... I mean...

(As an idea rocketed to him, he stood up and pulled a heroic expression.)

FLAXLEY: Darling! I was unfaithful to you! I put my manhood in the sacred places of an unauthorised shrew! I should be punished accordingly! It would be an affront to my masculinity if you didn't show me the error of my ways! I shagged Suma and I insist you do the same, it's the only way!

(Kritz swooned.)

KRITZ: You'd go through *that* for *me*? You're so brave!

FLAXLEY: I try to be! Now let's head to the bedroom where you can purge me of my sins!

(With that, he headed excitedly into the bedroom and sat down eagerly on a chair at the foot of the bed. Following him into the room, an apprehensive Kritz and a vengeful Suma headed for the bed.)

KRITZ: Are you sure about this?

FLAXLEY: It has to be, darling!

KRITZ: Okay, if you think it'll work!

SUMA: Of course it'll work! It always does!

(Trying to look as if he was composing himself, Flaxley folded his arms and sat back.)

FLAXLEY: Whenever you're ready!

(Shuddering at the thought of hurting him, Kritz waved her hands dismissively before her face.)

KRITZ: No, I can't hurt you like this!

(Fearing she wouldn't go through with it, Flaxley pleaded for her to save his soul.)

FLAXLEY: Darling, please don't offend my pride by letting me off of such a heinous crime!

KRITZ: But...

FLAXLEY: Do your worst my love! The filthier the better! For the sake of our marriage, I need to learn my lesson the hard way.

(Reassured that it was indeed the right thing for the future of their relationship, Kritz sighed and laid on the bed with Suma.)

KRITZ: Here goes then.

(As Suma and Kritz nestled into one another and began to kiss, Flaxley grinned from ear to ear.)

FLAXLEY: Tongues, ladies, tongues! I need to pay!!!

(Following a few minutes of passionate kissing, Kritz leant back and looked at the beaming

Flaxley.)

KRITZ: Is that Enough? You've gone red!

FLAXLEY: No, I need to learn my lesson well!

(As he watched the two naked beauties get down to some heavy foreplay, Flaxley sighed with joy, forgetting all about Tifaeris and the troubles with the Trepe. Right now, he thought he'd died and gone to heaven. Kritz, on the other hand, couldn't help but feel guilty.)

KRITZ: Are you sure you're okay?

FLAXLEY: Keep going, my love! I haven't suffered nearly enough yet!

(When Kritz and Suma eventually got down to the hard-core stuff, that even the god forsaken, immoral clubs in the town of Azagotse forbid its lusty patrons from seeing, Flaxley was barely able to contain his excitement.)

FLAXLEY: Damn, these thin trousers!

KRITZ: No more, he's suffered enough!

(With that, Kritz rolled Suma to one side, climbed from the bed and started to get dressed, much to Flaxley's dismay.)

FLAXLEY: Don't stop now!!! I was nearly purged then!

KRITZ: You've suffered enough!

(Suma looked at him from the bed and nodded, clearly impressed.)

SUMA: What a brave man!

(Certain it was over, Flaxley nodded in concession.)

FLAXLEY: Well, it was tough but I'd do anything for you, Kritz!

(Kritz couldn't help but smile the wildest of smiles.)

KRITZ: You're really amazing! You must really, really love me to have sat through that.

FLAXLEY: It was nothing! I'd do anything to prove my love to you, darling. Even if it means I have to sit and watch you do the filthy with a *thousand* beautiful women, I'll be only too happy to do it.

(Kritz exhaled lovingly.)

KRITZ: Oh my god, you're such an amazing husband. I really love you.

FLAXLEY: And I think I've proven that I love you too.

KRITZ: And then some.

(With only a crop top, micro-skirt and boots to put on, it wasn't long before Kritz finished dressing and raced around the bed to give him a hug.)

KRITZ: As horrid as it was to hurt you like that, darling, I feel much better about your infidelity now!

FLAXLEY: Funnily enough, so do I!

SUMA: Me too!

(She looked baffled.)

SUMA: Weird! Jazzu said men weren't interested in love! Only sex.

KRITZ: Well she's wrong! Flaxley loves me, as you can see! And one day, unless you remain a Trepe, you could be as happy as I am!

(Suma nodded, satisfied she'd learnt something.)

SUMA: The Trepe *are* right about one thing though! That punishment definitely works!

(Flaxley agreed heartily.)

FLAXLEY: Well, I was only too glad to help! And if you want to punish me more later, I'll be only too willing to oblige!

KRITZ: No, you've done enough!

FLAXLEY: Spoilsport!

(Just then, Lefiat rushed into the bedroom in a blind panic and stopped dead with a wide grin on his face.)

LEFIAT: Satsuma's naked!!!

(As Suma covered herself, Kritz slapped him.)

KRITZ: Lefiat, you filthy pervert!

(Lefiat flinched as he remembered why he'd raced inside.)

LEFIAT: Oh, yeah!!! The Trepe are coming!!! And Ouch!!!

(Flaxley grimaced angrily.)

FLAXLEY: Damn it!!!

KRITZ: It's okay, we were expecting this!

(She turned and gave Flaxley a firm hug.)

KRITZ: Darling, I'm relying on *you* now.

(With that, she climbed up on tip-toe to whisper in his ear.)

KRITZ: Don't go all crazy on me and start attacking them *now*. Let them take me and while I'm away, find a way to defeat them properly. Then come and get me when it's done! And don't worry about *me*, I'll be fine.

(Flaxley nodded with a heavy heart.)

FLAXLEY: I won't let you down!

(Kritz nodded then ran a hand down his cheek.)

KRITZ: If I turn myself in, maybe they won't cause any trouble.

FLAXLEY: They'd better not.

(Sighing heavily, Kritz then kissed Flaxley softly on the lips.)

KRITZ: See you soon, my love. I love you.

(With that, she forced a smile then headed for the door, leaving Flaxley and Lefiat pouting in her wake.)

LEFIAT: This sucks.

(Flaxley said nothing and just watched her go with a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach.)

(A minute after kissing her beloved husband farewell, Kritz pushed open the door to her home and stepped out onto the porch. With a sigh, she then paced into the street, just as a hundred or so Trepe warriors paced through the gates. Glancing back at the house, she then pouted sorrowfully as the Trepe came to a halt and parted to allow Jazzu through. As soon as Jazzu reached the front, Kritz paced straight up to her, anxious to keep trouble to a minimum.)

JAZZU: You're a stupid, stupid girl!

KRITZ: Just arrest me! I'm not in the mood for your nonsense.

JAZZU: I will. And when we get back I'll have to think long and hard about your punishment. If you're lucky, I won't have you strung up for this, Kritzeveltia.

(At this point, Suma raced from the house and charged up to them.)

SUMA: I've escaped! They kidnapped me!!!

(Jazzu rolled her eyes.)

JAZZU: Naturally! You're worse than fucking useless, Suma! It's permanent prison cleaning duties for you! Now get in line!

(As Suma skulked into the Trepe ranks, Jazzu sneered at Kritz.)

JAZZU: As for you! You're gonna pay a heavy price for your defiance!

KRITZ: I don't care, Jazzu. Do your worst!

(Happy to see that Tifaeris had rolled over, Jazzu smirked and paced up to a worried looking bystander.)

JAZZU: Peasant, tell your elder, that'll be one and a quarter million lig! And any more stunts like the last and we'll double it!

(Just then, as no surprise to anyone, Flaxley came out of the house wearing a furious expression.)

FLAXLEY: Now try telling it to the first team!

(Kritz turned to face him and whimpered.)

KRITZ: Don't start anything, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: I'm not going to.

(He snarled.)

FLAXLEY: But I'm not going to be caught napping if *they* do.

(As Flaxley paced to Kritz's side, Jazzu swiftly turned to face him and scoffed.)

JAZZU: Ah, Sir Flaxley, what a great knight you are, how successful!

(Resisting the urge to pull his sword and start culling the Trepe there and then, Flaxley just waved her away.)

FLAXLEY: Just leave, will you?

JAZZU: We will! And we'll return in a few days! If you don't have the money...

(She paused to smirk knowingly into Flaxley's eyes.)

JAZZU: Well... you know what if!

(With that, the Trepe parted and Jazzu paced through the middle of them again. At once, Kritz turned and kissed Flaxley goodbye and rubbed his gold chain for luck, before being dragged away by two Trepe warriors. Watching as they led her away, Flaxley furrowed his brow then folded his arms bitterly. Watching her get taken away was hard to take but this time he managed to keep his emotions in check. The first time they'd taken her, he'd been thrown by it and fallen apart, this time however, he knew roughly what he had to do and kept his head held high.

A short while later, as the Trepe and his beloved Kritz, disappeared out of sight, Flaxley growled to himself and stroked the handle of his sword.)

FLAXLEY: They're gonna pay!

(Sidling up beside him, as if from nowhere, the elder shook his head.)

ELDER: We'll done Flaxley, rescue her in the morning, and they come back and get her in the afternoon, well done!

FLAXLEY: Oh, shut up. Where were you just now anyway?

ELDER: Well, I didn't get to be my age by confronting warriors, you know!

(Not about to entertain the old man any longer than he had to, Flaxley sighed and headed towards the house. As he did so, the elder called out to him.)

ELDER: Forty two hours, Flaxley!

(Not allowing the elder to get to him, Flaxley shook his head and went back inside to try to gather his thoughts for a few minutes.)

FLAXLEY: I need a plan.

(Just then, Lefiat paced past him on his way back outside.)

LEFIAT: You coming to the building site, Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: Maybe... later. I don't know. Just go, Lefiat. I need time alone to think.

LEFIAT: Oh, okay. You need a hand with that?

FLAXLEY: What, being alone?

(Lefiat looked to him uneasily for a moment then scratched his head.)

LEFIAT: I'm confused.

FLAXLEY: Just go!

LEFIAT: Will do!

(As Lefiat headed outside, Flaxley sat himself down at the table and rubbed his chin. Having promised Kritz he'd find a way to defeat the Trepe, nothing else was likely to cross his mind until he'd found one. A few minutes later, as he sat there pondering ways to defeat the hated Trepe, however, he heard two people arguing outside and completely lost his train of thought. Somewhat angered by the interruption, he immediately upped and stomped towards the door,

looking furious. As he neared the door however, he paused mid-step and mused to himself.)

FLAXLEY: That voice sounds familiar!

(With that, he stepped outside and sure enough there was Bonson in a bowler hat, arguing with a young lad.)

BONSON: No, I won't! Now are you going to tell me or not?

VALENTINE: Why should I, old man?

BONSON: Because it'd be polite!

VALENTINE: No! You want information and so do I, so tell me what *I* want to know first!

BONSON: I can't! How could I possibly? I don't even know the answer. And even if I did I wouldn't tell *you*! What Kritz and her husband get up to in the privacy of their own bedroom is none of your business!

(He rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: Now are you going to tell me which one of these houses is Flaxley's or aren't you?

(Relieved to see his old friend, Flaxley grinned and yelled out.)

FLAXLEY: Good to see you again, Bonson!

(Bonson looked up and smiled.)

BONSON: Ah, Sir Flaxley!

(Upon sighting Flaxley, Valentine immediately screamed and ran off down the road.

Watching him go, Flaxley and Bonson shook their heads.)

BONSON: What a strange young chap!

FLAXLEY: That he is.

BONSON: He asked me if Kritz swallows it or spits it out! Bloody weirdo!

(Flaxley rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Twisted little shit. Kritz is forever catching him spying on her. The lad's got an almighty crush on her.

BONSON: Really? Sounds to me like he's lucky nobody's crushed *him*.

FLAXLEY: I'm sure someone will eventually.

(Flaxley then gestured inside his doorway.)

FLAXLEY: Anyway, come in, Bonson, come in!

BONSON: Don't mind if I do.

(Removing his hat, Bonson followed Flaxley as he made his way into the house.)

BONSON: Well, well Flaxley, from what I could see of the place, this has to be the biggest house in the whole town!

FLAXLEY: That's the beauty of building your own!

BONSON: Quite! So, are the others here?

(Flaxley sighed and sat down at the table, gesturing for Bonson to do the same.)

FLAXLEY: They're all hard at work!

(Bonson sat and rubbed his head in confusion.)

BONSON: Really? Work? And where's Mandika?

FLAXLEY: She's working too!

(Upon hearing this information, Bonson's face dropped.)

BONSON: Really? Mandika working? Something's very wrong isn't it?

FLAXLEY: You wouldn't believe it!

BONSON: I would! Unless you were lying but then why would you?

FLAXLEY: Quite. Anyway...

(Flaxley then proceeded to relay the events of the past few days to Bonson. As he related everything from the Trepe demands to his own misguided behaviour, in great detail, Bonson's jaw dropped. The more Flaxley told him, the more he struggled to believe what he was hearing.

Several minutes later, as Flaxley finally finished filling him in on what happened, Bonson was dumbfounded. Wearing a consoling frown, Bonson nodded and took a deep breath.)

BONSON: You must be going out of your mind, old chap!

FLAXLEY: I am!

(Bonson nodded sternly.)

BONSON: Well, just so you know, you can count on *me* to do what I can to help!

(Flaxley smiled warmly.)

FLAXLEY: I appreciate that, Bonson. Though, your kind offer doesn't surprise me in the slightest.

(Bonson bit his lip.)

BONSON: No? It surprises *me*! Showing kindness isn't normally my cup of tea. I'm probably still drunk from breakfast.

(Flaxley chuckled for a moment then offered Bonson a grateful smile.)

FLAXLEY: You know, I'm so glad you lot showed up! I seem to be losing my touch, you see! Despite that, everyone's rallied round and done their best to help me, it's very comforting to know I have friends like you chaps!

(Bonson looked somewhat uncomfortable and shifted uneasily in his seat.)

BONSON: Right, touchy-feely crap aside, I'm not sure *how* I can be of use exactly. For one, I'm old and secondly, I'm likely to change my mind about helping at any given moment. I've lived to this ripe old age by avoiding danger and I don't really intend to stop now.

(He nodded to himself and forced a smile.)

BONSON: That said, I've been training to become a wise man, Flaxley! I'm learning the art of illusions at the moment, so I'll try to create something!

FLAXLEY: A wise man, that's right, Derek told me.

(Bonson nodded modestly.)

BONSON: Yes, you know, an immortal elder of global importance, practically a god, but I don't like to brag.

(Flaxley grinned.)

FLAXLEY: Of course not.

BONSON: So, yes, if an illusion will help, I'll see what I can do.

FLAXLEY: Much appreciated.

(Bonson nodded then sat back.)

BONSON: So, you say you intend to *fight* the Trepe?

FLAXLEY: Of course.

BONSON: Fair enough. How many soldiers are on our side then?

FLAXLEY: Just us!

(Bonson rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: Well that's encouraging! Can't we let Lefiat go on their side to even things up a bit?

(Flaxley smiled.)

FLAXLEY: You like him really!

BONSON: Don't start, Flaxley!

(Flaxley sighed and sat back.)

FLAXLEY: The odds don't look good do they?

(Bonson sighed and nodded in full agreement.)

BONSON: No they don't.

(He looked thoughtful and rubbed his chin.)

BONSON: Can't you raise an army here in Tifaeris? Some kind of militia at least?

FLAXLEY: Well, I was trying to train some people, but then I had a mad moment and tried

to rescue Kritz instead! I ended up hurting her beyond words *and* pissing off the Trepe even more!

(Bonson bit his lip.)

BONSON: If I may say so, sir, that really doesn't sound like you at all!

FLAXLEY: As I said, I'm losing my touch, Bonson!

(Bonson mused for a moment then looked him in the eye.)

BONSON: No you're not; the truth is your love for Kritz has clouded your judgment!

FLAXLEY: Come again?

BONSON: You were the best; you don't forget those skills overnight!

FLAXLEY: Are you saying my feelings for Kritz are a bad thing?

BONSON: Not at all Flaxley, once you've learned to channel your emotions properly they'll be a bonus!

FLAXLEY: How do I do that?

BONSON: Guevina wasn't built in a day sir, be patient, it'll come!

FLAXLEY: Well, if you don't mind me saying that doesn't help right now!

(Bonson nodded.)

BONSON: No, I suppose it doesn't.

(He shrugged.)

BONSON: Anyway, how are things with the princess and Lefiat?

FLAXLEY: What do you mean?

BONSON: Are they at each others throats still?

FLAXLEY: I wouldn't say "each others" throats. Mandika's at Lefiat's throat a lot though.

BONSON: I see.

(Flaxley gave Bonson an enquiring glance.)

FLAXLEY: Having relationship problems are they?

BONSON: To put it mildly, yes.

FLAXLEY: Any particular reason?

BONSON: Well, you know Lefiat; he hardly helps himself, does he? It's one calamity after another with that chap. He drives Mandika insane with his disaster prone antics sometimes. As for the king...

(Bonson paused and shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: The king?

BONSON: Yes... I mean, Lefiat means well but the king is at breaking point with him, he hates the chap!

FLAXLEY: I see.

BONSON: He's already destroyed half the kings antiques and burnt down a section of the palace!

FLAXLEY: Accidentally, I suppose!

BONSON: Of course! Why do you think he gets so many missions? I'm certain the king hopes he won't come back!

FLAXLEY: That would explain it!

(Bonson nodded firmly.)

BONSON: I'm in no doubt that if the king has his way, a few months from now, Mandika will be seeing someone else and Guevina will have a new knight.

(Flaxley gave a pitying sigh.)

FLAXLEY: Poor Lefiat.

BONSON: That he is, sir!

FLAXLEY: You know, Bonson, you don't have to call me sir any more!

BONSON: I'm well aware of that, sir, but I'm kind of stuck with it, I'm afraid!

FLAXLEY: You did it again!

BONSON: And I'll do it again and again, probably!

(He paused and looked Flaxley in the eye enquiringly.)

BONSON: Anyway, tell me about this army you were training!

FLAXLEY: It was hardly an army. I was just trying to teach these two blokes I know from the pub the basics of swordsmanship that's all! They were hopeless!

(Bonson looked thoughtful and gave Flaxley a knowing glance.)

BONSON: Try again!

FLAXLEY: What?

BONSON: You heard me, only this time get some more men together! Not just your drinking buddies, as many men as you can find.

FLAXLEY: And how will *that* help?

(Bonson looked stunned for a moment then sat forward.)

BONSON: How will it help? Listen, Flaxley; if there's one thing I know you're really good at, it's inspiring people! Get out there and psych the people up for a battle! I know you can do it! Have faith in your ability to teach them.

(He nodded.)

BONSON: You're a born leader of men, Flaxley, so head out there and lead them. Show them the way and I've no doubt they'll follow you. If anyone can make soldiers out of mere townfolk, it's you. Just remember what you always *used* to say, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: What was that?

BONSON: Never underestimate *anyone*!

(He then sat back and nodded knowingly.)

BONSON: Especially when there's so much at stake.

(In that moment, the fog cleared from Flaxley's mind. His expression changed to one of pure enlightenment and any sign of anxiety drained away. The cool, calm and collected Flaxley was back. At last, he was seeing things clearly. Bonson was right. Feeling as if he'd grown another foot in height, Flaxley climbed to his feet and looked back at his seated friend.)

FLAXLEY: You're right, Bonson! That's what a knight would do. He wouldn't waste his time training two drinking buddies before buggering off to try and win the war on his own. He'd call upon the people, that's what a knight would do. He's not a one man army, he's a leader. Well, I'm a knight and its time I started acting like one.

BONSON: Yes it is. The people of this town *need* their knight. Who else is going to lead and inspire them?

(Flaxley nodded firmly and clenched his fist.)

FLAXLEY: I'll do it! I'll raise an army *properly* this time then we can defeat the Trepe and bring Kritz back home. No more headless chicken, I'm gonna do it right this time. Thank you, Bonson, you're a great man.

(Bonson allowed himself a self-satisfied grin and rubbed his chest proudly.)

BONSON: Yes, I am aware of this, my friend!

FLAXLEY: I can do it! It should be easy to inspire people to defend their own homes, I'm sure they'll be only too glad to do it. Not much motivating needed there. And as for making them soldiers, well I used to train Guevina's soldiers *all* the time!

BONSON: Exactly sir, now forget about your personal worries and go and do what you do better than anyone else in the world! Be a knight! You were the best once and you will be again!

FLAXLEY: Precisely! Thank you, Bonson!

BONSON: Pleasure!

(Flaxley clenched his fists and mumbled positively to himself.)

FLAXLEY: Derek was right, I've buggered about for far too long!

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Right, I still have 42 hours to put this thing right! I'll have to work fast! I'll have to *make* it time enough.

BONSON: Bravo, sir!

(Oozing confidence, Flaxley then stormed towards the front door.)

FLAXLEY: I'll make ruthless killers out of every last one of them!

(He then stopped dead in his tracks and glanced back at Bonson.)

FLAXLEY: Oh, and if you were wondering, she swallows it.

BONSON: I thought as much; all the best women do.

(With that, Flaxley barged his way out of the house and headed off down the street.)

(Following his chat with Bonson, the knight within Flaxley had been reborn. The despair and frustration that had been blighting his judgment had gone and he could finally see clearly again. Kritz, very much his damsel in distress, was depending on him to succeed in defeating the Trepe and he was going to do everything within his power to make it so. Bonson's words, although chosen very much to massage Flaxley's ego, were one hundred percent accurate. If anyone could make it happen, Flaxley could.)

As Flaxley headed forth at a pace towards the centre of town, he looked very much like a man on a mission. Receiving smiles from everyone he passed, he said nothing as he marched forwards with intent etched into his face. He had a job to do and nothing was about to distract him.

Upon reaching the bustling market in the town's main square, Flaxley glanced about himself sternly then paced towards an open space at the side of the square. Satisfied he'd found the best place to get his message across from, he then stood tall and projected his voice confidently to the unsuspecting masses.)

FLAXLEY: Everybody, listen to me! I have something important to tell you!!! I...

(Unfortunately, his thunder was immediately stolen by a little old lady in front of him.)

OLD LADY: Don't you bloody shout in my ear, young man. I'm not deaf you know!

(Flaxley furrowed his brow at her.)

FLAXLEY: Do you mind? I've got something important to say to the people of this town!

OLD LADY: I'm a person of this town. Just say it, you don't have to shout your head off, I'm standing right here.

(Flaxley placed his hands on his hips angrily.)

FLAXLEY: Look, with all due respect, this message isn't for you. It's for those who can fight.

OLD LADY: Oh really, you think I can't fight, do you? Well, let me tell you, you yell in my ear like that again and I'll box your bleeding ears for you.

(Flaxley sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Do be quiet!

OLD LADY: Don't you tell *me* what to do, you're not too old to be bent over my knee, you know!

(Flaxley gritted his teeth.)

FLAXLEY: Look, I've got something important to tell everyone, so will you just pipe down and let me get on with it, please?

(The old lady looked most put out.)

OLD LADY: How rude! I don't know who you think you are...

(Flaxley stood tall and folded his arms.)

FLAXLEY: If you must know, I am Sir Flaxley of Tifaeris!

OLD LADY: Is that supposed to mean something, is it? Only *I've* never heard of you!

FLAXLEY: I don't care if...

OLD LADY: And quite Frankly, I could care if you were the *king* of Tifaeris, yell in my ear again and I'll punch you into next week.

(Fearing he'd never get his message across if the old lady persisted, Flaxley frowned and looked out to the square.)

FLAXLEY: That stall over there is selling rhubarb for half price!

(At once the old lady stood tall, and glanced across the square excitedly.)

OLD LADY: Where?

FLAXLEY: At the rhubarb stall, obviously!

OLD LADY: I'm on it!

(With that, the old lady shot off across the square. Delighted to have seen the back of her, Flaxley immediately stood tall and projected his voice again.)

FLAXLEY: People of Tifaeris!!! Pay attention!!! I have news that affects us all!!!

(Hearing Sir Flaxley calling out to them, everyone in the square glanced in his direction.)

FLAXLEY: Gather round! I have something important to tell you all!

(Having very much earned the respect and admiration of the people of Tifaeris, it didn't take long for a small crowd to start gathering before him. Encouraged by the good start he'd made, Flaxley then yelled louder to those still going about their business in the square.)

FLAXLEY: Come on, I need more men over here!

(Slowly but surely, roughly a hundred people gathered around him, including forty or so men.)

FLAXLEY: Thank you! Now, listen well!

(Before he could begin, however, another old lady interjected angrily.)

OLD LADY 2: Are you going to be there long?

FLAXLEY: What?

(The old lady pointed to the house thirty feet behind him.)

OLD LADY 2: You're standing in the way of my door!

(Flaxley looked behind him and furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: There's plenty of room!

OLD LADY 2: Even so! It's the principle of the thing! You're standing in my garden!

FLAXLEY: This is the street!

OLD LADY 2: It could be my garden if I had a fence!

FLAXLEY: Then you'd be fencing off the street!

(The old lady flared her nostrils angrily.)

OLD LADY 2: Do you want a thick ear young man?

FLAXLEY: What??? Look, no! Be quiet, you old hag!

OLD LADY 2: I beg your pardon?

(Offended by Flaxley's tone, a villager gave the old lady a hug.)

MAN 01: You can't speak to my mother like that!

FLAXLEY: I apologise, but...

MAN 01: I ought to come over there and box your ears!

MAN 02: Yeah, go on!

MAN 01: No, he's bigger than me!

(Frustrated at his lack of success in being heard, Flaxley sighed then opted to do things Kritz's way. When she was having trouble being heard, she'd shout at the top of her lungs and leave no-one in any doubt that she meant business.)

FLAXLEY: For the sake of sanity, will you please listen???

(Startled by his deafening yell, everybody froze to the spot and glared at him.)

FLAXLEY: Thank you!

MAN 01: There was no need to shout!

(Sensing he was finally getting somewhere, Flaxley ignored the grumbling townie and spoke out to the attentive crowd in his most authoritative voice.)

FLAXLEY: Right, people, hear this! In just over 40 hours the Trepe tribe will come in demand of one and a quarter million Lig! This isn't another hoax, this is for real! If we fail to deliver the money in time, they'll attempt to destroy this beautiful town again, just like they did twelve years ago!

(He nodded sternly.)

FLAXLEY: Now there isn't a hope in hell of us raising such a silly amount of money in such a short time, so there's but one thing left for us to do! We can't let them raze our town to the ground again so we must face them in battle!

(As a gasp rose up from all before him, Flaxley stood akimbo and continued to speak with an imposing glint in his eye.)

FLAXLEY: I know what some of you might be thinking but we *can* defeat them if we work together! Nothing is impossible! We've already proven that. Some said we could never rebuild Tifaeris but take a look around you! We turned this burnt out shell of helplessness back into a town again. It happened because we wanted it and because we believed. The same applies to fighting those Trepe bitches!

(He then pulled his sword and held it before him.)

FLAXLEY: This town is our home and if blood has to be spilled to defend it then I'll gladly shed mine. By this blade, the Trepe will die and Tifaeris will go on.

(He then sheathed his sword again and stood akimbo.)

FLAXLEY: But I am just one man! I can not do it alone. So I implore you, take up your arms and be united with me against the tyranny of Jazzu and her Trepe warriors!

(He then shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: It's either that or do nothing then cry like babies when the Trepe come and butcher you all horribly. It's your call!

(He then stood tall again.)

FLAXLEY: Well? What do you say? Who's with me?

(To say the least, Flaxley had an imposing aura about him, and as the townsfolk looked upon him, it seemed pretty obvious that his message had got through to them loud and clear.)

FLAXLEY: Well, men?

(Looking somewhat peeved, one of the ladies in the crowd stepped forward.)

HELEN: Men? What about us women? We can fight too, you know?

(Flaxley nodded firmly.)

FLAXLEY: Indeed you can. And I welcome you to. Are you in?

(Helen seemed to lose all her enthusiasm and sloped away.)

HELEN: I left a chicken in the oven.

FLAXLEY: Anyone else who wants to leave, please do so now!

(With that, over fifty of the women in the crowd sheepishly crept away.)

FLAXLEY: Anyone else?

(As several more women and a few of the men proceeded to wander away, Flaxley looked around at all the faces of those who remained, staring back at him. As he tried to gauge their reactions, he saw many a positive glance coming his way. Satisfied that everyone who hadn't left yet was ready to fight for the cause, Flaxley nodded firmly.)

FLAXLEY: Brave volunteers. Tifaeris salutes you. It's time to get prepared.

OLD LADY 2: Yeah well, do it somewhere else! My garden isn't a bloody playground.

MAN 01: Oh, shut up mother.

(He rolled his eyes then looked to Flaxley.)

MAN 01: Just tell us what you need us to do, good knight!

OLD LADY 2: Goodnight? It's not even tea time!

MAN 01: Oh, go in the house will you, you silly old bat!

OLD LADY 2: Like that is it? Fine. Just get out of my bloody garden.

(As the old lady sidled away angrily gesturing at her son, Flaxley found himself scanning his eyes over his band of volunteers.)

FLAXLEY: Gentlemen, shall we?

(Again, a dissenting female voice spoke up.)

SAHARA: We're not all gentlemen!

FLAXLEY: I do apologise. Lady and gentlemen, shall we?

(With that, he turned and headed away towards the hill at the back of the town. Watching him go, the nervous volunteers all looked to one another uneasily for a moment then headed after him.)

(As Flaxley led his party of thirty or so volunteers through the streets of Tifaeris, he managed to acquire at least another twenty men, curious to know what the march was for and feeling duty bound to protect their homes once they found out. Five of the original volunteers, however, took the opportunity to run away, including the only female, Sahara.

By the time he led them away from the township and out into the meadow beyond, they'd become an all male party, numbering just shy of fifty. Those who were in two minds about fighting had gone and all those who remained were very much up for the battle. The thought of going into battle may have been an extremely intimidating one for these humble townsfolk, but the thought of having their lives destroyed by the Trepe tribe was a thousand times worse. And so, they soldiered forth, never even considering opting out for a moment.

Leading them forth with a determined glint in his eyes, Flaxley paced across the soft grass in the meadow with one hand firmly clutching the handle of his sword. Right now, he was very much in his element. Just like the days when he was Guevina's head knight, he had an army to lead and he couldn't wait to get started. He couldn't have been more enthused. Not only was he back to doing the job he loved, but he'd be training men to fight the enemy he hated most, the Trepe. Snarling to himself at the mere thought of the all female nuisance, he paced to the centre of the meadow then about turned immediately. Wasting no time, he then attempted to address his troops.)

FLAXLEY: Right...

(He then paused and allowed his men to gather around him. Once they were all in position, he then started over.)

FLAXLEY: Right, listen men... and woman...

MAN 01: She buggered off, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: Oh... okay... men; the Trepe will come in under two days! Thursday morning, to be precise. They're demanding a ridiculous amount of money in return for not razing Tifaeris to the ground. Razing it to the ground, just like they did twelve years ago. There's no way we can pay it, so we can either lay down and let them destroy our town, or stand up and defend the homes we've worked so hard to build! That's our one simple choice!

(Already, one of the men was baffled.)

MAN 01: That's *two* choices!

FLAXLEY: No, that's *one* choice between *two* options! Lay down and die or stand up and fight.

MAN 01: Oh... I get it.

MAN 02: Then we fight. We can't let them destroy our homes *again*!

FLAXLEY: Precisely! So we have no option but to fight!

MAN 01: Well technically we do, but the laying down and dying one's bloody silly.

(Flaxley furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: Will you shut up?

MAN 01: Me?

FLAXLEY: Yes, you! I'm trying to make a point here.

MAN 01: Sorry.

FLAXLEY: Now, I'm not suggesting it'll be easy to fight them. You're not trained soldiers after all. Luckily for you, however, I can help with that. You see, you may be surprised to hear that I used to train the Guevina army...

MAN 02: We know! You're Sir Flaxley of Tifaeris!

MAN 03: Aye, you're a living legend. Former head knight of Guevina and now the saviour of Tifaeris.

MAN 01: Yeah, everyone knows about *you* Flaxley!

(The man frowned.)

MAN 01: Except my mother!

(Flaxley was a little taken aback.)

FLAXLEY: Really?

MAN 01: You sound surprised!

FLAXLEY: Well...

MAN 01: You're the man who came back here with his tasty wife eighteen months ago and started talk of a building programme!

FLAXLEY: Well... yes, that's me, but...

MAN 01: And you're the man who then organised and started to undertake that building programme with his well fit wife at his side!

FLAXLEY: Yes, that's me!

MAN 01: Flaxley, the rebuilding of this town would never have happened if you and that sexy other half of yours hadn't come back here to inspire us!

MAN 02: He's right, Flaxley!

MAN 03: Aye, he is. You and that gorgeous woman of yours have given us all hope of a brighter future and we're not about to abandon you now! Your dream of turning Tifaeris into something special is our dream too.

MAN 02: Exactly. So you don't need to make motivational speeches to us, Flaxley. We're already up for it.

(Flaxley looked most impressed.)

FLAXLEY: And do you *all* feel this way? Are you all willing to risk life and limb to save our town?

(At this point four of the men they'd gathered on the way started to wander off, but the rest remained, nodding in defiant approval.)

FLAXLEY: Excellent! Now how many of you own a sword?

(Much to Flaxley's dismay, only a big fat man raised his hand.)

FLAXLEY: Only one of you?

THIN: I was going to say... I'm a weapon collector!

FLAXLEY: And what is your name?

THIN: They call me 'Thin Alero'!

FLAXLEY: Thin Alero?

THIN: You can call me 'Thin'!

(Flaxley grinned as he looked the plump gentleman up and down.)

FLAXLEY: That would be stretching the imagination a bit too far!

THIN: With respect, Flaxley, I've heard that joke a million times!

FLAXLEY: Fair enough. Okay then, Thin, how many swords do you have?

THIN: About 70!

FLAXLEY: Excellent, I have 10! Who else?

(No-one replied.)

FLAXLEY: Hmm, this is a peaceful town, I should have expected this!

THIN: Will that be enough?

(Flaxley mused to himself as he replied.)

FLAXLEY: Only time will tell! It might be enough, there may be about fifty of us now but I'm hoping our number will grow!

(Thin nodded.)

THIN: Shall I get them?

FLAXLEY: By yourself?

THIN: No, obviously not by myself, I meant...

(As Thin spoke, the thoughtful looking Flaxley, interjected.)

FLAXLEY: I don't suppose you have any armour do you?

THIN: Some, yes!

FLAXLEY: Good, good! Okay, let's get organized!

(Buoyed by the willingness of the men around him, Flaxley's spirit soared. As a result, he spent the rest of the entire day arming the soldiers and trying to instil the basics of defensive sword techniques. Although he knew he was asking a lot, and expecting more, once back in the role he was best at, Flaxley knew he'd soon mould this ragtag militia into some kind of disciplined fighting force.

Unfortunately, time was not on their side. As he went about teaching the men to block and parry incoming sword blows, the time seemed to fly past. He wasn't about to rest, however, until they'd all shown at least a little progress. Long after the sun had sunk beyond the horizon, he continued to pace around his men, correcting their stances and offering up advice. As the night wore on, however, the inevitable onset of tiredness became a problem and he knew he'd have to call it a day. To his men's credit, none of them had complained about fatigue, but he knew he couldn't ask them to continue for much longer. A tired army would be a useless one and with his mind, he set about disbanding them for the night.)

TIFAERIS – TUESDAY NIGHT

(When Flaxley eventually returned home from his busy day of battle coaching, Derek, Lefiat, Bonson and Mandika were already resting on the moonlit porch. Having put in long, hard days themselves, they offered him a smile as he joined them for a well-earned rest.)

DEREK: You're late, Flaxley!

(Flaxley sat on the top step and smiled.)

FLAXLEY: Just making up for lost time!

(Bonson nodded approvingly.)

BONSON: How did the soldiering go, Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: Pretty bloody well I'd say. They weren't natural warriors by any means, but I definitely had their respect and that's extremely important. I mean, they like to joke around sure, but I honestly believe they'll all follow me into battle with their heads held high.

(Wearing a philosophical expression, Flaxley rubbed his chin and stared into space.)

FLAXLEY: You know, I didn't realise the impact Kritz and I had had on this town!

BONSON: You didn't?

FLAXLEY: No. I knew we were popular, but I had no idea how respected and admired we are! Those chaps hung onto my every word this afternoon as if I was their king.

(He smiled warmly.)

FLAXLEY: And not one of them bears Kritz any malice for her Trepe connections! As far as they're concerned, she's an absolute heroine!

(As Flaxley proudly exhaled, Lefiat sighed and hung his head.)

LEFIAT: It must be great to be respected and admired!

DEREK: Nonsense Lefiat, the people of Guevina adore you!

BONSON: Only the one's who don't know you though, sir!

(With a disgruntled sigh, Lefiat glared at Bonson then looked away.)

LEFIAT: Can't you tell *he's* back!

BONSON: Well, what did you expect? That was a stupid thing to say, and you ought to know by now, I'm not gonna let that sort of thing slide. Fact is, you're respected and admired by almost the entire population of Guevina.

LEFIAT: Yeah, but not by people who actually know me.

(Bonson gave him a cold glance.)

BONSON: Then you agree! So, why complain when I pointed it out?

LEFIAT: Because you only said it to be mean!

BONSON: Well... that's true.

(As Bonson sat back and chuckled, Flaxley looked to him and smiled.)

FLAXLEY: Really, I must thank you again, Bonson! I really feel we can achieve something now!

(Bonson shrugged with uncharacteristic modesty.)

BONSON: I didn't do anything!

FLAXLEY: You did! You talked some sense into me, I mean what the hell was I thinking when I tried to rescue Kritz?

(With that, Bonson conceded.)

BONSON: Okay, you win, Flaxley! But then what did you expect, I'm virtually a god, you know?

FLAXLEY: And Derek, I apologise. I know you tried to talk sense into me earlier but... I don't know, maybe I wasn't ready to listen.

(Bonson scoffed.)

BONSON: Or maybe he doesn't have the people skills.

DEREK: Excuse me?

BONSON: No offence, old chap, but it takes years to become as wise as me. You can't just blindly crash headlong into someone else's planet and expect to become a revered elder overnight, you know.

(Derek gave Bonson a bemused glance.)

DEREK: That's how you see yourself is it? A revered elder?

BONSON: I am what I am, old boy, I am what I am.

(Mandika smiled at Bonson's delusional ranting then gave Flaxley a bewildered glance.)

MANDIKA: You know, I can't believe you got captured by the Trepe, Flaxley!

LEFIAT: Nor can I, how exactly did they catch *you*, Flaxley?

(Looking embarrassed, Flaxley thought about it and turned away.)

FLAXLEY: I'd rather not say!

(Just then, Derek burst out laughing, making everyone turn and look at him.)

DEREK: You fell down a well?

FLAXLEY: Damn it, Derek, must you read my thoughts???

DEREK: Sorry Flaxley, I can't help it, it's as natural to me as hearing things is to you!

(He giggled some more.)

DEREK: Head first! Twice!

FLAXLEY: Oh, shut up!

BONSON: Derek? Are you saying Flaxley did a Lefiat?

(Lefiat was not amused.)

LEFIAT: Hey, what's that supposed to mean?

DEREK: Sorry Flaxley, but the image I get is hilarious!

FLAXLEY: Well it wasn't! It was anything *but* hilarious!

(Angry at being ignored, Lefiat stepped up his protest.)

LEFIAT: Hey! What do you mean, "did a Lefiat"?

(Mandika furrowed her brow at him.)

MANDIKA: What do *you* think he means, halfwit?

LEFIAT: I think you're all being mean!

(Bonson offered Lefiat a comforting smile.)

BONSON: All I was saying Lefiat is, he was being a clumsy buffoon!

(A little comforted, Lefiat sat back.)

LEFIAT: Oh, that's alright then!

(As Bonson's words sunk in, he then sat forward again.)

LEFIAT: Hey, no it isn't!

(Bonson grinned and turned to hide his face.)

LEFIAT: I hate you sometimes, Bonson!

(Unable to come to terms with foolishly falling down a well, twice, Flaxley spoke up in his own defence.)

FLAXLEY: Point is, Derek, how would *you* fare against sleep magic?

DEREK: Sleep magic?

FLAXLEY: Yes, sleep magic! That's how they captured me, and yes, that's how I fell down the well!

(Derek sniggered.)

FLAXLEY: Grow up, Derek! Bloody alien!

(Not wanting to appear childish in any way, Derek forced back his amusement and looked at Flaxley with a straight face.)

DEREK: So, the Trepe use sleep magic do they?

(As Flaxley went to answer, Derek's lips curled up at the sides and he had to throw his hand over his face to stop himself from laughing again. Luckily for Derek, Bonson was deep in thought and changed the subject.)

BONSON: History shows that the Trepe actually *invented* sleep magic, you know?

DEREK: Interesting!

MANDIKA: You know, it almost *was*!

BONSON: Sorry? What was that, princess?

MANDIKA: Nothing!

(With a brief sigh as he thought about Kritz, Flaxley climbed to his feet and looked down at his friends.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, chaps, let's get a good night's sleep! Come the morning we'll only have a day to go!

(Finally looking every inch the leader he had to be, he gave them all a confident smile and headed inside. Slightly lifted by his demeanour, the others looked to one another and followed him through the door. In a time of crisis, one thing was for sure. You needed Flaxley to be lucid, focussed and very much on your side. Even with this finally in place, however, the prospect of Thursday's battle with the Trepe was still very much a daunting one. With this in mind, Derek's sleep magic was very much in demand to ensure that a good night's sleep would be had by all.)

TIFAERIS – WEDNESDAY MIDDAY

(The following morning saw the beginning of the same routine once again for Mandika, Derek and Lefiat. Mandika went to see the elder and Derek and Lefiat went and joined the builders. Unlike the previous morning however, this time Flaxley and Bonson were also hard at work. Flaxley went off to train his army while Bonson continued to work on his illusion magic.)

Since the dawning of the day, there had been an uneasy atmosphere about the town. The Trepe threat had suddenly become very real and all morning, everyone in Tifaeris had been well aware of how 24 hours was turning to 23 and then into 22. Despite this, however, everyone tried to remain calm and focussed on their tasks as the time ebbed away.

As midday approached, Flaxley was marching his troops through town when a loud cheer went up from the end of the town wall, echoing through the town. As the sound carried to his troops, Flaxley raised his head and a look of disbelief crossed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: Surely not!

(Curious to investigate, he turned to his men and nodded firmly.)

FLAXLEY: Carry on, men! Head for the foot of the hill where we trained yesterday. I'll be right back!

(With that, he raced off to make the short trip to the wall with a curious expression on his face. As he arrived a few moments later, he saw Derek and Lefiat celebrating excitedly with twenty or so builders. Looking across the completed wall, Flaxley gaped in amazement.)

FLAXLEY: What the?

(Looking extremely pleased with himself, Derek looked up, beaming a brighter shade of green.)

DEREK: It's finished Flaxley, the wall is built!

(Flaxley nodded in stunned awe.)

FLAXLEY: So I see! Amazing!

(Equally chuffed, Lefiat chirped in with a delighted glint in his eye.)

LEFIAT: There's even look out points and a new cast iron gate!

(Flaxley rubbed his chest smugly.)

FLAXLEY: I know that, Lefiat! I designed it!

LEFIAT: Did you? Wow!

FLAXLEY: Yes, I am rather proud!

DEREK: With those look out points in place, once you have a regular army, Tifaeris will become quite the fortress!

FLAXLEY: A *regular* army? We can but dream, Derek!

DEREK: Well, once we've seen off the Trepe, maybe you could look into starting one!

LEFIAT: *If* we see off the Trepe!

FLAXLEY: Confident as ever, Lefiat, I see!

(Just then, a six foot wide section of wall collapsed and a rockslide of boulders cascaded onto the grass. As the stunned builders stood helplessly by, watching the collapse, Flaxley frowned and glared their way.)

FLAXLEY: Who built that section?

(With perfect synchronicity, all eyes turned to Lefiat. In the vain hope that no-one would remember, Lefiat stared skywards and tried to look innocent. Flaxley gave him a contemptuous glance and shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: I needn't have asked! Lefiat, do it again!

DEREK: Only properly this time!

(Disappointed that he'd been rumbled, Lefiat frowned inwardly before giving out a sigh of concession.)

LEFIAT: Yeah, okay!

(As Lefiat hung his head, Flaxley turned to face the others.)

FLAXLEY: The rest of you, well done! Grab an ale or something then come and join me by the hill!

(One of the builders looked uncertain.)

BUILDER 1: But... we're builders, not soldiers, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: Well I can't force you, but remember this, if you don't help with the fight, come tomorrow there may be no town left to build in!

(Stirred by Flaxley's warning, the builders all looked to one another then embarked on a mass shrugging session.)

BUILDER 1: You're right, of course.

BUILDER 2: Aye, I'll just grab a drink and head over there.

BUILDER 3: Absolutely. It took forever to build this sodding wall and the least we can do is prepare to defend the bugger.

(One of the builders from the back then stepped forward and nodded to Flaxley.)

ULRICH: You're dead right, Flaxley. I was in two minds before, but not anymore. We owe it to our families to fight.

FLAXLEY: Yes, yes we do.

(Ulrich smiled then glanced across at his colleagues.)

ULRICH: Come on lads, let's grab a drink then head off to the hill.

(Very much in agreement with Ulrich's sentiments, the builders all nodded sternly then headed off towards the inn. As they passed him, Flaxley offered them up congratulations on a job well done then took one last triumphant look at the proud looking wall. Delighted by what he saw, he nodded to Derek and then they too headed away, leaving Lefiat behind. Frustrated by his failure, Lefiat watched them depart then about turned and stared at the pile of rocks in front of him with a sorrowful pout on his face.)

LEFIAT: Why does everything always have to happen to me?

(With heavy heart, he then picked up one of the fallen rocks and took it back over to the wall. Struggling under its weight, he dropped it into place and covered it with sand from the pile next to him. Pausing to feel hard done by, he then stuck another rock on top of it, when he heard a little girl's voice piping up from behind him.)

PHISELE: What are you doing?

(Given quite a start, he spun around to see a six year old girl, standing akimbo, giving him a belittling glance. Not about to be quizzed by a small child, Lefiat scowled at her coldly)

LEFIAT: Who are you???

(Not even remotely fazed by his coldness, the little girl repeated herself.)

PHISELE: What are you doing?

LEFIAT: Building a wall, obviously!

(The little girl looked puzzled.)

PHISELE: What? Like that?

LEFIAT: Eh? Like what?

(Much to his annoyance, she giggled.)

PHISELE: You're doing it wrong!

LEFIAT: Yeah? Like *you'd* know anything about it!

(Ceasing her laughter immediately, the little girl gave him a baffled look.)

PHISELE: My daddy's a builder, he doesn't do it wrong!

(Incensed by the child's audacity, Lefiat placed his hands on his hips and leant forward to

intimidate her.)

LEFIAT: Look, go away!

PHISELE: You're silly!

LEFIAT: Look, shoe! Clear off!

(Giving him a quick, innocent flutter of her eyelashes, the little Phisele just smiled and turned away.)

PHISELE: Okay! But don't say I didn't warn you!

LEFIAT: Eh? Warn me what?

PHISELE: Bye!

(As Phisele skipped away, a look of uncertainty crossed Lefiat's face. Fearing he'd look an even bigger fool if the wall collapsed twice, he stretched his arm out towards Phisele.)

LEFIAT: No wait! What am I doing wrong then?

(Like a smiling assassin, Phisele spun around and skipped back up to him arrogantly.)

PHISELE: Give me 5 Lig and I'll tell you!

(Lefiat was stunned.)

LEFIAT: 5 lig??? That's insane!

(Phisele shrugged.)

PHISELE: Take it or leave it, mister!

(Lefiat looked suspicious.)

LEFIAT: Yeah right! You probably don't know what I'm doing wrong anyway!

PHISELE: Do too!

LEFIAT: No, you don't!

PHISELE: Do too!!!

(Somehow convincing himself, he'd put the little girl in her place, Lefiat shook his head and turned to put more sand on the second brick. As he did so, Phisele sucked her teeth and shook her head.)

LEFIAT: I heard that!

PHISELE: It'll fall apart again!

LEFIAT: No it won't, stupid!

(Much to Lefiat's dismay, however, as soon as he placed another brick into position, the one beneath it slid out, exactly as Phisele had predicted.)

LEFIAT: Oh, poo!

PHISELE: Ha, ha!

(Amused by the gangly buffoon before her, she then proceeded to dance in circles and sing.)

PHISELE: Silly man, silly man, you are a silly man, silly man...

LEFIAT: Alright, I'll give you 5 Lig then! Now, what am I doing wrong?

(Immediately, the little girl stopped dancing and held out her palm.)

PHISELE: Give me the money first!

(Growing impatient and more than a little flustered, Lefiat shook his head and fumbled in his pouch, before pulling out a coin and dumping it in her hand.)

LEFIAT: There!

PHISELE: Thanks, mister!

LEFIAT: It's Lefiat! Now, what am I doing wrong?

(Folding her arms and taking up the cockiest stance imaginable, Phisele sneered and spoke up in a condescending tone.)

PHISELE: You're supposed to make the sand wet first, that's what all these buckets of water are for!

(Lefiat looked enlightened.)

LEFIAT: Oh, right! I thought they were for drinking!

(With that, the young Phisele laughed again and resumed her dance.)

PHISELE: Silly man, silly man, you are a...

(Feeling quite hurt by her words, Lefiat shook his trowel at her.)

LEFIAT: Shut up!

(Maintaining her dance, Phisele stopped singing and offered him a compromise.)

PHISELE: Fine, I will. But, only if you let me help!

LEFIAT: No! Now go away!

PHISELE: But... I'll pay you 5 Lig!

(Pausing to consider her offer for a moment, Lefiat beamed happily.)

LEFIAT: It's a deal!

PHISELE: Yay!

(With that, Lefiat immediately thrust out his palm.)

LEFIAT: Cash up front.

(Phisele rolled her eyes then smacked the coin back into his hand.)

PHISELE: Fine.

LEFIAT: And no more singing!

PHISELE: Whatever! Let's get to work!

(With that, they both paced to the wall and set about their task. Although he'd never admit it,

Lefiat found Phisele's help invaluable as he set about rebuilding his little section of wall.

Having educated him as to where he'd been going wrong then corrected all his mistakes, it wasn't too long before they found themselves with only one brick left to place. Lefiat was overjoyed.)

LEFIAT: Nearly done!

PHISELE: Let *me* put the last one in!

LEFIAT: No, I want to!

PHISELE: That's not fair!

LEFIAT: Yes it is! This is *my* section!

(Like a miniature Mandika, Phisele pouted and stamped her foot.)

PHISELE: I'll scream!

LEFIAT: Go on then, I don't care!

PHISELE: I hate you, you smell!

LEFIAT: So?

PHISELE: Poo head!

(She blew raspberries at him.)

LEFIAT: I'm bigger than you! Now go away!

(As her eyes glazed over with anger, Phisele stopped stamping her foot and took up a fighting stance instead.)

PHISELE: Let me do it or I'll hit you!

(Lefiat was most amused.)

LEFIAT: Go on then!

PHISELE: I mean it!

LEFIAT: I'm not scared, little girl! What are *you* gonna do, bite my kneecap?

PHISELE: Right, you asked for it!

(Again, Lefiat couldn't help but scoff.)

LEFIAT: Asked for what, exactly?

(Offering no reply, Phisele leant back and jumped up in the air doing a high spin kick. As her flailing foot collided with his chin, Lefiat was sent crashing to the ground with considerable force. Little did he know, she may have acted like a miniature Mandika, but in reality she more like a miniature Kritz. Tough, uncompromising and potentially violent. Dazed and in pain, Lefiat sat up holding his jaw.)

LEFIAT: Ouch!

(Giving Lefiat a satisfied grin, Phisele then picked up the last stone and placed it in the wall.)

LEFIAT: Hey!!!

PHISELE: Ha, ha!

(Crestfallen by the defeat, Lefiat pouted miserably.)

LEFIAT: Where did you learn to kick like that?

PHISELE: Mummy's friend Kritz has been teaching me self defence!

LEFIAT: I should have known! Only *she*'d teach *that* as a *defence* technique!

PHISELE: Kritz is awesome. She lets me water her plants and feed her pets. And she pays me! You're not awesome, you're rubbish.

(Satisfied she no longer had a use for the young man, Phisele then shrugged and ran back towards the centre of town.)

PHISELE: Bye then, mister Luffy-lops!

LEFIAT: It's Lefiat!!!

(As she ran out of sight, Lefiat shook his head and turned to admire his work.)

LEFIAT: Not bad! Especially as *she* kept hindering me!

(The fact that if it hadn't been for Phisele, he'd have still been trying to get the first brick to stay in place, was completely lost on him. As far as he was concerned, it had all been his own work and, at last, he had something to be proud of. Buoyed by this sense of achievement, he rubbed his hands together and turned to face the town.)

LEFIAT: Right, to the hill!

(Before he could even take a single step, however, Flaxley ran over to him holding a shoe. Upon sighting him Lefiat beamed joyfully.)

LEFIAT: I did it, Flaxley! All by myself!

FLAXLEY: Well done, Lefiat!

(Lefiat scoffed modestly.)

LEFIAT: Yeah, yeah, no big deal. It was easy!

(Gesturing to the wall, Flaxley spoke up masterfully.)

FLAXLEY: I was thinking about that mission the king set you!

LEFIAT: Oh yeah?

FLAXLEY: Yeah, I popped back home for a minute just now and Bonson told me all about it. (With that, Flaxley raised a shoe aloft causing Lefiat to reel back and whimper.)

LEFIAT: Don't hit me.

FLAXLEY: I wasn't going to. I was going to say, you should hide this shoe inside the wall!

(Lefiat nodded, very much excited by the idea.)

LEFIAT: Cool. I never thought of that!

FLAXLEY: Well, the king *did* tell you to put it where it'd never be found, didn't he?

LEFIAT: Exactly!

FLAXLEY: Right! Loosen a brick then and we can put it in!

(Lefiat smiled as he pulled one of the bricks out, knowing that *he*'d have to put it back.)

LEFIAT: Looks like I will get to place the last rock after all!

FLAXLEY: What?

LEFIAT: Oh, nothing!

(Flaxley gave him a curious look then slipped the shoe inside the hole before snatching the rock from Lefiat's grasp and placing it back on top. Lefiat was mortified.)

LEFIAT: I was supposed to do that!!!

(Flaxley gave him a bemused glance.)

FLAXLEY: Excuse me?

(Lefiat just hung his head.)

LEFIAT: Never mind.

FLAXLEY: Chin up, Lefiat! Your mission's complete!

(Lefiat sighed and nodded acceptingly.)

LEFIAT: Thanks Flaxley, the holy shoe of Dero will be safe there!

(Flaxley stepped back, looking baffled.)

FLAXLEY: The what?

LEFIAT: Holy shoe of Dero!

FLAXLEY: That shoe wasn't holy!

LEFIAT: Yes, it was, it's a symbol of prosperity in some cultures!

FLAXLEY: Who told you that?

LEFIAT: The king! That shoe is over five hundred years old!

(Giving him a belittling glance, Flaxley stood tall.)

FLAXLEY: Rubbish, that shoe used to be mine!

(Lefiat was completely thrown.)

LEFIAT: Eh?

FLAXLEY: When I left for Tifaeris I didn't take any of my belongings! When you told me you had to bury that shoe, I thought it was a training mission!

LEFIAT: No, that shoe really is holy! The *king* said so!

(Flaxley frowned, annoyed at Lefiat's resistance to his revelation.)

FLAXLEY: Lefiat, the old cobbler in Guevina made them for me three years ago!

LEFIAT: No, maybe they looked similar but...

(Clearly incensed, Flaxley flapped.)

FLAXLEY: They had my bloody name stitched into the tongue!

(As the reality began to sink in, Lefiat gaped.)

LEFIAT: Um... perhaps... what?

FLAXLEY: The king lied to you!

LEFIAT: Yeah! Eh? What's going on?

FLAXLEY: I don't know, but if I was you, I'd ask him as soon as you get back to Guevina!

(Struggling to comprehend what he'd just learnt, Lefiat scratched his head.)

LEFIAT: I will!

FLAXLEY: Anyway, let's go, Lefiat! We've wasted enough time as it is!

(And with that, they strode away from the wall and headed for the meadow at the foot of the hill. As they did so Flaxley became increasingly concerned by the fact that time was swiftly running out. The Trepe would be arriving the following morning and as of yet, his army were nowhere near ready to face them.)

(As Flaxley and Lefiat headed off towards the hill, they were quite unaware of the fact that the king's two spies had been watching them. Hiding in a tree near to the newly completed wall, first Poynes and then Reeve poked their heads out of the branches. Seeing the coast was clear, they leapt from the tree and approached the section of wall that Lefiat had just rebuilt.)

POYNES: Did you see that? That was the holy shoe of Dero!

(Reeve nodded enthusiastically.)

REEFE: I did! Building it into the wall was a stroke of genius!

POYNES: That Lefiat's a clever guy!

REEFE: He is!

(He paused and mused briefly.)

REEFE: Though, I wonder who that funny bloke with him was!

POYNES: The gangly weakling with the silly haircut?

REEFE: Yeah!

POYNES: I have no idea! And I don't care! Let's return to Guevina and tell the king what we've seen!

(Reefe looked uncertain.)

REEFE: No, let's hang around longer. The villagers are all talking about a battle that supposed to be happening here soon and I wanna see this knight in action!

(Poynes mused briefly before nodding in total agreement.)

POYNES: Sure! Sounds like fun! Nothing like watching a master swordsman in action.

REEFE: Exactly!

(Poynes nodded then paced away.)

POYNES: In the meantime, let's grab an ale at the inn. It's too bloody hot out here.

REEFE: I couldn't agree more.

TREPE VILLAGE – WEDNESDAY MID AFTERNOON

(While Tifaeris continued to make preparations for the biggest battle in his history, over in Trepe village, the coastal vigil continued. All guards were on high alert for the return of Dim Lee and his army. And *only* Dim Lee and his army. The neighbouring settlement of Tifaeris was of little concern to the Trepe army right now. Even if the Trepe had known that Tifaeris was raising an army to fight against them, nothing would have changed. Dim Lee and the Tang Yul army were the bane of the Trepe's existence and his wrath was their only fear.

Although Tifaeris may not have been of any concern in terms of an enemy threat, there was, however, much interest in the place among the Trepe elite. With the situation regarding Tifaeris' finances still unknown they were becoming increasingly determined to find some answers. And so, not about to waste any time in acquiring the information they desired, almost as soon as they returned from collecting her, Kritz was once again brought before Jazzu. As before, the guards threw her to her knees in front of the Jazzu's throne. As she thudded to the stone floor, Jazzu stared down on her and scoffed menacingly.)

JAZZU: Ah, here we go again, Kritzeveltia!

(With her lost child very much at the forefront of her mind, a red mist immediately descended over Kritz and she threw back her head and growled.)

KRITZ: You bitch!!!

(With that, she leapt to her feet and charged at Jazzu. The hatred on her face highlighted her bloody intention as she drew back her fists and snarled. She didn't get far, however, before she was dragged back and beaten to the ground by four of Jazzu's elite guard.)

JAZZU: Oh dear oh dear, I thought you were smarter than that, Kritzeveltia!

(Having laid into her somewhat savagely for a good thirty seconds or more, two of the guards then stood off of her allowing the other two to pull her up to her feet. Determined to keep her subdued, one of them held Kritz's arms tight behind her back and the other kept a firm grip on her neck. Having taken quite a beating, she was clearly dazed as she looked up at Jazzu with blood dripping from her lip.)

JAZZU: Now, before you begin your *life* sentence, halfwit, you'll answer my question! What is the financial situation in Tifaeris?

(Looking overcome with hatred, Kritz spat out some blood before she answered.)

KRITZ: How the hell should I know?

(Clearly losing patience with her, Jazzu jumped to her feet.)

JAZZU: Listen you silly little bitch, I have nothing to lose by killing you!!! Tell me!!!

KRITZ: I'll never help *you*!!!

(Satisfied that she held all the cards, Jazzu forced a smile and sat back down.)

JAZZU: Okay, have it your way! You either tell me or we'll destroy Tifaeris tomorrow whether they have the money or not!

KRITZ: Flaxley will never let that happen! You'll see!

(Jazzu sighed.)

JAZZU: Flaxley this and Flaxley that, he's only one man, Kritzeveltia! A man we captured within two seconds of entering our compound, no less. You should consider yourself lucky we didn't re-arrest *him* as well. Now, do you *really* want to gamble the lives of everyone in Tifaeris on the vain hope that fool will save the day? Well, do you?

(Continuing to fume, Kritz gave no response.)

JAZZU: Fine. Look, let me rephrase it for you. It's really very simple, Kritzeveltia. If you talk to me, I'll spare Tifaeris as long as they come up with the money. But if you don't then... well... even if they have the money, I'll raze it to the ground anyway. There, the future of Tifaeris is now in your hands. So... do you wanna play games, or do you want to talk?

(Desperate for Tifaeris to be spared by any means necessary, Kritz sighed inwardly then relented her angry demeanour.)

KRITZ: Okay!

(Jazzu nodded to her guards and they immediately let go of Kritz's neck and arms. At once, she fell to the floor on all fours, too weak from her beating to stand any longer.)

JAZZU: Well? For the hundredth time, what's the financials situation in Tifaeris? I'm waiting!

(Kritz breathed heavily then begun.)

KRITZ: I told you, I don't know exactly. There's money in Tifaeris, sure. There's plenty of work around, so people go out and earn a living... except the rich and retired.

JAZZU: When you say rich... how rich?

KRITZ: How should I know? There's a few millionaires I'm told, but I really don't know.

JAZZU: Okay... and what about the government?

(Kritz look baffled.)

KRITZ: What about it?

JAZZU: Don't get clever with me girl, remember Tifaeris is at stake!

KRITZ: I'm not! There *is* no government! There's a council to make decisions, but they don't have money!

JAZZU: Then what happens to your taxes?

KRITZ: There are no taxes in Tifaeris! Everyone takes care of themselves.

JAZZU: You lie, there's a free school! That much I do know. Who pays for that?

KRITZ: That's paid for by a benefactor! Just like the medical centre.

(Jazzu looked stumped.)

JAZZU: So there's no government or tax system?

KRITZ: No!

(Kritz sighed.)

KRITZ: Look, I don't know much about politics, I let Flaxley handle that kind of thing.

(Jazzu grinned, very much picturing Tifaeris as a gathering of disorganised buffoons, there for the taking.)

JAZZU: Interesting. So who funds your army?

KRITZ: What army?

(She sighed.)

KRITZ: We don't have an army.

(Jazzu scoffed.)

JAZZU: Just a Flaxley! That fool seems to think he's an army!

(Sick of hearing him slated, Kritz hung her head.)

KRITZ: Please... don't!

(As the weary Kritz hung her head, Jazzu turned to face Elsa who was standing aside her throne.)

JAZZU: Millionaires though? In that case they should have no trouble raising the money!
 (Before Elsa could reply, however, Kritz lifted her head and sneered sharply.)
 KRITZ: Don't bank on it! Most millionaires would rather move to another town than pay *you* the money!
 JAZZU: Is that so?
 KRITZ: No doubt about it!
 (Giving Kritz a belittling glance, Jazzu gestured to her guards.)
 JAZZU: Get this bitch out of my sight!
 (With no energy left to fight with, Kritz offered zero resistance as the guards started to drag her away. Before they'd quite reached the door, however, Jazzu called out to her wearing a cold sneer.)
 JAZZU: By the way, Kritzeveltia, I lied! In 19 hours time we're going to arrive in Tifaeris, collect the money then raze it to the ground anyway!
 (Chilled to her very core by the revelation, Kritz was overcome with fear and started to plead desperately as the guards continued to drag her weakened body away.)
 KRITZ: No, please don't, please, I beg you...
 JAZZU: Save your breath, whore! This Flaxley sounds the vengeful type! I hate vengeful types! I won't allow *him* to live! I'll destroy Tifaeris and everyone in it, including your Flaxley, leaving *no-one* alive to seek revenge!
 (With that, Jazzu gave her an evil smile and waved her away.)
 JAZZU: I'll bring you Flaxley's head on a platter, bye now!
 (Seeing red, Kritz started to struggle like crazy, desperate to get hold of Jazzu.)
 KRITZ: You sadistic bitch!!! You'll pay for this!!!
 (As the guards continued to drag the struggling Kritz away, Jazzu yelled to them.)
 JAZZU: When you get her in her cell, give her a swift kick in her lady parts, that'll stop her thinking about this Flaxley for a while!
 (Allowing herself a hateful smile as Kritz was dragged out of sight, cursing her name all the way, she then turned to her advisor, Elsa.)
 JAZZU: Right, let's take stock. How much have *we* raised?
 ELSA: So far, about two hundred thousand!
 JAZZU: That aint much!
 ELSA: It's more than I thought we would!
 (Jazzu mused briefly and scratched her chin.)
 JAZZU: So, if Tifaeris has raised eight hundred thousand, we'll be okay?
 ELSA: Exactly!
 JAZZU: If they don't have it, I shudder to think what Dim Lee will do to us!
 ELSA: Well, like Kritzeveltia said, they have millionaires in Tifaeris! We'll be fine, it shouldn't be hard to put down any resistance, Tifaeris doesn't even have an army! It'll be like taking limbs from a leper!
 (Following a brief pause to absorb her words, Jazzu smirked confidently.)
 JAZZU: You're right! Come tomorrow, we'll have all the money we need!
 ELSA: And then some, empress!
 (Jazzu smiled as she sensed an easy victory then upped and walked away with a spring in her step.)
 JAZZU: Perfect!

TIFAERIS – WEDNESDAY MID AFTERNOON

(Just outside of Tifaeris at this time, Flaxley was more determined than ever to put an end to Jazzu and her entire tribe. With one eye on the time he lined up all his troops, which now

included Lefiat and Derek, and gave them a lecture at the foot of the hill.)

FLAXLEY: There isn't a lot of time left, men! Now, I need to assess your fitness everyone, so we're going to have a little run over the cliff tops and back through the woods, okay?

(His words were greeted with a chorus of groans.)

FLAXLEY: Come on you lot, do I have to remind you why we're doing this?

MAN 01: Yes, actually. We've got a bloody massive battle tomorrow, isn't running about just going to tire us all out?

FLAXLEY: We're not going to the moon and back!

MAN 02: Even so...

FLAXLEY: Even so, nothing. You need to get your joints moving, so they'll be more supple. Consider it part of the warm up.

(He then nodded sternly.)

FLAXLEY: And like I say to need to assess your fitness. I'm not sure what I'll do with the information, but it might help me make decisions when it comes to finalising our tactics for the battle.

(At once, everyone groaned again.)

MAN 03: You're serious about this, aren't you?

FLAXLEY: Yes! And so should *you* be.

(One of his men sighed with acceptance.)

MAN 01: He's right, I suppose. We are doing this for the good of Tifaeris, after all.

FLAXLEY: Quite. In fact, we're doing it for the mere *survival* of Tifaeris. Now, quit complaining and follow me!

(With that, Flaxley about turned and started to run. Reluctantly the others followed suit, complaining bitterly as they went.)

FLAXLEY: Stop whining, it isn't far!

MAN 01: Not for you maybe, you're fit!

(Already struggling after only running a mere twenty feet or so, Thin yelled out.)

THIN: You're not seriously expecting *me* to keep this up are you?

(Ever anxious to be of use, Lefiat patted him on the back.)

LEFIAT: Don't worry, fat bloke, I'll run with you!

THIN: My name's Thin!!!

(As they jogged across the meadow then up across the nearby cliff top, Flaxley, Derek and a few others were striding confidently, concentration etched upon their brows. Those in the middle were trying desperately not to laugh at Derek's little legs going like the clappers but those at the back looked as if they were about to collapse of exhaustion at any moment.)

THIN: I can't do this. That bloody Flaxley's having a laugh!

LEFIAT: You can do it!

THIN: Are you still here? Run with someone else you annoying little git!

(As they continued on along the cliff tops the cool sea breeze was a god send for the stragglers. Gasping for breath, Thin let the breeze wash over him and wiped some sweat onto his sleeve before glaring bitterly ahead at Flaxley. Oblivious to the scornful glances he was receiving from the back runners, Flaxley took a soothing breath of the cooling air then pointed out to sea and yelled over his shoulder.)

FLAXLEY: Fantastic view from up here, don't you think?

(At once, everyone turned their heads to glance out at the sea when they heard a loud scream rise up then fade away. Immediately, they all stopped dead in their tracks and stared down over the cliff edge in horror. Gazing down on the twisted corpse at the bottom of the cliff, Flaxley looked miffed.)

FLAXLEY: If he didn't want to run, he could have just said no.

THIN: Now he tells us.

(One of the men gave Flaxley a sideways glance.)

MAN 03: You think he did that on purpose?

FLAXLEY: I wouldn't be at all surprised. You wouldn't believe some the lengths the soldiers use to go to just to get out of doing fitness training back in Guevina.

MAN 02: Aye, but suicide's a little extreme, don't you think?

MAN 01: Suicide? Is he dead then?

LEFIAT: Well, his head is half hanging off...

MAN 01: I guess he must be then!

(As some of the men started to look more than a little queasy by the bloody mess below, Flaxley stood tall and spoke up.)

FLAXLEY: It know it sounds harsh but we'd better keep going! We've got a battle to prepare for.

(One of the men shrugged.)

MAN 02: It's not harsh at all! He used to be a tax collector back in his old town. I say bollocks to him.

(With that, everyone shrugged and their cliff top run resumed. Upon hearing what the deceased had once done for a living, nobody felt even remotely guilty or remorseful and nobody even bothered looking back. Everyone was, however, extremely careful to make sure they looked where they going. To a man, they all raced close to the trees on the opposite of the path from the cliff edge.

Naturally, those at the back of the pack were more than a little disappointed that the run had resumed so quickly. Thin and two other portly townsmen were struggling horribly. The run felt like a cruel torture and their mood wasn't helped by the well-meaning Lefiat, trying his best to psych them up.)

THIN: How much further?

LEFIAT: Keep it up, you're doing well!

(Quickly losing patience with the lad, Thin gritted his teeth and spat.)

THIN: Will you shut up???

MAN 04: I can't go much further!

MAN 05: How is this running gonna help us in a sword fight anyway?

MAN 04: Assessing our fitness might help decide our tactics, Flaxley said.

MAN 05: Aye, well he can shove his tactics. You don't need to assess my fitness to know I'm slow and fat. You can decipher that from just looking at me.

MAN 04: Exactly. I'm going back in a minute! I can't do this! I'm too fat.

LEFIAT: Don't be defeatist, guys!

MAN 05: I'm gonna thump you in a minute!

(At this point, the sprightly young Phisele ran past them, bristling with energy.)

PHISELE: Ha, ha, slow coaches! You're rubbish, Luffy-lops!

(Far from overjoyed to see her, Lefiat frowned.)

LEFIAT: It's Lefiat!!!

(As she charged towards the front of the pack, the three stragglers all looked quite put out.)

MAN 04: Hold on, I'm not gonna be out done by a little girl!

MAN 05: Me either!

THIN: Let's go, chaps!

(With that, the three of them seemed to gain a second wind and raced closer to the pack with their heads held high. Alone at the back, Lefiat watched them keep abreast with the pack and smiled to himself, feeling proud of his motivation skills.)

LEFIAT: I knew I could get through to them eventually!

(Unfortunately however, their over exertion led to one of them having a fatal heart attack

right there on the cliff top. In absolute agony, he cried out to get his comrades attention then collapsed and died on the spot. At once, the run halted again and everyone stood over the stricken man looking greatly saddened by his expected passing.)

THIN: That could have been me, I'm walking back!

MAN 04: Me too!

THIN: Tell you what, Flaxley, if you kill this many of us in training, I shudder to think what'll happen in battle!

(Sensing the beginnings of discord among the ranks, Flaxley furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: *I didn't kill him!*

MAN 04: You kind of did kill him, Flaxley, not directly, but...

FLAXLEY: I did nothing of the sort! Years of over-eating and bugger all exercise are what did for him!

THIN: That's a bit harsh, Flaxley, have some respect! A good man's died.

(One of the men then sucked his teeth.)

MAN 02: Well, you say he was a good man, but... actually... his missus told mine, he was learning to play the bagpipes!

(Thin swiftly furrowed his brow.)

THIN: Is that so? Then the fat bastard deserved to die. Let's go!

FLAXLEY: Let's!

MAN 01: Bloody right! Bagpipes indeed.

(And so, they raced away once more, several of the men kicking the fallen wannabe bagpipe player as they passed him. Leading the pack, Flaxley was becoming increasingly worried by the delays and decided it was time to head back. Time was not on their side and he was yet to teach them all the basic sword moves they'd need to know. With this in mind, he pointed to the trees at his side before veering off into the woods.)

FLAXLEY: We'll take this woodland path back to the meadow.

MAN 04: Do we have to?

FLAXLEY: No, you can go back the way we came if you like, but I think you'll find this is quite the shortcut.

THIN: How short?

FLAXLEY: Very. It's not far from here at all.

THIN: Good, I'm bloody exhausted.

(Jogging along in the middle of pack, starting to get somewhat tired, Lefiat wiped sweat from his brow and puffed out, when suddenly, little Phisele appeared at his side.)

PHISELE: I'll race you, Luffy-lops!

LEFIAT: It's Lefiat!

PHISELE: Whatever. I'm gonna beat you, you're rubbish.

(Lefiat pouted at her.)

LEFIAT: Leave me alone. You're annoying.

PHISELE: No, I'm not.

LEFIAT: Yes, you are. Now, go away.

(Phisele punched him on the leg and snarled.)

PHISELE: Race me!

LEFIAT: No!

PHISELE: I'll sing!

LEFIAT: I don't care, just clear off.

PHISELE: Fine, you asked for it.

(With that, Phisele proceeded to sing.)

PHISELE: Silly man, silly man, you are a silly man...

(Just then, a deep voice rose up from just behind them.)

ULRICH: Phisele, stop pestering that pointless halfwit and behave yourself.

(Phisele looked to him and pouted.)

PHISELE: But dad, he's funny. He like's a really stupid little boy in a silly man's body.

ULRICH: I'd hardly call *that* a man's body, Phisele, but even so, leave him alone.

(Phisele sighed then dropped back to run with her dad.)

PHISELE: Yeah, okay.

ULRICH: Good girl.

(As Lefiat jogged onwards, his nostrils flared and he mumbled to himself bitterly.)

LEFIAT: Good girl, my arse.

(With that, he promptly tripped and fell on his face. Having landed with quite a thud he then had to endure the indignity of Phisele's chorus as she raced past him.)

PHISELE: Silly man, silly man, you are a silly man...

(Feeling quite the fool, he picked himself then dusted himself down before racing after the pack.)

LEFIAT: Why do bad things always happen to me when she's around?

(He then sighed and hung his head.)

LEFIAT: *And* when she isn't?

(Up at the front of the running pack at this time, Flaxley continued to bound forth comfortably. Being extremely fit, he was barely being tested by such a simple run.)

FLAXLEY: Well done, chaps. You're doing wonderfully. Not far now!

(Struggling in his wake, Thin snarled.)

THIN: You said that ten minutes ago!

(A minute or so later, as they continued on deeper in the woods, everyone seemed very keen to keep close to Flaxley. Vicious creatures like cuddyfinkles and grendiths were not uncommon in this part of the world and that was all the motivation his troops needed to stick close to him. Getting left behind in such a dangerous place, after all, could be fatal.)

FLAXLEY: Almost there!

THIN: I hate you, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: You'll thank me one day... Thin, is it?

(Thin said nothing, both too tired and too annoyed to respond. Flaxley's ideas of 'not much further' and 'not much longer' were very different to his. It was an annoyance shared by several of the lesser athletic among them. This run seemed to be never ending. Their nightmare was, however, soon about to be over. A few moments later, they arrived at the top of a slope leading down to the meadow, where the run was to end. At once, a look of relief washed over all Flaxley's men's faces.)

THIN: Thank fuck for that.

FLAXLEY: I told you it wasn't far!

(With that, Flaxley nodded firmly then yelled out passionately, imploring them all to join him in making a spirited push for home.)

FLAXLEY: Sprint finish!!!

(With that, he took off like a rocket down the hill. Making no attempt to even entertain the idea, however, the others continued to pace themselves and tried to focus on merely finishing the run. Having reached the bottom in very little time at all, Flaxley beamed then about turned and looked back up the hill. At once, his smile evaporated and a peeved look crossed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: Oh, come on!!!

(Watching his men slowly puffing and panting their way down the hill, he shook his head in despair.)

FLAXLEY: Even Derek's jogging!

(As he stood there despairingly with his hands on his hips, however, the air was filled with the sound of a cuddyfinkle roaring its foul roar at the top of the hill. Immediately, the entire group started to bolt at a devils pace towards Flaxley.)

FLAXLEY: Excellent! That got 'em moving!

(Looking terrified, they all reached the bottom of the hill in next to no time and raced behind Flaxley. Unfortunately, however, the runner who'd been at the back when the cuddyfinkle appeared hadn't quite made it. He'd heard the roar, become frozen with fear and was subsequently caught and devoured by the cuddyfinkle.)

FLAXLEY: Eaten by a cuddyfinkle! Shocking way to go.

(With that, he removed his helmet and bowed in respect for the fallen man.)

MAN 01: Not to worry, Flaxley. He was a retired lawyer.

(Flaxley gave the man a swift glare.)

FLAXLEY: Really?

MAN 01: Aye... so he told me.

FLAXLEY: Then, bon appetite, mister cuddyfinkle.

(Flaxley was stumped.)

FLAXLEY: Taxmen, lawyers, bag pipe players... I think we need to start a vetting system before we let anyone else move here.

MEN 03: Aye.

(Flaxley then nodded firmly and placed his hands on his hips. Despite the deaths, he felt the run had been a complete success.)

FLAXLEY: Still, good job chaps. That went pretty well, all told.

(Unfortunately, not all of his men shared his sense of achievement.)

THIN: Oh, really? Seriously, how many of us do you intend to kill, Flaxley? That's three down and we haven't even *seen* a Trepe yet!

FLAXLEY: Hey! None of those deaths were my fault!

MAN 02: Well, you say that, but if you hadn't made us do the run...

FLAXLEY: We'd still have a taxman, a lawyer and a bag pipe player in our midst!

MAN 02: True, but you got lucky. It could just as easily have been a doctor, a barman and a busty wench.

(Flaxley sneered.)

FLAXLEY: A busty wench? There *were* no busty...

MAN 02: Okay, bad example, a doctor and two barmen then!

(Flaxley shook his head and spoke up in an exasperated voice.)

FLAXLEY: You lot are unbelievable. It was just an exercise. This is what armies do. You do want us to be an army, don't you?

MAN 02: Well, yeah, but...

FLAXLEY: Then stop doubting me! I actually learnt something from that run.

MAN 01: You did?

FLAXLEY: Yes! There was only one of us that wasn't fit enough to fight for the cause tomorrow and he died of a heart attack. The rest of you have at least the minimum fitness you'll need. I had feared at least ten of you wouldn't make it back...

THIN: You wanted to kill ten of us???

FLAXLEY: No, you idiot! I mean, I feared ten of you wouldn't make the run and would walk back in your own time. I thought I'd have to arrange something else for you to do, but you're fine.

(He then shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: Unbelievable!

(Just then, Ulrich paced to his side and looked to the assembled men.)

ULRICH: Yeah, it *is* unbelievable. This is Sir Flaxley you're talking to. A veritable one man

army. The saviour of this town. You should be backing him one hundred percent. So, there were some accidents? *He* didn't cause them! He's doing this so people like us...

(He gestured to where Phisele was poking Lefiat repeatedly in the side just to annoy him.)

ULRICH: And people like my little girl can have a safe place to live.

(He then furrowed his brow and raised his voice.)

ULRICH: Behave, you little shit. Leave that nondescript waste of space alone.

(As Phisele crept away from Lefiat with a sorrowful pout on her lips, Ulrich continued.)

ULRICH: Now that's enough of this nonsense. Let Flaxley lead and come tomorrow we might just be able to save this town.

(As everyone nodded in full agreement with Ulrich's words, Thin sighed to himself.)

THIN: Aye, he's right, of course. Sorry, Flaxley.

MAN 02: Aye, sorry.

FLAXLEY: It's fine. No harm done. Anyway...

(With that, he drew his sword.)

FLAXLEY: Let's practice some sword skills now!

THIN: *You* practice, I'm knackered!

MAN 01: Yeah, at least let us get our breath back!

(Annoyed by the thought of yet another delay, but conscious of maintaining a level of morale, Flaxley sighed inwardly then conceded to the request.)

FLAXLEY: Very well, but hurry up about it. There's barely 16 hours 'til the Trepe come, and you'll all need a good nights sleep tonight!

(Looking a little flustered, he then sat on the grass and impatiently tapped his fingers on his thigh, waiting for them to regain their energy.)

(Back in the township at this time, Princess Mandika headed towards Sir Flaxley's house to see if he had any spare coffee the elder could borrow. Expecting to find nobody at home, she whistled to herself as she crossed the porch then pushed open the front door. As she set foot inside the house, however, she was greeted by the sight of Bonson asleep in a chair. At once, she froze on the spot, her brow furrowed and she mumbled under her breath.)

MANDIKA: How come *he* doesn't get sent out to work like a common donkey?

(Rolling her eyes bitterly she then started to head for the kitchen. Not wishing to wake him, she tried to tip-toe her way there carefully, but inevitably, her foot found the creaky floor board and Bonson was woken with quite a start.)

BONSON: But I'm too young to die!!!

(Highly amused by his panicked reaction, Mandika couldn't help but grin.)

MANDIKA: Yeah right, *you're* not too young for anything!

BONSON: Excuse me?

MANDIKA: Dreaming we're we?

BONSON: I wasn't asleep!

MANDIKA: No? What made you think I was going to kill you then?

(Bonson gave her a belittling glance then frowned.)

BONSON: What? Be quiet!

(Never one to indulge Bonson's rudeness easily, Mandika frowned back at him.)

MANDIKA: It's be quiet, *ma'am*!

BONSON: You said it! Anyway, what are you doing back?

MANDIKA: I need to get some coffee!

BONSON: Need a hand?

MANDIKA: No, some coffee, what are you, deaf?

(He rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: I meant do you need any help?

MANDIKA: No, no, you go back to sleep, don't worry; we'll do all the work!

(Incapable of letting even the tiniest dig or criticism slide, Bonson scoffed.)

BONSON: For one I wasn't asleep and secondly, I'd hardly call what you're doing work!

MANDIKA: At least I'm helping out, that's more than you are!

BONSON: If you must know, ma'am, I've just finished creating an illusion to use in battle!

(Mandika scoffed, not even remotely impressed.)

MANDIKA: Whatever!

(Somewhat rattled by her coolness, Bonson folded his arms and mocked her bitterly.)

BONSON: At least I've been of *some* use, princess! All you're doing is collecting and counting money, when you know full well that Flaxley has no intention of paying the Trepe a single Lig!

(Mandika looked uncertain.)

MANDIKA: What?

BONSON: He intends to fight them, you know that! Even if you raise *two* million lig, Flaxley will see to it that the Trepe don't receive *any* of it!

(Rattled by his words, Mandika gaped, unable to think of a response.)

BONSON: So, in short, ma'am, you've been wasting your time and haven't helped Flaxley or Kritz one iota!

MANDIKA: Yes, I have...

BONSON: No, you haven't!

(He scoffed.)

BONSON: And even if there *was* a point in raising the money, I very much doubt *your* half arsed efforts would have helped very much.

MANDIKA: What's that supposed to mean???

BONSON: Well, look at you now, coming back for coffee. Taking a break, are we?

MANDIKA: Everyone's entitled to a break, Bonson!

BONSON: Yes, but how many breaks have had today, exactly? I bet the elder had plenty of coffee until you went over there, drinking endless cups of it while he does all the work. I'm right, aren't I? I bet he's been collecting the money and you've been doing the simple task of counting it in between long periods of slacking off and drinking his coffee.

MANDIKA: That's nonsense!

BONSON: Is it now? You forget, Mandika, I *know* you. You're motivation isn't to help Flaxley, it's to *look* like you are while actually doing the bare minimum. You're not actually working, you're basically hiding out at the elder's house with your feet up, counting some coins every now again.

(He scoffed at her harshly.)

BONSON: Fact is, if you *really* wanted to help Flaxley, you wouldn't be wasting your time with the elder. You know collecting the money is a futile gesture. If you were genuine about wanting to help him, you'd be out there doing something you *know* he'll find useful.

(Deeply hurt by Bonson's accusations, Mandika flapped at him angrily.)

MANDIKA: I'm doing what he asked me to!!!

BONSON: Yes, but only because it's easy and you want gratitude. It's not because you want to *help*, or like I said, you'd find something to do that's actually useful!

(He then glared at her harshly.)

BONSON: And collecting coins isn't it! Admit it!

(As Bonson's words hit her, Mandika whimpered. He was right about one thing, Flaxley was very much intent on fighting the Trepe and collecting coins was indeed a waste of time.

Making this realisation, Mandika's bottom lip drooped.)

MANDIKA: But... I really wanted to help...

(Bonson scoffed.)

BONSON: Yeah right.

MANDIKA: It's true!

(Tears formed in her eyes and she looked very much as if she was going to cry but the remorseless Bonson kept coming.)

BONSON: Cobblers. You just wanted to do something easy then take the credit for a job well done. Lots of pats on the head for caring, sharing Mandika. Well, you don't fool me! You didn't want to *help* at all. You just wanted to *look* as if you were then accept the kudos for it.

(He shook his head in disdain for her.)

BONSON: I mean, it's not like you genuinely *care* about Flaxley or Kritz. The only person you care about is it yourself! No offense to Derek, but the will to do what's right is an alien concept to you. Selflessness is a virtue and let's be honest, you don't have it in you, ma'am! (Greatly upset by his stinging criticism of her, Mandika burst into tears then raced into the bedroom, just to get away from him. Her heart felt extremely heavy and she couldn't take his vile tongue any longer. Although she'd never admit it, there was a large element of truth in what Bonson had said about her slacking off and that was what hurt her the most. Trying hard not to accept that fact however, she concentrated her mind on refuting Bonson's cruel allegations that she didn't care about Flaxley or Kritz.)

MANDIKA: I do care... and I do want to help... I do... there must be something I can... (She then spotted some of Kritz's make up on the dresser and bit her lip with uncertainty.)

MANDIKA: I wonder...

(As an idea sprang into her mind, a wry smile crossed her brow and she clenched her fists determinedly. All at once, the dark clouds over her head were swept away and she stood tall with a defiant expression on her face. Bonson's words had crushed her and now she was determined to ram them back down his throat.)

MANDIKA: I'll help her in a way no man ever could! I'll show Bonson who's selfish!

(Having watched Mandika race out of the room in tears, Bonson stood up and walked outside onto the porch feeling proud of himself. After all, he'd managed to bring Flaxley to his senses, and he hoped that a good dressing down was exactly what Mandika needed to help her get over her ingrained selfishness.)

BONSON: She'll thank me in the long run!

(Unfortunately, Bonson didn't realise how profoundly his scathing words had affected her. A few minutes later, as he stood there on the porch enjoying the afternoon sunshine, Mandika came running past him wearing some of Kritz's clothes. Having never expected to see her wearing such an outrageously skimpy outfit, Bonson looked most perplexed.)

BONSON: What are you wearing? You look like a right tart.

(As she ran down the steps at the front of the house, she turned to yelled back to him.)

MANDIKA: I'll show you, you old git! I'm going to Trepe village to rescue Kritz!

(Bonson flapped in shock and dismay.)

BONSON: What??? Are you insane???

MANDIKA: Far from it! You reckon I don't care and don't really want to help, well, I'll show you, arse face!

BONSON: Don't do it! Rescuing her isn't going to work, Flaxley already tried that! You could ruin everything and get yourself killed in the process!

(Charging off towards the town gates, glaring back over her shoulder as she did so, Mandika scoffed at him coldly.)

MANDIKA: They won't kill me; they'll think I'm one of them! This disguise is fool proof!

BONSON: Mandika!!! No!!!

(Blanking him completely, she then raced out of the Tifaeris gates, leaving a fretting Bonson in her wake.)

BONSON: Even if you succeed... it's a two hour walk, Mandika!!! What am I saying? That isn't even remotely relevant!

(He shook his head as she disappeared out of sight.)

BONSON: Nice one, Bonson, how do I explain *this* one to Flaxley?

(Bonson was stuck for what to do. He was too old and slow to go after her and he didn't particularly want to stop the soldiers training to tell Flaxley the news at this sensitive hour. Feeling distressed and on edge, he could only pace up and down on the porch looking worried sick.)

BONSON: Oh, shit... what would Flaxley do?

TREPE VILLAGE – WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON

(Unbeknown to the princess, while she was off trying to do what she considered the decent thing for once, Bonson was pulling out what was left of his hair. He was still pacing up and down over an hour and a half later when Mandika arrived outside Trepe village. Feeling unusually proud of herself, she came to a standstill some ten feet from the gates and bent to catch her breath. She'd ran all the way and was thoroughly exhausted. Keen to get on and prove herself, she then stood tall and clenched her fists defiantly.)

MANDIKA: I'll show him who's selfish!

(With that, she put her head down and started to walk through the Trepe village gates.

Immediately, a guard blocked her path.)

GUARD: Halt!

MANDIKA: Okay!

(As she stood in a cocky manner with every confidence in her excellent disguise, the guard scrutinised her closely.)

GUARD: Hey, you're Princess Mandika of Guevina! What are you doing dressed as one of us?

(Shocked and astounded at being recognised, she became very flustered, very quickly.)

MANDIKA: Um... I'm on a royal visit!

(Taking up a doubting stance, the guard glared at her.)

GUARD: In disguise?

MANDIKA: Nothing wrong with that! Now let me inspect your prison!

(Much to Mandika's dismay, the guard smirked at her coldly.)

GUARD: Now *that* I can help you with!

(And thus, Mandika had incredibly broken Flaxley's world record for the quickest person ever to get captured by the enemy. Not caring one iota about her royal standing, the Trepe guards immediately dragged her away to the cells, crying all the way.)

MANDIKA: It's not fair; you wait 'til my dad hears about this!

GUARD: Yeah? Who's going to tell him? I won't and *you* certainly can't!

MANDIKA: But... it's not fair... I want my daddy!!!

(With no sympathy for the princess whatsoever, the guards dragged her to the nearest cell block then threw her to her knees in a cell and left. As she trembled there on all fours feeling very sorry for herself, however, she heard a voice that brought her much comfort.)

KRITZ: What the hell are you playing at, Mandika?

(Looking utterly relieved, Mandika swiftly glanced up then scrambled to her feet. With her heart pounding she raced across the cell and hugged the battered and bruised Kritz like a long lost sister again.)

MANDIKA: I've come to rescue you!

(Kritz looked entirely sceptical.)
KRITZ: Oh yeah? How? And why?
(Mandika's blank expression said it all.)
KRITZ: I guess it's the thought that counts!

TIFAERIS – WEDNESDAY, LATE AFTERNOON

(Over at the hill in Tifaeris, Flaxley was beginning to reap the fruit of his labours. Some of the soldiers had mastered the basic defensive techniques and were onto practising the countering. Their progress throughout the day had been steady and greatly encouraging. Unfortunately, however, as the afternoon worn on, he became increasingly aware that the men in his command hadn't eaten all day. Very much a firm believer that a hungry soldier was a beaten one, he soon set about dispersing them for 90 minutes. Having done so, he also headed for home with Lefiat and Derek at his side. Despite the fact time was swiftly running out, Flaxley felt things were going exceptionally well and he couldn't have been happier with the day's events. As they approached his house however, he saw Bonson pacing up and down on the porch in some considerable distress and immediately felt a dark sense of foreboding. Fearing something terrible had happened, he raced up to him urgently with Derek and Lefiat hot on his heels.)

FLAXLEY: Bonson, what's wrong?

DEREK: Are you okay?

(Bonson waved his arms around erratically.)

BONSON: It's Mandika, I had a full head of brown hair until she was born!

FLAXLEY: What's she done?

BONSON: I'm sure she won't be happy until I'm in an asylum!

FLAXLEY: Bonson, calm down and tell me what happened!

LEFIAT: Yeah, where is she?

(Not knowing quite how to break the news, Bonson shook his head despairingly.)

BONSON: I tried to stop her, sir!

(He then sighed despondently.)

BONSON: She went to Trepe village to rescue Kritz!

(Finding his words ridiculous, Lefiat fell about laughing.)

LEFIAT: Yeah, right. Needed someone to braid her hair, did she?

BONSON: This is no time to get witty, halfwit! I'm serious.

(At once, Lefiat's jaw dropped in horror and it was Flaxley's turn to be sceptical.)

FLAXLEY: Bonson? What the hell are you talking about? Why would Mandika of all people suddenly decide to do that?

(Bonson looked shifty.)

BONSON: I don't know. Maybe someone insinuated something and she got upset... I don't know.

(Derek sighed.)

DEREK: What exactly did you say to her, Bonson?

(Bonson looked most offended.)

BONSON: Why do you assume it was me???

DEREK: I didn't!

BONSON: I see... mind reading...

(With that, Bonson hung his head and sighed.)

BONSON: Fair enough. I may have suggested that collecting money was a waste of time.

FLAXLEY: It is, but that wouldn't be enough to make her charge off and do something stupid.

BONSON: Well, true... but I may have also told her she was only doing it because she was lazy... and didn't really want to help... and I may have also suggested that she didn't give a crap about you or Kritz...

(As everyone glared at him angrily, Bonson shrunk where he stood.)

BONSON: I may also have pointed out that she only cares about herself... and that she'd never do anything selfless to help someone else. And possibly some other stuff too.

FLAXLEY: So she got all upset and decided to prove you wrong?

BONSON: I suppose so, but in my defence I didn't know she was going to rush off and do that!

(Flaxley growled with frustration.)

FLAXLEY: Well, that's just perfect that is.

DEREK: Upset or not, why would she rush off to rescue Kritz? She already knows that plan's a non-starter.

(Flaxley growled at Bonson.)

FLAXLEY: Because Bonson here probably upset her *so* much, she lost the plot entirely.

(Bonson shook his head.)

BONSON: Honestly?

DEREK: That would be a first.

BONSON: What's that supposed to mean?

DEREK: Stop saying "possibly" and "you may have", you know damn well what happened.

BONSON: Fine! You're right, Flaxley. Spot on, in fact. I was so hard on her, she flipped and ran off to prove what I said was wrong. And that she *does* care.

(As Lefiat continued to gape in a horrified trance, Bonson looked to Derek and held out his palms.)

BONSON: I just wanted her to take a look at herself, you know? To encourage her to be a better person. I didn't think for a moment she'd lose the plot like that.

(He sighed.)

BONSON: I thought she'd start making drinks and take them to the soldiers or something, the last thing I expected was for her to raid Kritz's wardrobe and run off dressed like a tart.

(He then whimpered and looked to Flaxley.)

BONSON: I mean, as a Trepe.

(Flaxley sneered at him then drew his sword.)

FLAXLEY: I'll let that slide for now, Bonson. I've got to stop her before she reaches Trepe village. Disguised as a Trepe or not, she's bound to get caught.

BONSON: You're far too late now, Flaxley, this all happened hours ago!

(Flaxley was far from pleased to say the least.)

FLAXLEY: Then why didn't you come and tell me?

(As Lefiat continued to mouth silent words, Derek looked to Flaxley urgently.)

DEREK: What shall we do?

(Finally some words managed to escape from Lefiat's lips.)

LEFIAT: I've gotta rescue her!

(Flaxley swiftly grabbed hold of him.)

FLAXLEY: No, Lefiat. Don't make the same mistake I did, you could end up getting her killed!

(Lefiat struggled to escape his grasp for a moment then slowly stopped and hung his head in defeat.)

FLAXLEY: Why didn't you tell me sooner, Bonson?

BONSON: I didn't know what to do! I thought you were busy!

FLAXLEY: I wasn't too busy for the princess, damn it!

BONSON: If you'd gone after her what would have happened to your army? You have to

train them, Flaxley. You couldn't have left them to it and gone after her!

(Flaxley sighed and shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: Maybe not... but I would have! If you'd have told me, I could have caught her up and dragged her back here before she got there.

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Too late now, though. She'll be at the Trepe compound by now and anything we do might give her away and get her caught.

(He growled.)

FLAXLEY: You cock, Bonson.

BONSON: Well... okay... I don't see how name calling will help, but if it makes you feel better.

(Looking tortured, Lefiat retorted angrily.)

LEFIAT: Then name calling it is! Bonson, you are a... silly man... a silly man!!!

(He then hung his head in shame.)

LEFIAT: I hate Phisele.

(With that, he threw his sword on the floor and started to walk away.)

LEFIAT: And I hate you too, Bonson!

(As he went and sat on the grass outside the home opposite, Bonson shook his head in shame.)

DEREK: Poor lad!

BONSON: I don't feel very good about myself right now!

(Flaxley sighed and shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: No! You didn't know she'd react like that. And fair enough, you then didn't know what to do when she did.

BONSON: Some wise man I'm going to be!

FLAXLEY: Shitty things happen. Don't blame yourself, Bonson!

BONSON: Easier said than done!

(With that, Flaxley walked over to Lefiat and sat beside him, the two of them making a very sorry sight.)

FLAXLEY: I guess we're in the same boat, Lefiat.

(Saying nothing, Lefiat stared angrily into the ground.)

FLAXLEY: We'll get her back!

(Lefiat slowly shook his head.)

LEFIAT: We'd better!

FLAXLEY: It may not be much of a consolation Lefiat, but I know exactly how you feel right now!

LEFIAT: No, you don't!

FLAXLEY: Believe me, I do!

LEFIAT: I love her, you know!

(Flaxley offered him a consoling smile.)

FLAXLEY: I can see that!

LEFIAT: Like you love Kritz, the only difference is, if Kritz is in trouble she knows she can rely on you! What's Mandika got? Some pretend knight who has to get someone else to do his missions for him! Now she's in trouble, and here I am, miles away without a clue!

FLAXLEY: Is that how you see yourself, as a pretend knight?

LEFIAT: Well I am, I mean look at me!

FLAXLEY: Lefiat, you earned your knighthood, we'd all be dead if it wasn't for you!

LEFIAT: That was then Flaxley, this is now. And look at me, I'm useless!

FLAXLEY: Rubbish! 18 months ago you were like a stick with legs, now you're filling out and starting to look like a real man! That sword of yours is beginning to look like a dagger in

your hands these days!

LEFIAT: I know you mean well, Flaxley, but please don't patronise me!

FLAXLEY: I mean it, Lefiat, it's time you tried a bigger sword. You could become a great knight yet!

(Trusting Flaxley as he did, Lefiat looked slightly lifted.)

LEFIAT: You mean that, don't you?

(Right now, Flaxley was glad that part of his training was to become a great liar.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, Lefiat... I do!

(Despite his obvious anguish Lefiat somehow forced a weak smile, geed by Flaxley's confidence in him.)

LEFIAT: Thanks, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: You're welcome. Now try to remain focussed. Once we've vanquished those Trepe bitches tomorrow, we can rescue Kritz and Mandika together, okay?

LEFIAT: Right... so that's the plan is it? Leave it until tomorrow? Tomorrow???

FLAXLEY: There's nothing else we *can* do, Lefiat. We have two priorities here. One is to make sure Tifaeris can win tomorrow and the other is to rescue Kritz and Mandika. The only way we can do both is to make sure we carry on as planned.

LEFIAT: But... what if something happens to Mandika tonight while we're messing about somewhere else?

FLAXLEY: We're not going to be messing about...

(He looked Lefiat in the eye and nodded sternly.)

FLAXLEY: Trust me, Lefiat. Mandika will be okay. She's in disguise so she may not even get caught. And even if she does get caught, she'll be fine.

LEFIAT: You don't know that!

FLAXLEY: I do, actually. Kritz told me the Trepe like to throw their captives in jail and taunt them mercilessly for weeks about their impending demise before they hang them. Nothing will happen to her tonight.

LEFIAT: Are you sure?

FLAXLEY: Kritz wouldn't make up stuff like that, Lefiat.

LEFIAT: Well, okay.

FLAXLEY: So, basically, we're in the same position as we were before. The only difference is we'll have *two* women to rescue after we've seen off the Trepe. Nothing has really changed. Believe me; if I thought for a minute Mandika's life was in danger, I'd have left for Trepe Village already.

LEFIAT: Fair enough. But... what if she got attacked by a cuddyfinkle on the way there?

FLAXLEY: Well seeing as all she knows about Trepe village is that it's five miles down the coast, I'm assuming she'd have run down the beach to get there. Cuddyfinkles don't go near beaches.

LEFIAT: Grendiths then, or any other kind of beast.

FLAXLEY: The beaches are perfectly safe in this part of the world, Lefiat. It's one of the few places nobody ever gets attacked by the wildlife.

LEFIAT: Really? But I heard...

FLAXLEY: Beaches can be dangerous around Guevina sometimes, yes, that's true. But trust me, around here they're perfectly safe.

LEFIAT: Yeah... okay.

FLAXLEY: Good lad.

(He then nodded sternly.)

FLAXLEY: We'll continue as normal and come the morrow, like I said, we can rescue them both together.

(Just over an hour later, following a hearty and thoroughly well deserved meal, Flaxley and his troops reconvened in the meadow at the bottom of the hill. The break had indeed been refreshing but with only 13 hours to go until the arrival of the Trepe warriors, nerves were beginning to jangle.

Eager to keep everyone calm before they begun what was going to be their last training session together before the big battle, Flaxley paced slowly before his proud looking troops and attempted to make an uplifting speech.)

FLAXLEY: Men, you have impressed me, and believe me, that isn't easy!

(Thin raised a nervous hand.)

THIN: How do you think we'll do tomorrow?

FLAXLEY: If you fight to your utmost I feel we can win!

MAN 01: And if we don't?

FLAXLEY: Lest we forget chaps, the Trepe are trained warriors, this is what they practice all their lives for!

MAN 01: So essentially, we don't stand a chance!

FLAXLEY: Bollocks! They may be highly trained, but they're fighting because they were told to. We on the other hand are fighting for everything we own. We have no choice but to stand up and fight, that gives us the advantage!

(His men looked to one another.)

THIN: I like your style, Flaxley!

(Flaxley nodded to accept the compliment then stepped forward.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, now let's practice some sword work!

(He then set about making everybody busy, learning the important moves that could be the difference between life and death. For two solid hours the men hung onto his every instruction and copied his every move. Then, when he thought they were ready he got them to practice duelling.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, try to get into pairs of equal stature!

THIN: Shall I fight two people then?

(Everyone laughed.)

FLAXLEY: Just for that you can fight *me*!

THIN: Me and my big mouth!

(In the middle of it all, looking somewhat overexcited, Phisele bounced up and down with her sword poised.)

PHISELE: Come on Derek, I'll play with you!

DEREK: Play?

(Spotting her, Flaxley's eyes bulged and he quickly rushed over and snatched the sword from her.)

PHISELE: Hey!!! That's mine!!!

FLAXLEY: Who gave this little girl a sword?

MAN 01: He did!

(He pointed to Lefiat.)

LEFIAT: You snitch!

FLAXLEY: Look, somebody take her home, this is no place for a child!

ULRICH: She can't go home, Flaxley. The missus is at work, she won't be back until midnight and I can't leave her at home on her own.

FLAXLEY: Well she can't stay here, there's sword play afoot!

ULRICH: Then I'll have to go with her.

(Derek looked to Flaxley then shrugged.)

DEREK: No need for that! I'll go. I'll take her to your house, Flaxley, sword fighting isn't my thing anyway!

(Ulrich smiled gratefully.)

ULRICH: Much appreciated, little green bloke.

DEREK: You're welcome, stocky pink man.

(With that, he took Phisele's hand then turned to leave. Unfortunately for him, however, Phisele dug her heels in and pouted at him bitterly.)

PHISELE: Not fair, I wanna fight!

DEREK: Come on!

PHISELE: Shan't!

(As she stood there glaring at him in something of a sulk, Derek protested. He had no idea how to handle children and felt somewhat out of his depth.)

DEREK: Don't do that, we have to go!

FLAXLEY: Derek, hurry up, will you?

DEREK: She won't come, Flaxley!

(Phisele glared at Derek.)

PHISELE: Look, I'll only go if you agree to play with me!

DEREK: Play with you?

PHISELE: Yeah!

DEREK: Don't be silly! You can play with a ball or something while I read.

PHISELE: Failed! I'm not going then!

DEREK: But...

PHISELE: Play with me!!!

DEREK: I'm too old to play!

(Just then, much to Derek's annoyance, Flaxley chipped in with his opinion on the matter.)

FLAXLEY: Go on, Derek, what harm will it do?

(Derek gave him a prolonged filthy look then sighed in defeat.)

DEREK: Fine! But I'll get you back for this, Flaxley!

(With that, the reluctant alien led her away.)

PHISELE: I'm taller than you!

DEREK: Oh, shut up!

(As soon as Derek had led Phisele out of harms way, Flaxley stood tall and glanced about at his men.)

FLAXLEY: Okay then... duelling. Remember, defence is the key to a good duel!

THIN: Or running away in my case, why did I have to get you?

FLAXLEY: I won't hurt you!

THIN: You'd better not or I'll... bleed!

FLAXLEY: Okay, let's go everyone, remember, be careful... concentrate!

(Keen to follow Flaxley's instructions to the letter, a few of the men took tentative lashes at their partner's swords.)

FLAXLEY: That's it... nice and easy for now!

(As his men carefully lunged, blocked or parried, Flaxley easily fended off Thin's blade, making no effort to counter as he watched his men's efforts. Nearly all of them were displaying the correct stances and a superb degree of focus. Lefiat, however, was struggling to concentrate. All he could think of was Mandika.)

LEFIAT: This all seems pointless without Mandika!

(His partner then swung at him and he just managed to duck out of the way in time.)

LEFIAT: What the hell did you do that for?

(Much to Lefiat's annoyance, his partner replied in an equally gormless voice to his own.)

PARTNER: I'm supposed to, stupid!

LEFIAT: Don't call me stupid; who the hell do you think you are?

PARTNER: If you must know, my name's Lefiat!

(Lefiat was furious.)

LEFIAT: Eh? No it aint, *I'm* Lefiat!

PARTNER: You Liar! *I* am!

(They looked angrily into each others eyes, sneering.)

LEFIAT: Anyway, I'm actually *Sir* Lefiat of Guevina!

(Feeling victorious, he gave him a cocky grin. Undeterred, the other Lefiat matched his smarmy grimace.)

PARTNER: Yeah well... I'm *Lord* Lefiat of... everywhere!

(They both looked scornfully at each other for a moment then without a word, threw their swords down and engaged in fisticuffs.)

FLAXLEY: You two!!!

(Immediately, Flaxley raced over and pulled them apart.)

FLAXLEY: What the hell's this about?

LEFIAT: Oh, sod off!

(Clearly still upset, Lefiat spun around and started to wander off towards the house.

Understanding how he felt, Flaxley let him go and looked back to his men.)

FLAXLEY: Oh well. Thin? Come here.

(Having paired Thin with Lefiat's partner, Flaxley then stepped back from them all to observe his men's technique without any distraction.)

FLAXLEY: Great technique... that man!

MAN 01: You might have made some effort to learn our names!

FLAXLEY: I did... um... Horsley?

MAN 01: I'm Tragen, Horsley's over there!

FLAXLEY: Never mind that, get on with it!

(As the men sparred away against each other, Flaxley began to notice signs of real talent in some of them. Others were lesser naturals, but even in them he could see a certain potential.

Delighted with it all, he nodded in satisfaction.)

FLAXLEY: Okay chaps, finish strong!!!

(With that, they all started to swing violently at each other, much to Flaxley's dismay.)

FLAXLEY: Whoa!!!

(As the sound of clashing steel echoed across the meadow, Flaxley eyes bulged and he swiftly raced forth to stop everybody.)

FLAXLEY: Stop!!! I didn't say kill each other!!!

(As the sound of metal upon metal abated, one of his men raised his hand and grimaced with shame.)

MAN 01: Um... I'm sorry; I think I got carried away!

FLAXLEY: What?

(At once, everyone rushed over and gathered around a blood covered man lying motionlessly on the ground.)

THIN: Is he dead?

MAN 01: I didn't *mean* to kill him!

MAN 02: Tell me he used to be a lawyer too!

MAN 01: No actually... he's my GP.

(Starting to turn red, Flaxley snarled and looked to the heavens to calm himself.)

THIN: You're going to shout, aren't you?

(Gathering himself, Flaxley stood silently for a moment, took several deep breaths then nodded to himself sternly.)

FLAXLEY: Gentlemen... I think you're ready!

(Immediately, they all erupted into laughter.)

FLAXLEY: I'm serious!!!

(As soon as he finished speaking, the laughter immediately died and the fifty or so remaining men stared straight at him as if he was mad.)

FLAXLEY: You may not realise it but you've come a long way! When the battle starts and the danger becomes real, you'll understand!

(Thin was more than a little sceptical.)

THIN: Flaxley, be honest, you're not just saying that are you?

FLAXLEY: I never patronise people, Thin!

(Thin nodded.)

THIN: We trust you, Flaxley!

(Thin then turned around and eyed his fellow soldiers in a gesture for them to back his sentiments.)

MAN 01: Yes, we trust you!

(At once, very much as a unit, they all nodded or spoke up to give Flaxley their approval. Appreciating the gesture, Flaxley nodded to acknowledge them and stood tall.)

FLAXLEY: Thanks, men.

(With that, he looked up at the lowering sun and nodded.)

FLAXLEY: I think I've taught you all I can, men. You've mastered the basics and the rest comes with practice. I just wish there was more time to do that but it looks like it'll be dark within the hour.

THIN: Then we should keep practising until it's too dark to carry on!

MAN 01: Absolutely.

ULRICH: You never know, another hour's worth might make all the difference.

FLAXLEY: A perfect attitude, men.

(He then grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: Just be careful though, this town can't spare the GP's.

(With that, he paced backwards and watched on proudly as his men resumed duelling, albeit much more carefully this time. As he did so, he allowed himself a saddened sigh. These men were bravely preparing to give their lives for what they held dear and he would never condemn them for it. They were however, very much amateurs and when he'd said they were ready, he'd actually meant, they were as ready as they were ever likely to be. It was his job to instil confidence in them and so he'd done exactly what he'd told Thin he'd never do. He'd patronised them. It didn't sit well with him, but he knew he'd had no choice. After all, an army could only overcome its enemy if it *believed* it could. The truth was, that despite the training, they still weren't soldiers; they were just men with swords. Brave men, whom he hoped had learned enough to keep themselves alive until the battle had been won. With this in mind, he mumbled to himself as he watched them.)

FLAXLEY: Bloody heroes, the lot of them.

(Nodding to himself, he then called out to them.)

FLAXLEY: Good work, men. Once it gets too dark, we can head to my house. I have an ale with everyone's name on it!

(At once, a huge cheer filled the air filling Flaxley with dread.)

FLAXLEY: Only one, mind!

(With that, he rolled his eyes then glanced up into the heavens and sighed. He done all he could do in terms of training and all that remained was the battle. Clenching his fist in hope of a swift victory, he then allowed himself a smile as he thought about Kritz and how good it'd feel to have her home safely again.)

TREPE VILLAGE – WEDNESDAY EVENING

(In Trepe village at this time, Kritz was sat solemnly upon her bunk, staring into space as she thought about her beloved Flaxley. With a black-eye, a fat lip and bruises all over her body, she was desperately trying to take away her pain by reminiscing about all the wonderful times they'd had together. Casting her mind back to the glorious day when she said "I do", she sighed longingly, when her cell mate, Mandika, spoke up from her side and interrupted her train of thought.)

MANDIKA: What's going to happen to us, Kritz?

KRITZ: What? Sorry, I was just thinking about Flaxley!

MANDIKA: Are we going to die?

KRITZ: Well, *you* can! Come tomorrow, I'm getting out of this cell and going home!

MANDIKA: You are?

(Her face dropped.)

MANDIKA: Oh my god!!! By "home" you don't mean here in Trepe Village do you???

You're not going to betray Flaxley and re-join the Trepe are you???

(Kritz was far from amused by the suggestion.)

KRITZ: What the hell, Mandika?

MANDIKA: So by "home" you mean where?

KRITZ: Tifaeris, obviously.

(She shook her head and scowled.)

KRITZ: And I ought to hit you for even suggesting otherwise!

MANDIKA: Then how can you be so confident you'll get out?

KRITZ: Mandika, you idiot, why do you think they've put us in the same cell?

MANDIKA: Don't call me an idiot, *you* can't even read.

(Kritz ignored her quip and rolled her eyes.)

KRITZ: We're in the same cell because there's only one guard on duty! Almost everyone else is preparing to destroy Tifaeris in the morning.

MANDIKA: How could you possibly know that?

KRITZ: I used to be a Trepe, didn't I? I know how these people work!

(Mandika offered her an apologetic smile.)

MANDIKA: Okay! Sorry!

KRITZ: So, in 10 hours time while they're in Tifaeris, I'm gonna use this lightning magic Derek gave me and blow that lock off the door! With the warriors away, getting out will be easy!

(Mandika frowned, feeling extremely foolish.)

MANDIKA: So you didn't need rescuing at all?

KRITZ: Nope, not one bit!

(Flustered to the core, Mandika held her head in her hands.)

MANDIKA: For heaven's sake, what was I thinking?

(Kritz furrowed her brow at her.)

KRITZ: Good question! What *were* you thinking?

(She rolled her eyes.)

KRITZ: We already established that rescuing me was a stupid thing to do. You were in the room at the time!

MANDIKA: I don't know... Bonson just made me feel so... I dunno, low I guess. I really wanted to help and after he had a go at me... I just... I stopped thinking.

(Kritz gave her a sideways glance then offered her up a smile.)

KRITZ: Well, your heart was in the right place. That counts for something.

MANDIKA: I suppose.

(She pouted.)

MANDIKA: Maybe being with Lefiat is having an affect on me. I never used to do stupid things.

KRITZ: You can hardly blame this on *him*.

MANDIKA: Oh I dunno, this was a pretty stupid thing to do. Almost Lefiat-esque in its dim-wittedness. Not only did we already agree *not* to rescue you, but you don't even *need* rescuing. And what's more, I didn't even come with a plan! All I had was a disguise for getting myself into the Trepe compound. After that, nothing.

KRITZ: Well, I guess you got lucky then.

MANDIKA: Lucky?

KRITZ: Yeah, you wanted to find me and they brought you straight here!

(Mandika scowled at her.)

MANDIKA: Yeah, what a stroke of luck that was. Arrested and thrown into jail within two seconds of stepping into the village.

(Kritz gave her a consoling smile.)

KRITZ: Hey, like I said, your heart was in the right place. And you didn't know I already had lightning magic to escape with, so you can forgive yourself that much.

MANDIKA: Maybe...

(She then looked to the ceiling and sighed.)

MANDIKA: Flaxley will go nuts when he finds out.

(She looked horribly uneasy.)

MANDIKA: Oh god, he's gonna come and try to rescue me, isn't he?

(She thumped the bunk with her fist.)

MANDIKA: He'll be so frantic with worry about me that he won't be able to concentrate on training his army. No doubt, he'll abandon what he was doing and won't rest until he's got me out of here. What have I done?

(Kritz gave her a cold glance.)

KRITZ: Well for one, you've over-estimated your importance!

MANDIKA: Excuse me?

KRITZ: When it comes to *you* he's always been the consummate professional. And I could see it in his eyes when I left, Mandika, he's got his head straight now. He's focussed on saving Tifaeris so he and I can be together. He'll be concentrating on that, not rushing over here on *your* behalf, I can assure you.

(Mandika then returned Kritz's cold glance.)

MANDIKA: Maybe it's *you* who's overestimating their importance! Saving Tifaeris so you and he can be together, indeed.

KRITZ: He is! I'm his soul mate!

MANDIKA: So? I'm his former charge...

(With that, her entire body seemed to deflate from the shoulders downwards and her bottom lip drooped.)

MANDIKA: I don't like you!

KRITZ: Look, Mandika...

(Not about to let Kritz win that easily, Mandika sat up straight then turned to face her.)

MANDIKA: I'm still his charge, Kritz! He may not be my knight anymore, but he swore to protect me before the king of Guevina himself.

KRITZ: True, but he swore before the *gods* to love *me* forever.

MANDIKA: That's as maybe...

KRITZ: Mandika, do you really think I'm asking too much to expect to be the most important woman in my own husband's life?

MANDIKA: Yes! I'm a princess, by the natural order of things, I'm more important than

you! Full stop!

(Kritz shook her head then sat back.)

KRITZ: Setting your delusions aside, Mandika. He won't come and rescue you. He might have chased you in the hope he caught you before you got here, but seeing as he didn't... trust me, he'll be back to focussing on Tifaeris by now.

MANDIKA: You don't *know* that.

KRITZ: I do, actually. I know my husband. When he's focussed on a goal he does things right. He lost it for a while, sure, but I saw that look in his eye. I can promise you, he'll deal with the situation in Tifaeris first like I asked him to. Then he'll come to rescue *you* when he comes to get *me*.

(She beamed.)

KRITZ: Which thanks to Derek, won't be necessary. Point being, he isn't coming so get used to it.

(Mandika pouted then glanced about the floor nonchalantly.)

MANDIKA: I don't want him to come anyway, I want him to carry on with his army, I was pretty clear on that.

KRITZ: Then you're in luck, because that's exactly what's going to happen.

(They shared a cold glance for a moment then Mandika chuckled to herself.)

MANDIKA: What am I doing, Kritz? One minute I'm angry at myself because I thought Flaxley might come and save me, and the next I'm getting angry at you because you say he won't.

KRITZ: Don't worry about that, babes. Being locked up like this can drive you pretty crazy.

(Mandika sighed and laid her head on Kritz's shoulder.)

MANDIKA: Sorry.

KRITZ: Don't worry about it.

MANDIKA: It's just you're very easy to get angry with.

KRITZ: What?

MANDIKA: You stole my knight!

KRITZ: Yeah, well... serves you right for having such a hot one.

(They both chuckled for a moment then Kritz smiled warmly.)

KRITZ: Besides, you bagged yourself a knight too, didn't you?

(She smiled.)

KRITZ: I was pretty amazed when I found out you two were seeing each other. It was when Lefiat first came to Tifaeris and begged Flaxley to do his mission...

(With that, she clammed up and stared straight ahead in horror.)

MANDIKA: Don't worry! I know about the missions.

KRITZ: Oh... cool then. Anyway, as I was saying, when he first came begging to Flaxley to do his mission for him, he was so excited about being with you. He couldn't stop talking about you.

(She smiled.)

KRITZ: I didn't believe him at first. I mean, you're a pretty girl... and he's...

MANDIKA: A dick? I know.

KRITZ: I didn't say that!

MANDIKA: You didn't have to.

(Kritz sighed sympathetically.)

KRITZ: You know, with you locked up in here and everything, Lefiat will be pulling his hair out right now!

MANDIKA: I can't help that! Not that it matters... he's got stupid hair anyway.

(Somewhat concerned by Mandika's coldness towards Lefiat, Kritz looked quizzical.)

KRITZ: Why do I get the feeling you and Lefiat won't be together much longer?

(Mandika looked away and shrugged.)

KRITZ: You love him, don't you?

MANDIKA: Kind of. I think so, anyway.

KRITZ: You think so?

MANDIKA: I dunno... he's a fool!

KRITZ: Yeah, but you knew that when you started seeing him!

(Glancing to one side as she contemplated the young lad in question, Mandika then proceeded to launch into a rant.)

MANDIKA: He's so useless! Because of him, I don't even feel safe enough to take trips anymore and I hate that. I need a knight I feel safe with!

KRITZ: Then *get* a new knight. You don't have to dump him to do that.

(Mandika sighed.)

MANDIKA: Kritz, it's not just that he's a lousy *knight*... he's a lousy man too. This might sound lame to you, what with you being butch and manly and all...

KRITZ: Excuse me?

MANDIKA: But I want a guy who can take care of me, you know?

KRITZ: Mandika, I'm neither butch nor manly. Sure I can handle myself but I'm all woman. And I'm smoking hot too, even if I do say so myself.

MANDIKA: I knew you wouldn't get it.

KRITZ: I get it, I just didn't like the insulting way you put it.

MANDIKA: So you do understand? I'm a princess, I'm girly and I want a guy who makes me feel safe in his arms. Not one who makes me feel embarrassed every time he opens his mouth.

(Kritz nodded.)

KRITZ: I understand more than you know. What do you think first attracted me to Flaxley?

MANDIKA: His stunning good looks? His charm? His amazing body?

KRITZ: Well yeah, but also the fact he pinned me face down on a table in an arm lock and I couldn't move.

(Mandika gave her a troubled glance.)

MANDIKA: That's a little too kinky for me.

KRITZ: No, the point is, no man has ever been strong enough to do that to me before.

Knowing he was strong enough to protect me if I was in trouble was a huge deal to me. It's natural for a girl to feel that way, so trust me, I get it.

(Mandika nodded solemnly.)

MANDIKA: So you *do* get it then. If he can't make me feel safe, what else is there? Is there any hope for our relationship?

(Kritz shrugged as if the answer was easy.)

KRITZ: Well, I guess you've just got to try and remember why you fell in love with him in the first place!

MANDIKA: That's the problem see, I can't remember!

KRITZ: Oh dear!

MANDIKA: Exactly!

(With that, they both stared silently ahead, deep in thought. Mandika was seriously considering her future with Lefiat, while Kritz returned to silently pining for her beloved. Between them they cut quite the pitiful sight.)

TIFAERIS – WEDNESDAY EVENING

(Shortly after the very last trace of sunlight had disappeared from the Tifaeris sky, Flaxley and his weary band of soldiers headed along a moonlit street on their way back from training,

lusting for an ale. The rise of the moon had meant their work was done and now they were looking forward to their liquid reward. Satisfied they'd achieved much in a short space of time, they chatted merrily and shared many a laugh and a joke as they marched forth. Pacing along at the front, Flaxley couldn't help but smile. He may not have transformed his men into fighting gods, but they'd at least learned enough to give Tifaeris hope of survival come the Trepe attack on the morrow.

Allowing himself a self-satisfied sigh, Flaxley nodded to himself then glanced ahead as they turned a corner and headed towards his house. Still, the high spirited men laughed and joked together as they paced forth when Thin spotted something up ahead in the moonlight, outside Flaxley's home. At once, he shushed everyone and called them to a halt, before drawing their attention to what he'd seen. As one, they all stopped and stared hard ahead with large smirks appearing on their highly amused faces.)

THIN: Tell me, I'm not imaging that!

ULRICH: You're not, mate. I see it too.

(Before them, Derek and Phisele were swinging a skipping rope for Lefiat to skip over.

Having never had so much fun in all his life, he was grinning from ear to ear with delirious joy.)

FLAXLEY: Don't say anything, let's just sneak over there!

(Very much on Flaxley's wavelength, everyone slyly nodded to one another, then they slowly and quietly advanced towards the unlikely threesome. Just as they got within twenty feet of them, they then heard Derek make an impassioned plea.)

DEREK: Come on, Lefiat, it's *my* turn now!

LEFIAT: Just a few more skips, this is fun!

(At once, everyone fell about laughing and Derek and Lefiat froze to the spot with embarrassment.)

LEFIAT: Oh, god. I'm not gonna hear the last of this.

(As Lefiat and Derek continued to cringe, Phisele gathered in her skipping rope and scowled at them both.)

PHISELE: That's ten lig you owe me!

(As Lefiat and Derek continued to shudder and say nothing, Phisele stamped her foot.)

PHISELE: Just another twenty minutes you said, and you promised me ten lig! I wouldn't have let you play with me if you hadn't promised me it, now give!!!

(Crushed by her words, Derek and Lefiat cringed harder, everybody's hysteria clearly killing them.)

DEREK: Why did you make me play this stupid game, Lefiat?

LEFIAT: Eh? It was *your* idea!

(As Flaxley and his militia approached them, many were wiping tears of laughter.)

MAN 01: Paying a six year old girl to play with you... I've seen it all now.

FLAXLEY: You guys are a class act, I'm mean really!

(Once again, Phisele stamped her foot.)

PHISELE: Pay me!!!

(Derek winced and passed her two coins.)

DEREK: Please go.

PHISELE: About time too!

(With that, Phisele yanked the money from his palm then folded her arms angrily.)

PHISELE: And next time, don't hog the rope! I didn't even get a go!!!

(With that, she stomped off and stood with her dad, leaving Flaxley giggling uncontrollably.)

FLAXLEY: Lefiat, yes, but I'm surprised at *you*, Derek.

DEREK: I don't wanna talk about it.

THIN: You should come over to my house some time, you two. My little one could use a play mate. She won't charge much, I'm sure.

(As everyone laughed out loud, Lefiat and Derek burned red with embarrassment.)

MAN 2: Nice one, Thin.

ULRICH: Aye, though I don't know why *I'm* laughing. That's *my* daughter you were fleecing. The going rate is thirty lig for a twenty minute skipping lesson.

(Once again, everyone roared with laughter.)

MAN 01: Oh, I meant to ask you, Ulrich, how's your little one's self defence coming on?

(Ulrich ruffled Phisele's hair and beamed.)

ULRICH: Bloody great, mate. Nobody messes with my little Phisele. The only thing she's got to be afraid of these days is cheeky buggers underpaying her for their skipping tuition.

(As everyone laughed once again, Derek gritted his teeth and mumbled to himself.)

DEREK: Everyone's a bloody comedian.

(Fearing the men would never stop taking the rise out of him, Derek was more than a little relieved when Bonson leant out of Flaxley's front door and called out to them.)

BONSON: I thought you could all use an ale or two, sir!

(As he proceeded to roll a barrel of ale onto the porch, Flaxley's hair almost stood on end.)

FLAXLEY: Steady on, Bonson!

(Bonson grinned.)

BONSON: Someone give me a hand fetching the other barrel! Oh, and the tankards.

(As Flaxley growled, three men raced into Flaxley's home, eager to give Bonson a hand. The others all cheered, sending a chill down Flaxley's spine.)

FLAXLEY: Don't get too excited!!! You can only have one each!!!

(A short while later, having collected the other barrel and Flaxley's bizarrely large collection of ale tankards, everyone found themselves sat around in a circle outside the house, chatting in the moonlight while they guzzled their ale.)

THIN: A fine ale this is too, Flaxley!

BONSON: You think so?

(He grimaced.)

BONSON: It's not quite to Daman Siria's standard... or indeed *any* standard but I'll drink it all the same! I'm thirsty.

(Flaxley gave him a scornful glance.)

FLAXLEY: Nobody's forcing you to drink it.

(Under the weight of Flaxley's stare, Bonson offered up a cheesy grin and relented.)

BONSON: I'm kidding Flaxley, it's not bad at all.

MAN 01: I like it.

MAN 2: Aye, so do I.

FLAXLEY: Well, enjoy it chaps, you're not getting another one!

(He glared at Bonson and mumbled under his breath.)

FLAXLEY: And ale or *two*, indeed. And I'll bet he had six or seven before he came out here. I should punch him!

(Reading Flaxley's angry thoughts, Derek flinched and tried to distract him.)

DEREK: What time is it, Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: Eh? About an hour to midnight, why?

DEREK: Um... no reason.

(With that, Flaxley shrugged and turned to Bonson.)

FLAXLEY: You'd better not have been at my ale all afternoon, Bonson!

(Annoyed by the accusation, Bonson gave him a belittling glance.)

BONSON: Don't flatter yourself, Flaxley, I've tasted better horse piss!

LEFIAT: You tasted horse piss?

BONSON: Yes, Lefiat! Say something stupid, why don't you?

FLAXLEY: Never mind him, what do you mean by that?

BONSON: No offence, Flaxley, you're a knight, not a brewer! Definitely not a brewer!

FLAXLEY: You said it wasn't bad!

BONSON: You told Lefiat he could be a great knight one day! Everybody tells white lies, Flaxley! Like the time you...

(He paused as he caught sight of Flaxley squeezing the handle of his sword in the corner of his eye. Sensing he'd possibly gone too far, he clammed up and looked the other way.)

BONSON: So... an hour to midnight, eh?

THIN: Not long now then!

(Flaxley relented from angrily glaring at Bonson and looked across at his men.)

FLAXLEY: No, it's not. If we all meet at seven tomorrow, okay?

MAN 01: Seven? Okay!

(As everyone nodded or gestured to confirm the meeting time, one of the men looked starry-eyed and glanced upwards joyfully.)

MAN 2: Ah, battle eh? Such fond memories!

DEREK: You've been in battle before?

MAN 2: Only once, when I lived in Kazoo, we had a battle with our neighbours from Ashrin! I remember...

LEFIAT: Did you win?

(The man glared at him coldly.)

MAN 2: No! We came close, but just before we could snatch victory, this gangly, curly haired pillock with a dopey voice and stupid face, butted in and interrupted us before we could finish.

LEFIAT: That must have been annoying!

(Unable to believe what he'd just heard, the man shook a despairing head at Lefiat, then offered him a one lig coin.)

MAN 2: Look, just take Phisele and go and play on the swings or something!

(Everyone laughed except Derek and Lefiat who had begun to realise that their episode with the skipping rope was not about to be forgotten in any hurry.)

MAN 2: Where was I? Oh aye, I fought one chap who hit me twice and insulted my profession, I was a shrub merchant back then, see? He told me to 'get a life', so I did, I took his!

(Bonson sighed.)

BONSON: That was a rubbish anecdote.

MAN 02: I beg your pardon.

BONSON: I had such high hopes for you after you put Lefiat down so brilliantly, and then you go and ruin it with a crap story.

MAN 02: Well pardon me for breathing.

BONSON: I'm not sure I can.

(The man scoffed.)

MAN 02: I don't care what you think, you old fart. Crap or not, I'll share my war stories with whoever I like.

BONSON: Fine, but if you ask me, you'd be better served sharing them with people you *don't* like. You'll lose fewer friends that way.

(Bonson and the man glared at one another for a moment then slowly broke eye contact.)

MAN 02: Anyway, the point I was making is, battles are a scary prospect, but once they get started, you get in the zone, you know? You lose all your nerves and the will to kill or be killed just takes over. As that bloke who called me a 'flower arranging sissy boy' found out.

(Having listened to his words, Flaxley nodded thoughtfully.)

FLAXLEY: I hope you feel as confident tomorrow... bloke, for the Trepe will have superior weapons, superior training and not only that, they'll outnumber us two to one!

LEFIAT: Yeah, but we've got you, Flaxley. And Derek, come to that!

(Bonson looked at Lefiat and sighed.)

BONSON: Unfortunately we've also got...

(Lefiat glared at him in defiance.)

BONSON: What? I was going to say... a lack of armour, that's it!

LEFIAT: Yeah, right.

FLAXLEY: Just don't, Bonson. This isn't the time to go knocking people's confidence!

BONSON: As if I would!

FLAXLEY: You were about to insult Lefiat!

(Looking deeply offended, the other Lefiat in the group piped up bitterly.)

2ND LEFIAT: He'd better not have been!

LEFIAT: I told you once, pal, *I'm* Lefiat!

2ND LEFIAT: It was my name first!

LEFIAT: Liar! My name's always been Lefiat!

(As the two of them stared at one other hatefully, Bonson gaped in horror.)

BONSON: Two Lefiat's? I can't handle that! I need a drink!

(A shudder ran down Bonson's spine then he stuck his tankard to his lips and took a large swig.)

BONSON: Good god, that's foul. Two Lefiat's and horse piss for beer. It might as well rain and bugger my evening completely.

(Feeling nothing but disdain for Bonson's behaviour, Derek rolled his eyes then looked to Flaxley.)

DEREK: So, Flaxley? What's the battle plan for tomorrow then?

FLAXLEY: Hmm, under 9 hours now, eh?

(Looking thoughtful, Flaxley stood up and entered the centre of the circle. Once there, he pivoted around to see if everyone was listening then stood tall. With silence all around and all eyes focussed solely on him, he then spoke up passionately.)

FLAXLEY: Tomorrow morning, the same Trepe warriors who destroyed this town 12 years ago will come strolling back through that gate intent on wreaking the same destruction on us once again. Only this time it isn't to be a surprise attack, this time we've had chance to prepare, not long I admit but we've used our time well.

(He then rubbed his hands together.)

FLAXLEY: Now, as for battle tactics, I suggest that we form a defensive line across the gate and have a second row just behind. They're bound to break those lines eventually, but the longer we can keep them out of our town, the better!

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, now here's the thing, chaps. I want you to fight them hard and fight them well, but mostly I want you to stay alive. Even if you end up defending for your lives, without countering, that's fine. Just keep them at bay until I can get round to culling them. That's our best hope. Stay alive, keep them at bay, and let me do my stuff.

(At this point the elder approached from a nearby house and confronted Flaxley with outstretched palms.)

ELDER: Flaxley, what are you doing?

(Flaxley turned and squinted into the darkness to see him.)

FLAXLEY: Elder?

ELDER: We've raised four hundred thousand Lig; the Trepe may accept it and go in peace, why do you want to start a war?

FLAXLEY: War is the furthest thing from my mind!

(Bonson nodded in enthusiastic agreement.)

BONSON: I should hope so too!

FLAXLEY: What?

BONSON: I was agreeing, don't call it war, ever!

FLAXLEY: I wasn't going to!

ELDER: Well Flaxley? Why your determination to risk these peoples lives?

(Flaxley shook his head in disdain.)

FLAXLEY: For an elder you really are a halfwit!

(Everyone gasped.)

FLAXLEY: He is! Do you really think them Trepe bitches will take four hundred thousand
lig and go?

ELDER: Surely, it has to be worth a try!

FLAXLEY: Really? What if you're wrong?

ELDER: Well...

FLAXLEY: At least my way there's a chance only a *few* of us will die. *Your* way Tifaeris
will be obliterated and the entire population slain!

ELDER: But you must give peace a chance, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: I am! If we're successful tomorrow, the Trepe will leave us in peace for
evermore!

(The elder puffed out in frustration and looked to Flaxley's militia.)

ELDER: People, surely you don't agree with him?

THIN: Um... actually Elder, I lost my entire family to them bitches 12 years ago. I know
exactly what they're like. If we don't stop them now, we never will! Even if they take the
money and go, like you hope they will, what's to say they won't come back for more next
week?

ULRICH: Aye, and keep coming back until one day we can't pay. If that happens, no doubt
they'll destroy the town again. We can't live with that threat looming over us.

MAN 01: They might not even ask for money next time, they might just turn up and attack
without warning again, like they did twelve years ago.

MAN 02: I agree. We're with Flaxley on this one! The Trepe have to go.

THIN: Sorry, Elder, but some things just have to be done.

FLAXLEY: Agreed.

(The elder sighed and looked to the skies.)

ELDER: Then I will pray for you all...

(He lowered his head and shrugged.)

ELDER: Incidentally, has anyone seen my dog?

(Receiving no reply, he shook his head then wandered back off into the night leaving
everyone feeling even more focussed and determined than they already had been.)

ULRICH: The elder means well, but he's so wrong. Come tomorrow, we *have* to fight for all
we hold dear.

MAN 01: Aye, if we can't risk life and limb for our families, then we don't *deserve* lives or
limbs.

THIN: Spot on, that man. Whatever it takes.

MAN 02: Agreed. It's them or us. Them bitches need to feel pain.

PHISELE: Yeah, man. Them bitches are going down!

ULRICH: Language, Phisele!

PHISELE: But *he* said it.

ULRICH: Aye, but he's a twat.

(With that, he winced and held his head in his hands.)

ULRICH: Don't copy that word.

PHISELE: What word? "Twat"?

(Ulrich whimpered.)

ULRICH: God help me, when you mother finds out you've learned those words, she's gonna kill me.

PHISELE: Don't be silly, dad. As long as you make those bitches pay tomorrow, she'll be too happy to give a flying f...

ULRICH: Phisele!!!

(As Ulrich shuddered, Lefiat folded his arms and nodded defiantly.)

LEFIAT: I'll do all I can tomorrow, I'm doing this for Mandika!

DEREK: Good for you, it'll be just like 18 months ago, eh?

BONSON: Except instead of slaying witches, you'll be slaying bitches!

PHISELE: Bitches!!!

ULRICH: Phisele!!!

LEFIAT: You'd better believe it, Bonson. I'm ready for action. Right now!

FLAXLEY: You know, I've seen that look in your eye before, Lefiat!

BONSON: So have I, it was when he burnt down the west wing of Guevina castle!

FLAXLEY: No, it *was* when he performed his heroics 18 months ago!

LEFIAT: Exactly, Flaxley, I've never been so ready! I feel the same now as I did back then!

DEREK: Superb.

(Delighted by the positivity of all those around him, Flaxley decided this would be the perfect time to call the night to an end and nodded sternly.)

FLAXLEY: Okay men; let's get a good night's sleep then. Tomorrow is the biggest day in the history of Tifaeris ever!

(Just then, Derek quickly leapt to his feet.)

DEREK: Actually, wait up; I made some things last night while you were all sleeping!

(With that, he rushed into the house. Having watched him go, everyone climbed to their feet, continuing to talk a good fight, when Derek suddenly came rushing back out of the house again carrying a box.)

DEREK: Everyone take one each!

FLAXLEY: Hold on!

(As everyone watched on quizzically, Flaxley paced over to him and took an object from the box.)

FLAXLEY: Interesting!

(He inspected it closely.)

FLAXLEY: A piece of string with two berries on it?

DEREK: They're necklaces!

(Thin frowned.)

THIN: Necklaces? If you think I'm gonna walk around looking like a poofa, you've got another thing coming!

DEREK: No, listen, the Trepe use sleep magic...

(Flaxley looked greatly alarmed.)

FLAXLEY: Holy tornados of the forbidden plains, I hadn't thought of that!

DEREK: Don't worry, I've got it covered! The green berry is from an insomnia bush, it prevents sleep and the red berry will protect you from my new magic!

BONSON: So you perfected it then?

DEREK: I'm not just a little green face you know?

(He then shrugged.)

DEREK: That said, it's not been tested yet, so I'd rather we don't use it unless we absolutely have to.

(Flaxley looked most relieved.)

FLAXLEY: Excellent work, Derek! If you hadn't remembered sleep magic, all our efforts might have proved in vain tomorrow.

DEREK: Don't fret, Flaxley. We're a team; *you* shouldn't have to think of everything.

(He smiled.)

DEREK: I'm only happy I could help.

FLAXLEY: And help you have. If those Trephe bitches...

PHISELE: Bitches!!!

ULRICH: Stop it!!!

FLAXLEY: If they were planning on using sleep magic to defeat us, they'll be in for a shock. This could well give us an advantage. While they're waiting for us to collapse and start snoring we can surprise them with some good old fashioned butchering.

BONSON: Indeed. And what's more, with my new illusion to help sir, I feel tomorrow's battle could well turn out to be a doddle!

FLAXLEY: What illusion's that, Bonson?

BONSON: You just wait, sir, you'll be rather impressed!

FLAXLEY: Good stuff! Thanks, Bonson.

(With that, Flaxley nodded and then gestured to the box.)

FLAXLEY: Right, everyone grab a necklace and I'll see you at seven in the morning!

Assemble here at my house.

DEREK: Just remember not to wear the necklace to bed, you'll either squash the berries or well... put it this way, anti-sleep berries aren't a lot of use when you *want* to sleep!

(With that, everyone queued to grab a necklace from the box before dispersing to their homes for the night. As they did so, Flaxley offered them all stern nods of approval and kind words. The next time they met, battle would be imminent and he wanted them all to head off feeling proud of themselves and in no doubt whatsoever that their efforts were greatly appreciated.)

(At the stroke of midnight, Flaxley climbed into bed then glanced at the empty space where Kritz should have been. With a sigh, he then glanced to the window and furrowed his brow. Having told the lad, Valentine, in no uncertain terms to stop staring forlornly at Kritz's side of the bed, he then laid himself down. He'd done everything he could to prepare and there was nothing left for him to do but get a good nights sleep then make sure everyone was ready for the battle come day break. This was where Derek's sleep magic came in handy. With a promise to wake everyone at half past six in the morning, Derek sent Bonson and Lefiat to sleep before heading to Flaxley's room and doing the same favour for him.

For those infused with the magic, sleep was obviously not a problem, but for many of the citizens of Tifaeris this particular hot summer's night was unbearable. Many lay awake staring at the ceiling fearing for their loved ones and others found the act of lying still in bed too impossible to comprehend. With what could be the end of life as they knew it, only a few hours away, some people took to their heels in the night and others found themselves wandering down to the beach to seek inspiration from the sea.

Derek, a normally placid and calm creature also found himself feeling restless. He'd made some good friends since becoming stranded on this planet and only now was their suffering really beginning to sink in. As the night dragged on he stood over Flaxley and recalled the night when Flaxley rescued him from his ship and nursed him back to health. He knew what Kritz meant to him and felt himself sharing his pain. He went on to think of Lefiat's similar misfortune and found himself feeling almost tempted to raid Trephe village and rescue Kritz

and Mandika himself. Instead he went and sat out on the porch and tried to gain as much comfort as he could from the gentle sea breeze.)

TIFAERIS – THURSDAY MORNING

(Thirty minutes after the sixth hour of the morning had passed, the sun reared it's head from over the top of the hills to chase away the darkness of night. The day of reckoning had dawned. On the porch, where he'd been sitting, lost in thought for the last two hours, Derek raised his head to look towards the sunrise then upped and walked back into the house. As he did so, he saw Flaxley emerge from his bedroom.)

DEREK: I was just coming to wake you!

FLAXLEY: No need, Derek, I'm awake!

DEREK: Yes... I spotted that!

(With that, Derek turned to go and wake the others, only to stop dead in his tracks as Flaxley spoke up in a defiant tone.)

FLAXLEY: This is the day, Derek! This day will go down in history as Tifaeris' finest ever.

(Derek looked to him and nodded.)

DEREK: I hope so, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: Hope has nothing to do with it, old chap. Today is the day the Trepe will be wiped from the face of the planet. And more importantly, Kritz will be coming home.

Waking up sucks when she's not there beside me.

(He exhaled positively.)

FLAXLEY: I can't wait to do her!

(He then shook his head and corrected himself.)

FLAXLEY: *See* her! And *then* do her!

(Derek laughed.)

DEREK: I'm sure she's looking forward to that too.

FLAXLEY: No doubt about it!

(He nodded firmly then looked down to Derek determinedly.)

FLAXLEY: I can feel it in the air, Derek. That bitch Jazzu is going to rue this day.

DEREK: Well, I hope you enjoy killing her as much as I'll enjoy watching you do it.

FLAXLEY: I'm sure I will, Derek.

DEREK: I just hope we can do it without using my new magic.

FLAXLEY: You do?

DEREK: Well... yeah, I mean... like I said last night, it's untested and there might be side effects.

FLAXLEY: Such as?

DEREK: I don't know. It's never been tested, has it? It should be fine but... it's a risk, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: Fine, then we'll only use it if we absolutely have to.

DEREK: That would be best.

(He smiled then gestured to where Lefiat and Bonson were sleeping.)

DEREK: Anyway, I'd better wake everyone else...

FLAXLEY: Righto, I'll just go and freshen up.

(With that, Flaxley headed outside to the water butt and Derek proceeded to wake Bonson and Lefiat.)

(As soon as everyone was awake and cleansed, Derek rustled up some fruit for breakfast then they sat down to eat in total silence. Flaxley and Lefiat's thoughts were very obviously on

their women and Derek and Bonson were both clueless to know what to say to them. As a result, not a single word was spoken until Bonson finished his meal and commented on its mediocrity. In that moment, the silence turned to a cacophony of angry bickering. Suffice to say, at this point the four of them looked very much like petty children rather than warriors on the morning of a battle. By a few minutes to seven, however, their squabble had come to a natural end and all four of them stepped outside, looking very much united and ready for combat.

As Flaxley's door swung shut behind them, Bonson took a seat on the porch while Flaxley, Derek and Lefiat stepped down into the street and stood facing the town gates. As they began to compose themselves, the first of Flaxley's soldiers then strolled onto the scene from in between two houses.)

THIN: Morning, Flaxley! Others!

LEFIAT: Others?

DEREK: I heard that too.

(Flaxley looked to Thin and smiled.)

FLAXLEY: Morning, Tony!

THIN: Tony? Who the bloody hell's Tony?

(Flaxley grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: It's Thin, isn't it? I do apologise. Tony's the other fat... I mean, fair-haired chap.

THIN: Aye, he's also the other fat bastard. And thanks.

(Upon reaching them, Thin paused to catch his breath.)

THIN: Now I know why you wanted to fight them by the gate, Flaxley. Because it's near your house 'ere, and you wouldn't have to walk far.

(Flaxley gave him a sideways glance.)

FLAXLEY: No, we're fighting them here at the gate because we don't want them coming into town.

THIN: I know that, Flaxley, I was kidding.

FLAXLEY: I see.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Well, thank you for coming, Thin!

THIN: I didn't come here for you; I came here to kill the Trepe!

(Standing to lean on the porch rails, Bonson nodded firmly.)

BONSON: And to stop history repeating itself I feel!

(Thin replied sarcastically.)

THIN: That's right. What are you, a wise elder or something?

(Bonson beamed.)

BONSON: That obvious, is it?

FLAXLEY: Well, I'm glad you came anyway, Thin. No second thoughts?

THIN: Hundreds of the buggers, but I wasn't about to back out, no way.

FLAXLEY: Top man. I just hope the others share your sentiments.

(By the time the seventh hour of the day came around, every single one of Flaxley's make shift army had arrived. One by one, they'd appeared from all directions until every last one was present and correct. Greatly lifted by their dedication to doing the right thing, Flaxley welcomed them all with a firm handshake. Overjoyed that none of them had headed for the hills during the night, as soon as he'd finished the final handshake, Flaxley clenched a triumphant fist then spoke up to get their attention.)

FLAXLEY: Good morning, men! It's fantastic to see you all.

(He gave a stifled laugh then raised an impressed eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: You know, I fully expected at least one of you to change your mind and run away in the night, but I guess I was wrong!

ULRICH: That was never gonna happen, Flaxley.

MAN 01: Aye. It's like *you* told us Flaxley, some things just have to be done!

FLAXLEY: I never said that!

THIN: Yeah, that was me!

MAN 01: Aye, but Flaxley agreed!

THIN: Oh, alright, you win!

FLAXLEY: Well, anyway...

(As all eyes returned to focussing on him, Flaxley looked across their faces and nodded proudly.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, the time has come, chaps. This is it! Now, listen up!

(With that, he stood tall and projected his speech to their waiting ears.)

FLAXLEY: We've worked hard to get to this point, and we can all be proud of what we've achieved. That said, it was just training. What's about to come is the real thing. What happens next matters and we need to be focussed and ready for it. Very soon the Treppe will arrive...

(Just then, his speech was crudely interrupted by the elder.)

ELDER: Flaxley, please, let me ask you once again, will you please consider offering them the money I raised?

(Far from pleased by the interruption, or indeed the elder's suggestion, Flaxley furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: Go away, you silly old fart!

(Everyone sucked their teeth as the elder walked away shaking his head in despair.)

THIN: You really shouldn't speak to the elder like that, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: Why not? A silly old fart is a silly old fart, be he the village elder or the village idiot!

LEFIAT: Tifaeris is a village?

(Having given Lefiat a swift sideways glance, Flaxley then resumed his speech.)

FLAXLEY: Anyway, like I said, the Treppe will soon arrive and we need to be focussed and ready. We're covered if they try to use sleep magic, so there's no worries on that score... not that they would, come to think of it. I have a feeling they're expecting to turn up and kick our arse without a fight. That complacency might work to our advantage, actually. Plus, if we're desperate, we've got Derek's new magic to fall back on...

(He then nodded firmly.)

FLAXLEY: There's a lot for us to be positive about, but... it'll count for nothing if we're not absolutely one hundred percent focussed on the fight. Being in the game mentally is everything, without that we've got nothing, okay?

(As everyone nodded back at him determinedly, Flaxley returned the nods then continued.)

FLAXLEY: Excellent. Now, the front line is going to be myself and...

(He held his arm out in front of him then nodded to his left.)

FLAXLEY: Everyone to this side of my arm, join me in the front row. The rest of you, make a second row two sword lengths behind.

THIN: Your sword length or an ordinary bloke's sword length?

FLAXLEY: Let's call it eight feet.

THIN: Your feet or...

FLAXLEY: Stop that!

THIN: But...

FLAXLEY: Now, any questions?

THIN: Aye! Your feet or...

FLAXLEY: Just call it two yards, for pity's sake!

(He furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: And if you make reference to Kritz and I having a large yard...

THIN: Yeah, alright.

FLAXLEY: Now, any proper questions?

(Hearing no replies, Flaxley nodded sternly.)

FLAXLEY: Excellent! Now... push away any lingering doubts you might have, if you can. The time to stand up for all we hold dear has come.

(He then stood tall and placed his hands on his hips.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, chaps, let's give our all for Tifaeris!!! It's time to wish you good luck... and god speed! Let's kill those bitches!

(At once, a loud cheer rose up then they all headed off to take up their assigned positions.

Half of the group formed a line across the gateway and the others created a second row just behind them. As soon as they were all in line, Flaxley glanced around his pack of fifty or so volunteers and the builders they'd later acquired and nodded to himself confidently. They may not have been a real army but they certainly bore the aura of one. Every one of them looked psyched and ready to give their all for the cause. Delighted by what he saw, he allowed himself a smile then stared out of the gates. With everyone focussed, ready and in their positions all that remained now was to wait for the Trepe to arrive.

As the wait began, the area around the Tifaeris gates became eerily quiet. Barely a sound was heard nor a movement made. Flaxley stood absolutely still with one hand on the handle of his sword while all around him, his army stood silently facing out of the gate, on the lookout for the enemy. Only the sound of the sea lapping the shore and the songbirds above prevented a perfect silence.

Amidst all the silence, the minds of the soldiers under Flaxley's command, ran riot. They were now in a situation which could only bring forth one of two outcomes. Death or glory. The Trepe wouldn't be taking prisoners, so before long they'd either be drawing their final breaths or going down in history as heroes for ridding the world of such a sadistic enemy. In this moment, the men preferred to think of the latter. The glory. The very real possibility of death being upon them was however, never far from their minds. Despite this, however, every man standing awaited the enemy with impatience. All this waiting was truly the hardest part. Being destined to either die or live on as heroes, they just wanted the Trepe to arrive as soon as possible so fate could decide which.

As the minutes ticked past, the two lines of brave men stood firm, facing out of the town in nervous anticipation of their enemy's arrival. Still, not a single word was spoken. Now and again the soldiers would look across at each other to gauge each other's reaction to the nerve-wracking situation, but for the most part, everyone stood perfectly still with the wind in their hair silently wishing for their moment to arrive. Unable to handle such a high pressure situation, however, Lefiat didn't take too long to break the silence in his trademarked panicky voice. Standing in the second row, he flapped his arms erratically and bellowed out.)

LEFIAT: This tension's unbearable!

DEREK: Calm down, Lefiat! You can't lose it *now*, Mandika's relying on you!

LEFIAT: That's *why* it's so unbearable!

(Watching them all from Flaxley's porch, a good forty metres away, Bonson felt incredibly nervous on their behalf. Unable to help but feel he ought to say or do something positive, he mused to himself for a moment then leant over the rail and called out to them.)

BONSON: Good luck chaps!!!

(At once, the gathered troops all gasped and strained their necks to see if Bonson had spotted the Trepe coming from an angle out of their line of sight.)

MAN 01: What's he on about? I can't see 'em!

THIN: Nor can anyone else, they're not even here!

ULRICH: Why that old... I tell you, old codger or not, I'll thump him if he does that again!

(As his men all started to calm down, Flaxley pushed through them then ran over to Bonson.)

FLAXLEY: Don't do that, Bonson, they all thought you'd spotted the enemy then!

BONSON: Sorry sir, I wasn't thinking!

(With that, Flaxley raced back to retake his position and the waiting began again. It was a wait that seemed to go on forever and the tension was palpable. Every minute that passed felt more like fifteen. To cope with the situation, a few bit their nails, some tapped their fingers on their legs and one or two began mumbling to themselves, but all of them remained strongly focussed on the horizon.

As the seamlessly never ending wait continued, Derek glanced back at Bonson then sighed to himself.)

DEREK: It doesn't seem right without Kritz and Mandika here.

(Standing at his side, Lefiat stared straight ahead as he replied.)

LEFIAT: That's because it isn't!

(A little surprised by Lefiat's response, Derek looked to him and read his mind.)

DEREK: Well, I never.

(Lefiat had never been so focussed in all his life. Killing the Trepe to save Mandika was his only thought. There were no irrelevant things popping into his head to destroy his train of thought like they normally did. For once in his life, Lefiat was very much in the zone. He was thinking like a knight.)

DEREK: Superb.

(Derek smiled approvingly then started to look around and check that everyone was wearing the necklaces he gave them. As his eyes scanned the assembled men, however, he noticed Flaxley and adopted a knowing smirk. Flaxley was standing perfectly rigidly with his arms folded and his feet apart, staring straight ahead in readiness for a killing spree. It was a stance that very much suggested he was in what Bonson had once referred to as 'knight mode'.

According to Bonson, when Flaxley was in this frame of mind, woe betide anyone who dared to cross him. Having spotted this Derek grinned to himself and mumbled under his breath.)

DEREK: Almost makes you pity the Trepe.

(Just then, as eight o'clock approached, some hands bearing lit torches appeared on the distant horizon. At once, Flaxley sneered and raised his voice.)

FLAXLEY: This is it men!!! Battle stations!!!

(Immediately, everybody drew their weapons and adopted battle stances. Bonson swiftly double checked his illusion and Derek checked his magic.)

FLAXLEY: Come and get it, Jazzu!!! I'm going to rip you apart.

(As the torchbearers marched over the horizon and advanced towards them, they became clearly recognisable to all as the hatred Trepe army. There were over one hundred of them in their full battle regalia, armed to the teeth in readiness for destruction. The battle was now imminent.

With the Trepe clearly in sight, the Tifaeris militia's hatred of them deepened even further and they snarled and made angry gestures in their direction as they watched them approach. In that moment, the men's tails were up and they just wanted to charge at them with their blades flailing. Fighting the temptation, it took every ounce of willpower they had just to

hold fast in their positions as the detestable Trepe approached far too slowly for their liking. Also finding the Trepe advance too slow for his liking, Flaxley shared their temptation to charge and start chopping away with his sword. Not about to show such indiscipline and set a bad example for his men, however, he managed to hold tight until the Trepe were a good 20 feet in front of them. Not about to let them advance any further than that, however, Flaxley stepped forward to confront them. With a look of pure anger in his face he demanded them to halt and much to his surprise they did exactly that. In the vain hope that it was his charm winning them over, he then pushed his luck.)

FLAXLEY: Now, return to whence you came!!!

(Sadly for Flaxley, this time they weren't so obliging. Instead, as always, the Trepe troops parted and Jazzu made her way through them. As soon as she'd made it to the front, she looked up into Flaxley's eyes then groaned with annoyance.)

JAZZU: You again?

(Flaxley growled bitterly.)

FLAXLEY: Don't worry, this is the last time!

JAZZU: It will be if you don't have the money!

FLAXLEY: Like we were ever going to give you money!

(At this point the elder ran up beside Flaxley, having barged his way through Flaxley's men. Looking extremely desperate he stared into Jazzu's eyes and adopted praying hands.)

ELDER: Jazzu, we did our best, we made four hundred thousand!

FLAXLEY: You tit, Elder!

BONSON: Allow *me*, sir!

(Bonson, who had chased after the elder, then proceeded to cosh him over the head and knock him out. As Bonson dragged the elder back into Tifaeris, Flaxley nodded to him then looked to Jazzu.)

FLAXLEY: Thank you, Bonson!

(Infuriated by what she'd heard, Jazzu sneered hatefully.)

JAZZU: We told you what would happen if you didn't get the money!!!

FLAXLEY: No, you merely expressed some silly fantasy about what you *wanted* to do if we didn't get the money!

(Jazzu shook with rage and bellowed.)

JAZZU: Fantasy, was it? Wanna bet? We're gonna raise Tifaeris to the ground!!!

(At once, the Trepe warriors with the torches raised them aloft and cheered aggressively. Not about to let them even begin their arson attempt, however, Derek mumbled to himself.)

DEREK: That's what *you* think!

(With that, he stepped before the assembled militia and fired H2O magic over the Trepe's heads soaking them all and dousing all the flames. Seconds later, following a chorus of horrified screams, Jazzu and her entire tribe snarled back at Flaxley through straggly, messy hair. Watching them all drip, their clothes soaked through, it was all Flaxley could do, not to laugh. Far from sharing his amusement, Jazzu cast her heavy, drenched hair from her face then growled hatefully.)

JAZZU: Nobody does that to the Trepe!!!

(With fury in her voice, she then thrust her hand in the air and bellowed.)

JAZZU: Attack!!!

(Immediately, Flaxley raised his sword and sneered venomously.)

FLAXLEY: You won't even get through the gates!!!

(Unfortunately for him, however, the Trepe bypassed him completely and charged towards his troops, immediately battering both lines backwards through the gates into Tifaeris. Having turned away from Jazzu to watch the disaster unfold, Flaxley snarled under his breath.)

FLAXLEY: Crap!

(With that, he spun around to glare at Jazzu, only to find she'd disappeared. Looking furious, he then about turned again only to see her vanish through the gates to join in with the violence.)

FLAXLEY: Damn you, you emasculating harpy!!!

(Realising that he was the only one not engaged in combat, he flinched then charged into Tifaeris in pursuit of Jazzu.)

FLAXLEY: You won't get away that easily, wench.

(Fortunately, after the initial setback of being bashed backwards, almost as if they'd been caught off guard by the ferocity of the Trepe attack, Flaxley's men managed to steady themselves and the battle began, just outside Flaxley's home.

The part time soldiers may have failed in their attempt to keep the Trepe out of Tifaeris, but having halted the advance, early impressions were that they seemed to be able to handle themselves in combat. Despite being outnumbered almost two to one, they weren't being cut down like lambs to the slaughter, and they were now holding their ground. Using the skills Flaxley had taught them to defend themselves and get in a few attacks of their own, at this very early stage of the battle, the signs were encouraging.

Like any battle, it wasn't long before the well organised lines from both armies broke up and the melee became a mass brawl with both sides rampaging in amongst each other. Gone were the well organised rows and the battle descended into disorganised chaos. This chaotic style of battle troubled Flaxley greatly. Being heavily outnumbered, defending themselves would be harder for the Tifaeris army. A sword in the back could happen at any moment, from any number of Trepe warriors currently not engaged in a one on one battle. The Tifaeris army had no such luxury. Every single of them was very much locked in battle with an enemy warrior. To make things worse for Flaxley, with dust being kicked up into the brawling swarm, finding Jazzu was proving extremely difficult.)

FLAXLEY: Stupid, bloody haridan!!!

(Miraculously, however, as he continued struggling to track her down, still yet to use his blade in anger, Lefiat was already onto his fourth kill. Looking every inch like a true knight, he was fighting two warriors at a time with extreme ease. As if he was born with a sword in his hand, he was either killing or knocking them out without even breaking a sweat. Bonson, who had an excellent view of this bizarre phenomenon, couldn't believe what he was seeing.)

LEFIAT: Taste cold steel, wench!

BONSON: You go, Lefiat!!!

LEFIAT: You mess with Mandika; you have Lefiat to deal with!!!

BONSON: Quite so, sir, quite so!!!

(As he continued to hunt for Jazzu, Flaxley was feeling quite pleased with his men to this point. Inevitably, some had fallen but for the most part they were still holding their own. Derek, however, wasn't faring very well at all. Since the battle started he'd been trying his utmost to fire lightning magic at any Trepe he came into contact with, but unfortunately for him, they wouldn't stand still long enough for him to get a shot off, and he didn't want to risk accidentally burning down Tifaeris after all they'd gone through to stop that happening. And so, as the sound of clashing steel continued unabated, Tifaeris' two great hopes for success, Flaxley and Derek, still hadn't launched a single attack. Thankfully, as he saw one of his men fall lifelessly to the ground, Flaxley realised the importance of a change of tactics. The Trepe may have lost a few warriors but their numbers were still uncomfortably high compared to the Tifaeris contingent and he knew he'd have to address that fact.)

FLAXLEY: Right, sod Jazzu for now!

(With that, Flaxley, like Lefiat, launched into every Trepe he saw, slashing and punching with extreme ferocity.)

FLAXLEY: Eat this, girly!

(Wearing a furious snarl, he spun around and lashed his sword through a Trepe leg cutting it in half.)

FLAXLEY: Think, you'll save fifty percent on shoes from now on!

(Smirking at his pun, he then jumped forwards and plunged into his blade into the warrior that one of his men had been fighting.)

FLAXLEY: Failed!!!

(With that, he drew back his sword and lashed the head off a third Trepe as she raced towards Ulrich. As her head dropped towards the ground, Flaxley then leapt forward and booted it, full on the volley, back out of Tifaeris with all his might.)

FLAXLEY: Remind me to scavenge her earrings later, Thin, they looked expensive.

(Ulrich just stared at him in bewilderment.)

ULRICH: You're twisted, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: And you're gay!

(With that, he danced forwards and plunged his sword into another offending Trepe.)

FLAXLEY: This is fun!

(Some of Flaxley's troops, however, were becoming more than a little disturbed by Flaxley's level of enjoyment.)

MAN 01: He's loving this!

MAN 02: Aye, I'm bloody glad he's on our side!

(They then watched on in astonishment as Flaxley lopped the hand off another Trepe, just as she was about to lunge.)

FLAXLEY: Consider yourself maimed, Trepe! Killing you would have been a waste of high grade boobies!

(As she screamed in agony, he then knocked her out cold with his fist.)

FLAXLEY: Less watching, more fighting, chaps!

MAN 01: Aye, right. Whatever you say, Flaxley.

MAN 02: Bloody right, I don't wanna get on *his* bad side.

(As the fight continued and both sides started to receive more casualties than they'd have liked, Flaxley noticed four of his men retreat and run away.)

FLAXLEY: Fuck! That's the last thing we need!

(Just then, he spotted Jazzu clubbing Thin with a chain mace and his despair about the fleeing men was swiftly forgotten. At once, his nostrils flared and his brow furrowed.)

FLAXLEY: There you are!

(As Flaxley raced over to her furiously, he heard Thin yelping in agony at the facial wound he'd received from the marauding Jazzu's chain mace.)

THIN: That fucking hurt, you old bag.

JAZZU: It was meant to kill you!!! Second time lucky, perhaps?

(With that, she swung the mace at him a second time but Flaxley managed to flash his sword out just in time, cutting through the chain. As the spiked ball flew over the top of Thin's head, Jazzu immediately glared at Flaxley with eyes full of hatred. Greatly relieved by the reprieve, Thin swiftly scrambled away to safety as Jazzu growled at Flaxley through her teeth.)

JAZZU: You again???

(She drew her sword and snarled.)

FLAXLEY: I'm going to enjoy killing *you*!

JAZZU: Fine! Okay, let's do it!

(As the soldiers all around them continued to do battle bravely, Flaxley and Jazzu squared up

with hate-filled eyes burning into one another.)

JAZZU: Pathetic man. I could kill you with my eyes shut!

FLAXLEY: Fuck off; you couldn't kill me if *my* eyes were shut!

(With that, he started to slash at her with his heavy sword but much to his annoyance, she managed to block his every move with a swift parry and deft footwork. Extremely peeved by her resistance, Flaxley stopped swinging at her and growled.)

FLAXLEY: Stop defending and let me kill you!

JAZZU: Never!!! The only one of us destined to die today is *you*, and you won't be the first so called *big* man to die at my hands!

FLAXLEY: Less talk, more dying, saggy tits!

(Absolutely enraged by Flaxley's quip, Jazzu bellowed at him ferociously.)

JAZZU: Insolent penis bearer!!!

(She then started to lay into him with a series of wild sword swings towards his head, which he deflected with absolute ease. Feeling somewhat smug about it, he then went to his 'go to' insult for putting down lesser swordsmen.)

FLAXLEY: That's pathetic! You fight like a woman!

(With that, he winced at his own foolishness and growled inwardly.)

FLAXLEY: Pillock, Flaxley!

(Jazzu sneered.)

JAZZU: Thanks for the compliment... we'll continue this later!

(With that, she did a series of back flips and disappeared into the fighting crowd. Furious at her hasty exit, Flaxley yelled into the crowd, snarling.)

FLAXLEY: I'll get you yet, Jazzu! And next time my pun will be relevant!

(In the meantime, just outside Flaxley's home, Lefiat was still battling away like a seasoned veteran.)

LEFIAT: Don't swing that sword at *me*!

(With that, he head-butted a Trepe until she passed out then threw her onto her ally's out stretched sword.)

BONSON: Good shot, sir!

(In the middle of the battle at this time, Derek was starting to get frustrated. Lefiat and Flaxley were both battling like men possessed, but he still hadn't managed to muster a single opportunity to fire off his lightning magic. Swiftly reaching the end of his tether, he gritted his teeth and growled to himself.)

DEREK: Stupid Trepe won't stand still!!!

(Just then, however, he spotted a Trepe warrior repeatedly kicking a Tifaeris soldier who was lying defenceless on the ground.)

DEREK: A-ha!

(Satisfied he could blast her before she had the chance to move, he fixed his stance then pointed out his arm to take aim.)

DEREK: Lightning!

(With that, he flicked his wrist and fired a bolt of electricity towards the Trepe warrior. Unfortunately, however, just as he released it, one of Tifaeris' brave soldiers edged backwards into the way as he sparred with another Trepe. With a loud fizzing noise the soldier shuddered violently then collapsed dead to the ground. Naturally, Derek was devastated.)

DEREK: In the name of Tryme 17, whose side am I on?

(Just then, Flaxley yelled out from the centre of the battle.)

FLAXLEY: Regroup!!!

(Enacting a move he'd taught the men at the foot of the hill, the day before, the Tifaeris soldiers swiftly disengaged from combat and made their way into a line just a little deeper

inside Tifaeris. Immediately, the Trepe raced after them and battle resumed with barely a pause. The move had, however, served its purpose. It'd given Flaxley the opportunity to gauge their current situation. Much to his dismay, they'd lost half their men and the Trepe were still over seventy strong. Well aware that they couldn't keep defending at this rate, he rushed over to Bonson and threw out his palms in frustration.)

FLAXLEY: Where's this illusion of yours?

(Bonson grimaced.)

BONSON: Um... I may have miscalculated...

FLAXLEY: So is there an illusion or not???

BONSON: Um... no... sorry....

(With that, Flaxley growled then raced to Derek and implored him with his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Use your new magic, Derek!!! We've got no choice.

DEREK: You sure about that, Flaxley???

FLAXLEY: Yes! We're running out of soldiers and Bonson doesn't have an illusion after all! I don't care how risky it is, it's a chance we're gonna have to take!!! If we keep on like this we'll lose!

DEREK: Well... okay.

(Deciding it was best to trust Flaxley's judgment at this sensitive hour, Derek nodded nervously. He'd hoped his new magic wouldn't be necessary but alas, that wasn't to be the case. He could only cast it and hope there were no negative side effects.)

DEREK: Well, here goes then, Flaxley!

(With that, he thrust his fist into the air and called out.)

DEREK: Nerve magic!!!

FLAXLEY: Nerve magic?

(Just then, a blinding white light engulfed the battle area. At once, the clashing of steel came to an abrupt halt as everyone refrained from fighting to shield their eyes.)

FLAXLEY: What the hell?

(Seconds later, as the bright light dimmed to nothing, tiny particles of dust started raining down from above, landing on everyone's clothes. Not about to stop killing one another to discuss the bizarre occurrence, however, both sides resumed fighting immediately.)

FLAXLEY: What the hell was that, Derek? Useless!!!

DEREK: Give it time, Flaxley!

(Just then, all the Trepe warriors, including Jazzu seemed to have an odd reaction to the dust. They all looked consummately terrified and several of them dropped to their knees and surrendered forthwith.)

TREPE 1: Please don't hurt me!!!

TREPE 2: I'm sorry, it was an accident!

(Bizarrely, twenty more of the normally fearless Trepe women then started to flee out of the gates, screaming in terror. Having developed a Flaxley-like hatred for the Trepe, Lefiat was furious.)

LEFIAT: Hey, come back!!!

(With that, he charged out of the gate and yelled after the fleeing Trepe.)

LEFIAT: Come back here right now or I'll kill you *all*!

(Much to his amazement they all stopped and immediately threw away their weapons before surrendering to him unconditionally. Some of them even offered him sex in exchange for their lives. Without even considering their offers for a second, Lefiat pointed them back to Tifaeris and scowled.)

LEFIAT: No-one gets away from the great Sir Lefiat!

(As the Trepe women sheepishly returned, Flaxley and his men couldn't believe their luck. The fearless and often warped warrior women of Trepe village had just given up and

chickened out of the fight for no apparent reason. A fight that they were winning, no less. Unsurprisingly, Derek looked most pleased with himself. His strange new magic had snatched a miraculous victory from the jaws of defeat just as they were about to bite down hard.)

(With the battle clearly over, the king of Guevina's two spies who'd been accidentally watching Flaxley since they'd arrived, decided they'd seen enough and started to head for the gates, stopping on the way to ask a victorious Tifaeris soldier one last question.)

REEFE: Excuse me, mate. Who cast that amazing magic? Tifaeris looked positively screwed until that happened.

TRAGEN: Um... what's its name? It came 'ere with that Princess Mandika and the other one! The little green creature.

(As Tragen wandered off, Reefer and Poyner looked to one another in bewilderment.)

POYNES: Did you catch that?

REEFE: Not at all! They speak funny round here!

POYNES: I think he said, whoever cast it came here with the princess.

REEFE: Yeah, I heard that too. Trouble is, thanks to that stupid wheel of ours, we don't know how many people came here in that carriage.

POYNES: Exactly!

REEFE: So, what else did he say? I didn't catch the last part!

POYNES: Well... sounded to me like he said 'the lingering creeper'.

(They shared a baffled look for a moment then Reefer looked enlightened.)

REEFE: It was Lefiat! The lingering creeper is probably his nickname in this neck of the woods.

POYNES: Why on earth would...

REEFE: Because, Lefiat is a knight, right?

POYNES: And?

REEFE: So it's probably a tribute to his stealth skills. I bet he's like a stealth assassin. Lingers in the shadows for hours, creeping silently from place to place until he's ready to make his move.

(Poyner looked skywards as he thought over Reefer's words.)

POYNES: Makes sense.

REEFE: It does!

POYNES: So, not only did Lefiat achieve his mission, but he stayed on and fought the Trepe for no other reason than just to do the right thing. Then, having chopped up the Trepe warriors like they were made from butter, *just* to help the people of this town, he ends up casting the magic that won the day!

REEFE: That's about the shape of it.

POYNES: Not bad! The king of Guevina's gonna be over the moon. The man's a legend.

REEFE: Yeah, you're not kidding.

(He shrugged.)

REEFE: Well, no time like the present. Let's go and tell him what we've seen.

POYNES: Definitely.

(With that, the two spies wandered off out of the gates and retrieved their carriage from its hiding place before headed back to Guevina to share their report with the king.)

(Having achieved a historic victory over their hated neighbours, the jubilant men of Tifaeris tied up the surviving Trepe warriors and placed them all sitting bunched together on the

ground outside Flaxley's house. Weary from battle, the surviving Tifaeris warriors then gladly accepted an ale from Bonson on the porch. At this moment in time, Flaxley was feeling very smug. He'd dreamt about a moment like this ever since the Trepe destroyed Tifaeris twelve years earlier. Such was his delight at the outcome of the battle, he wasn't even bothered about the men drinking his ale. Right now, he just wanted to milk the moment and rub the Trepe's nose in it and nothing was going to stop him from doing so. Pacing before them with an arrogance in his step, he projected his voice to the captives, making absolutely certain that the men gathered on his porch could hear every word.)

FLAXLEY: Right, before I kill all you Trepe nuisances, rescue Kritz and Mandika then burn down Trepe village, I'd like to make a little speech! Firstly, well done, Derek; excellent magic!

(Derek beamed and rose his voice from the porch.)

DEREK: Nerve magic! Makes the opponent temporarily terrified of everything, I'm very proud of it!

FLAXLEY: Also, well done Lefiat, a performance well beyond your level, excellent!

LEFIAT: That's what they get for messing with my woman!

FLAXLEY: And finally...

(With that, he walked straight up to Jazzu and crouched so he could talk to her face and watch it as she squirmed.)

FLAXLEY: My word, Jazzu, you seem awfully quiet!

(With the effect of the nerve magic slowly wearing off, she screwed up her face then spat in his eye.)

FLAXLEY: Hey!

(He wiped his face with his hand then rubbed it on Jazzu's shoulder before standing up to resume taunting them.)

FLAXLEY: Now, the question is, shall I burn you all?

(He pretended he was deep in thought.)

FLAXLEY: No, that's too smelly, besides your screams might frighten the children!

(Comprehensively defeated, Jazzu sneered bitterly.)

JAZZU: Just get this over with, you...

(Before she could continue, however, Thin yelled over from Flaxley's porch.)

THIN: Hey, wait a minute, Flaxley!

(As Thin rushed down from the porch holding a handkerchief over his wound, Bonson paced after him holding a tray of ale tankards.)

THIN: I've got unfinished business with *this* bitch!

(He stood before Jazzu and snarled.)

FLAXLEY: No, she's *mine*, Thin, the pleasure of killing her is gonna be all mine!

THIN: Don't worry, Flaxley. I aint even gonna touch her!

(With that, he fiddled with his trousers then proceeded to urinate all over Jazzu's face.)

FLAXLEY: As disgusting as that is, Thin, old chap, I find it highly appropriate!

(Thin looked worried for a moment and grimaced at Flaxley.)

THIN: I thought you were gonna say you found it highly erotic then!

(Flaxley scowled his way angrily.)

FLAXLEY: Do I *look* like some kind of weird deviant to you, Thin?

(As Jazzu cringed, urine trickling slowly down her face, Flaxley turned to face her and her fellow captives then rubbed his chin thoughtfully.)

FLAXLEY: Now, where was I, oh yes, if I can't burn you all... ah, the cuddyfinkles wouldn't say no to some gift wrapped snacks!

BONSON: That'd never work, sir! Jazzu's face would frighten the cuddyfinkles away!

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: True, and chopping their heads off would probably be more fun anyway!
(The Trepe warriors were broken at this point. Resigned to their fate, none of them said a word. They just sat, heads bowed, waiting to succumb to the inevitable. Their leader, Jazzu, however, wasn't about to go down quietly.)

JAZZU: You'll pay for this; women all over the world will come and make you suffer for this atrocity!

(Astonished by her claim, Flaxley couldn't help but scoff.)

FLAXLEY: Listen to yourself! The rest of the world, *including* women, hate you almost as much as I do! Seriously! Your abhorrence of men is an abhorrence of husbands and sons, do you seriously think *that* endears you to the women of the world? They hate you!!! Women indeed. What a ridiculous thing to say! Did you really think the women of the world admired you?

(He laughed heartily for a moment then stared back down at Jazzu.)

FLAXLEY: You're an idiot. You're a small nation full of women bred to be psychotic, that's all you are. The world hates you and nobody will avenge the end of your tribe and I mean nobody. In a few minutes time, you'll all be dead and by this afternoon, the rest of your tribe will be joining you. Then I'll stand back and laugh as your village burns. This time tomorrow, you'll be no more than a pile of ashes and a bad memory. And nobody alive is going to mourn your passing, let alone avenge it.

(Bonson raised an impressed eyebrow.)

BONSON: Brilliantly put, Flaxley. Here, have an ale.

FLAXLEY: Just a minute, Bonson, I haven't finished! I just want Jazzu here to understand that once we destroy Trepe village, the way they destroyed Tifaeris 12 years ago, we'll all be able to go to bed at night knowing that no-ones going to come here and attack us as we sleep! You've lost. You'll be extinct and we'll be free to thrive long into the future. How does that make you feel, Jazzu? Personally, I'm having trouble hiding my delight.

(Jazzu shuddered with anger.)

JAZZU: You love the sound of your own voice, don't you?

FLAXLEY: I prefer it to yours, naturally.

(He then stood tall and nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Now, hurry up and decide who wants to die first. I've got to go and rescue Kritz and Mandika!

(With that, he paced up and down pretending he was going to let them choose, his hatred for the Trepe clearly taking over his every action.)

By now, the rest of the surviving Tifaeris warriors, except Lefiat who was watching Flaxley, had gone inside Flaxley's home and were on their second flagon of ale as they celebrated an unusual yet landmark victory against their aggressors. Bonson liberally doled out the ale as they continued to enjoy their well deserved celebration. Not about to join them any time soon, Flaxley kept on celebrating in his own way by mentally torturing the Trepe he was about to mercilessly slaughter.)

FLAXLEY: Well? Any ideas?

(He walked around them and kept stopping to look one in the eye.)

FLAXLEY: How about you?

(As he looked at her closely he could see she was shaking and about to cry.)

FLAXLEY: Why so sad? Didn't you get to burn our homes and slaughter our children again? Poor, doomed, little Trepe!

(With that, she burst into tears realising there would be no mercy from this bitter man.)

FLAXLEY: Now, before I butcher you all in the most horrific way imaginable, I'd like you all to know that the irony isn't lost on me at all!

(Jazzu looked up hatefully.)

JAZZU: Irony?

FLAXLEY: Yes! My father raised me to never hit a female, if *he* was here he'd probably convince me to grant you some kind of amnesty. Unfortunately for *you*, he isn't. You killed him 12 years ago along with my mother and all my siblings! How's that for irony?

(There was no response at all, just a silent acceptance of death. Clearly in his element, Flaxley turned his head and saw Lefiat watching with interest.)

FLAXLEY: Lefiat? Who do you think I should kill first?

(Anxious to get into the spirit, Lefiat jumped forward.)

LEFIAT: What about that one?

FLAXLEY: Which one?

LEFIAT: Her!

(He walked up to a Trepe and knelt face to face with her.)

LEFIAT: What's the matter? Did the cat get the cream? No, wait... your tongue... what was it again?

(As he knelt there looking stumped, the Trepe he'd failed so spectacularly to taunt, pulled her head back and butted him extremely hard on the chin.)

LEFIAT: Ouch!!!

(Somewhat dazed, he fell back in pain holding his lower face.)

LEFIAT: You cow!!!

(Fuming wildly, he then scrambled to his knees, grabbed her by the throat and pulled back his fist.)

LEFIAT: You asked for this!

(Before he could hit her, however, the Trepe next to her bit his hand.)

LEFIAT: Yow!!!

(In a great deal of pain, he leapt up and paced behind Flaxley, shaking his painful hand as he tried to conceal his agony. Watching him, Flaxley raised a baffled eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: Interesting!

(Flaxley couldn't quite understand how Lefiat had managed to go from being a hapless buffoon to an expert swordsman then back again so quickly. He then shrugged and conceded to the fact that Lefiat was a law unto himself before resuming taunting the Trepe.)

FLAXLEY: So, have you made up your mind? What'll it be? Burning? Beheading?

(Unsurprisingly, there was no reply.)

FLAXLEY: Fair enough, I'll just swing my sword at random, that way the ones who don't die instantly can bleed to death!

(With that, he drew his sword from his side and swung it around his head.)

FLAXLEY: Stand back Lefiat, this could get messy!

(No sooner than he'd taken a step forward, however, a voice yelled out to him making him stop dead in his tracks.)

KRITZ: Flaxley!!! No!!!

(Looking joyous, both he and Lefiat swung their heads in the direction of the noise. At once, their hearts leapt with joy to see Kritz and Mandika coming through the gates into Tifaeris.)

LEFIAT: Mandika!!!

(Lefiat ran to Mandika as Flaxley relaxed his sword and put it away. Smiling the widest smile, Flaxley then walked towards his beloved Kritz with relief etched on his face as Lefiat and Mandika held each other warmly.)

LEFIAT: Thank god you're safe!

MANDIKA: Miss me?

LEFIAT: You bet!

(He then went to kiss her but she turned her head to one side and went straight into the house,

leaving Lefiat feeling hurt and rejected.)

LEFIAT: Mandika?

(Over his shoulder, Flaxley and Kritz approached each other slowly, both wearing wide smiles. Upon coming together, they took each others hands and looked lovingly into each others eyes.)

FLAXLEY: It's over Kritz, Tifaeris is safe now!

KRITZ: Not necessarily, I'll explain in a second, just hug me first!

(Flaxley was dying to know what she meant, but he'd missed her so much he opened his arms and they embraced lovingly. Such was their joy at being reunited, they held each other tight for a solid minute until Jazzu spoke up irritably.)

JAZZU: This is all very touching but can you please just finish us!

(Annoyed at the interruption, Flaxley eased Kritz away from him then approached Jazzu menacingly.)

FLAXLEY: Don't rush me! I want to savour killing *you* slowly and painfully last! The rest of you I'll dispose of right now!

(As he went to re-draw his sword, however, Kritz grabbed his wrist.)

KRITZ: No! You can't do that, Flaxley!

(At once, he let go of his sword and took her to one side. He could see she was troubled and wanted to get to the bottom of it.)

FLAXLEY: What's going on? What's the matter?

(She looked him dead in the eye and spoke to him in an extremely serious tone.)

KRITZ: It isn't over yet, darling. Tifaeris could still be in trouble!

FLAXLEY: How? What are they gonna do? Come back and haunt us?

KRITZ: This is no time for sarcasm, the Trepe have been trying to raise a million Lig to pay off some oriental warlord. He's going there tomorrow to collect, if they don't pay up, he'll destroy their village!

FLAXLEY: So? That's what I was going to do anyway!

KRITZ: You don't understand!

FLAXLEY: Too right I don't!

KRITZ: Well, listen to me, this warlord is the one who ordered them to destroy Tifaeris twelve years ago!

FLAXLEY: They were *ordered* to destroy Tifaeris?

KRITZ: Yes. This warlord's been bullying them for years, Flaxley. Point being, if we destroy the Trepe... if *they're* not there to bully, who do you think he'll start on next?

(Flaxley looked concerned.)

FLAXLEY: Hmm, that could be a problem... I suppose!

KRITZ: You suppose?

FLAXLEY: Yeah, I mean he *might* just go to Trepe village, see they're all dead, have a good laugh about it then go home.

KRITZ: He won't though.

FLAXLEY: You don't know that for sure.

KRITZ: I do, actually.

(She sighed.)

KRITZ: Apparently, he's raising a million lig for some reason and he ordered the Trepe to pay it. The Trepe didn't have it so they ordered us to get it...

FLAXLEY: Right...

KRITZ: So, if he turns up there tomorrow and see's the Trepe are all dead, and therefore won't be paying him, he'll have to look elsewhere for the money!

(Flaxley's face dropped.)

FLAXLEY: And where better than the reasonably well off town just five miles up the coast?

KRITZ: Exactly!

(Flaxley shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: Who is this warlord then?

KRITZ: Apparently it's Dim Lee!

FLAXLEY: Dim who?

KRITZ: From Tang Yul!

(A look of awareness then crossed Flaxley's brow. Not wanting to unsettle Kritz so soon after her ordeal, he rubbed his chin and tried not to look anxious.)

KRITZ: You look anxious!

FLAXLEY: Damn it!

KRITZ: What is it?

(He sighed despondently.)

FLAXLEY: I've heard tales of Tang Yul, they're not pleasant!

KRITZ: I'm a big girl, you can tell me!

(Flaxley looked baffled.)

FLAXLEY: What have your breasts got to do with it?

(Kritz rolled her eyes.)

KRITZ: I mean I'm an adult! But thanks.

(Flaxley then stared at her breasts wearing an adoring smile.)

FLAXLEY: They're delightful!

KRITZ: So? Tang Yul? What's the deal?

(Snapping out of his trance, Flaxley looked into her eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Sorry, got side-tracked! Anyway, how do I put this? Tang Yul has an army of over 3,000 troops, and legend has it they've been known to destroy anything that comes between them and all they desire.

(He shook his head sorrowfully.)

FLAXLEY: From what I hear, if he's demanding a million lig, he won't rest until he has it. He won't just give up on the money, he'll go somewhere else... and like you say, we're nearest.

(He shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: If they start on Tifaeris, we won't stand a chance!

KRITZ: Not against 3,000 Troops!

FLAXLEY: Exactly, it puts our twenty five or so rather in the shade, doesn't it?

(Kritz sighed.)

KRITZ: He'll be arriving in Trepe village at dawn, is there *any* way we can defeat him?

FLAXLEY: Well, I see a couple of problems there. One, they have 3,000 troops. And two, how can I ask the chaps to do that after I told them we'd saved Tifaeris already?

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: How do you know all this, anyway?

KRITZ: I've been in a Trepe prison for 48 hours with nothing better to do than listen to other peoples conversations!

FLAXLEY: Okay, good answer!

(Kritz looked thoughtful.)

KRITZ: This Dim Lee won't bring all 3,000 troops at once, will he? That'd be ridiculous overkill.

FLAXLEY: I suppose not!

(As the full impact of her revelations sunk in, he shook his head in despair.)

FLAXLEY: Damn it, Kritz, I thought our troubles were over. I thought from today we could just go back to enjoying life. I had no idea our troubles were just beginning!

(Kritz sighed in agreement.)

KRITZ: I know! But the fact is, we either defeat Dim Lee or we might as well start packing and abandon Tifaeris right now!

(She then looked thoughtful.)

KRITZ: Or we could just pay the million lig... I mean, we'd have to borrow it from a rich family but...

(Flaxley shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: We can't. If we give a million to the Trepe to pay him off with, Jazzu will take it as a sign of victory and we'll never get her off our backs. And if we destroy the Trepe then pay it to the Tang Yul ourselves...

KRITZ: We'll just become Dim Lee's bitch instead!

FLAXLEY: Exactly. We'd just be living under *his* threat rather than the Trepe's. If we want freedom, we have to fight him... and win.

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: We've less than thirty men though! That's 100 of them to every one of ours!

KRITZ: Well, actually...

(She then gestured with her eyes to the Trepe warriors tied up beside them. Flaxley immediately stepped back angrily.)

FLAXLEY: What? No way!!!

KRITZ: They've got more troops back in their village plus these 50 or so!

FLAXLEY: But, they're Trepe!

KRITZ: So was I when you met me!

(He gave her a condescending glance.)

FLAXLEY: That's different!

KRITZ: How is it?

(He swiftly looked her dead in the eye and raised his voice.)

FLAXLEY: How? They just tried to kill me!

KRITZ: Whereas I just tried to beat you senseless then steal all your money!

(Flaxley shrugged dismissively.)

FLAXLEY: Well, with that kind of a success rate you can see why I'm worried!

(Kritz was not amused.)

KRITZ: Hey! What I'm saying is, I changed and so can they!

FLAXLEY: But... you don't understand! The Trepe are dog shit on the face of humanity, the world will be a better place without them! Besides, I was looking forward to popping over there this afternoon and killing them all.

(Kritz gave him a condescending glance.)

KRITZ: On your own?

FLAXLEY: Well, no. I was going to ask Derek to join me.

KRITZ: So, you two were going to take on one hundred well armed warriors by yourselves, were you? Not to mention Vooda, an almighty mage with powers even Derek can't conceive of? Then once you'd made mincemeat of *them*, you were going to merrily butcher all the old people and children too, were you?

(At this point, Flaxley was lost for words and practically stared right through her.)

KRITZ: You hadn't thought of that, had you? You thought they'd brought all their best warriors here and everyone else was an evil, snarling, killer in the making who had to be butchered didn't you?

FLAXLEY: Well...

KRITZ: There's an army, Flaxley, yes. But Trepe village is also a town with innocent people in it.

(Flaxley sighed.)

FLAXLEY: So, you mean... we're stuck with them?

KRITZ: Well, you're not a butcher of the innocent, so yes.

(She then snarled.)

KRITZ: We will find a way to destroy them as a threat through. Of that, you can be certain.

(Flaxley sighed to himself then looked her in the eye.)

FLAXLEY: I fucking hate the Trepe.

KRITZ: I know that, darling, but if we're going to beat this Dim Lee, we'll need their help.

FLAXLEY: Fine. I don't like it, but I guess it makes sense.

KRITZ: I don't like it either, trust me.

FLAXLEY: Okay! Just let me kill Jazzu then we can ask the others to join us!

KRITZ: No! If you kill the leader they'll never help, they're sworn to protect the Trepe way at all costs!

(Flaxley looked absolutely lived for a moment then sighed in defeat.)

FLAXLEY: Damn it! Fine, whatever it takes!

(She gave him a pitying glance.)

KRITZ: Don't worry, I feel the same, but it's for the good of Tifaeris! We'll always be sworn enemies of the Trepe but right now we have an even bigger common enemy!

(Flaxley nodded, conceding to her insight.)

FLAXLEY: Yeah, you're right! C'mon!

(With that, Kritz took Flaxley's arm and they approached Jazzu together. As their shadow engulfed her, Jazzu looked up at them visibly sickened by their closeness.)

JAZZU: You two are a revolting sight!

FLAXLEY: You think so? Don't they have mirrors in Trepe village then?

(Kritz frowned.)

KRITZ: Flaxley!

(Flaxley shrugged.)

KRITZ: Listen Jazzu, we have a proposition for you!

(Jazzu looked her scornfully up and down.)

KRITZ: Don't think of double crossing us though, you've seen what we're capable of!

(Truth was, Kritz had no idea how the few men of Tifaeris had defeated such an army, nor did she care.)

KRITZ: And there's plenty more where that came from, so make no mistake, Jazzu, we can defeat you anytime!

(Jazzu, fearing she was probably right, gave her a hateful look and spoke through gritted teeth.)

JAZZU: Why should we do anything for you?

(Flaxley was in no mood to be trifled with.)

FLAXLEY: Because I'll kill you otherwise!

KRITZ: Look, fact is Jazzu, if you *don't* help us, the Trepe are doomed, Dim Lee will see to that!

(She shrugged.)

KRITZ: But if you do, then there's a chance you could survive!

(Jazzu was outraged.)

JAZZU: How the hell do you know about Dim Lee??? Who told you?

KRITZ: That's not important, the thing is...

JAZZU: It was that bloody Suma, wasn't it?

(She snarled.)

JAZZU: And how did you escape anyway?

(Kritz shrugged.)

KRITZ: I was wearing a magic anklet that had lightning magic on it!

(Jazzu was horrified.)

JAZZU: You smuggled magic into the compound???

KRITZ: Never mind that! The fact is that Dim Lee is coming to your village tomorrow and you don't have what he demands. All you can do is stand up to him, and we're willing to help you defeat him!

(Jazzu was naturally suspicious.)

JAZZU: Why? What's in it for you?

KRITZ: Well, chances are that once he's finished with you, he'll start on Tifaeris instead! So, we're kind of in the same boat, really. Therefore, we should fight him together. It'll be our only chance to defeat him!

(Extremely sceptical of everything she was hearing, Jazzu scoffed.)

JAZZU: Do you realise how powerful the Tang Yul are? We don't stand a chance!

KRITZ: Maybe, but what have you got to lose?

JAZZU: Our entire civilisation!!!

KRITZ: Yeah, but you're gonna lose that anyway when you fail to give him the million lig!

(The expression on Jazzu's face as she pondered the idea made it quite clear that she didn't like the idea of working with Tifaeris, but she knew she had no choice. Having failed to raise the money, Dim Lee would try to destroy them and facing the Tang Yul with allies was far better than facing them alone.)

JAZZU: Fine... but it'll only be a temporary truce!

(Far from convinced by Jazzu's reply, Flaxley looked towards the house.)

FLAXLEY: Wait a minute!

(With that, he ran over and yelled inside the front door. Seconds later, Derek came out and Flaxley spoke with him quietly before leading him back over to Kritz. Upon sighting him, Jazzu was terrified.)

JAZZU: Argh! What's that ugly thing???

(Derek was most offended.)

DEREK: You can talk!

FLAXLEY: So, tell us again, Jazzu, will you fight with us against Dim Lee?

(Hating having to repeat herself, Jazzu snarled.)

JAZZU: Fine, I said! Yes!

(Immediately realising Derek's reason for being present at this time, Kritz then proceeded to question Jazzu accordingly.)

KRITZ: Before we release you, do you promise not to attack Tifaeris ever again?

(Jazzu breathed out heavily and shuddered with rage.)

JAZZU: Okay! Fine!

KRITZ: And can we take your word there'll be no double cross? When we turn up to help you fight Dim Lee, you won't just ambush us and sling us all in jail, will you?

(By now insane with anger, Jazzu bellowed her reply.)

JAZZU: Of course not!!!

KRITZ: And if we win, you won't do the sly and arrest us afterwards either?

JAZZU: No, for fuck sake!!! Happy now???

(Kritz shrugged indifferently.)

KRITZ: Don't know yet!

(With that, Kritz, Flaxley and Derek stepped out of earshot from Jazzu.)

FLAXLEY: Well, Derek?

DEREK: She won't double cross you, that's the good news. She hates the idea but she's willing to join forces with you tomorrow and isn't going to arrest you at any point.

Unfortunately when it comes to attacking Tifaeris again, she lied! She wants you to pay for humiliating her.

(Flaxley nodded purposefully and started to turn.)

FLAXLEY: Right, I'll kill her now then!

KRITZ: No, Flaxley! Wait! Derek, all we need to know is if we can trust her to fight with us tomorrow. Anything beyond that is something we can sort out later.

DEREK: Well, yeah. Tomorrow won't be a problem; she knows she needs all the help she can get if she wants to defeat Dim Lee.

KRITZ: Good. That's all that matters for now.

FLAXLEY: Well, you say that, but I couldn't agree less. Seeing as she plans to attack Tifaeris again, I say we kill her right now.

DEREK: She's thinking long term, Flaxley. You've really pissed her off. I don't think she cares how long it takes; she plans to get you eventually.

KRITZ: But not any time soon?

DEREK: No. She's willing to battle Dim Lee at your side for now. But once he's defeated, *if* he's defeated, you'll be next on her agenda.

(Flaxley nodded firmly.)

FLAXLEY: Fine, then I'll kill her!

KRITZ: No, Flaxley! We need her army to fight alongside us tomorrow.

(Flaxley pouted at her and stamped his foot like a petulant child.)

FLAXLEY: But, Kritz...

(Kritz offered him a sympathetic smile and looked lovingly into his eyes.)

KRITZ: I know you want to chop her into tiny fragments, darling, but you need to look at the big picture. We should join forces with her for now, just for now. Then if we're successful tomorrow, we can think about killing later, okay?

FLAXLEY: You promise?

KRITZ: I swear on my life.

(Flaxley sighed and shrugged in defeat.)

FLAXLEY: Fine. As long as you're *sure* we can trust her, Derek.

DEREK: I am, Flaxley!

KRITZ: Cool.

(Kritz smiled and patted Derek on the head.)

KRITZ: I used to really hate your mind reading talent Derek, but actually, it's pretty cool!

(Derek leant back and slapped her hand away.)

DEREK: Stop molesting me, woman!

(Kritz grinned.)

KRITZ: Not above flattering yourself, are you, Derek?

(Derek gave her a peeved glance for a moment then sighed and shook his head.)

DEREK: Mind-reading isn't cool, at all. It sucks. If it wasn't for mind-reading, I'd be going into battle tomorrow feeling a lot more confident.

FLAXLEY: What do you mean?

DEREK: Neither you two *or* Jazzu are expecting to survive this battle against the Tang Yul tomorrow! In fact, you all think the odds are ridiculously against you.

(Flaxley and Kritz both looked to him and shrugged.)

DEREK: I'm right aren't I?

KRITZ: Maybe!

DEREK: Then why fight when you can pay him off instead?

FLAXLEY: Because some things are *worth* fighting for, Derek! Freedom, especially.

KRITZ: Yeah. If you're living under the constant threat of attack, you're not free. And without freedom, you might as well be dead anyway. So, it's worth fighting for, in my opinion.

FLAXLEY: Exactly. If we win, we're free. If we lose, we'll die... and like Kritz said, without freedom life isn't worth living anyway.

(With that, Flaxley and Kritz headed back over to Jazzu, leaving Derek shaking his head in despair of them.)

DEREK: I'll never understand humans!

(With that, he shrugged then headed back inside. As Derek disappeared in the house, Kritz stepped up to the Trepe prisoners and looked across their empty, hope-drained, faces.

Looking more than a tad miffed, Flaxley stood behind her trying not to let Jazzu's lack of gruesome death get to him.)

KRITZ: You're all free to go.

(As a mass sigh of relief emanated from the captured Trepe soldiers, Kritz looked down at Jazzu.)

KRITZ: We'll come to your village at six in the morning tomorrow to help you fight Dim Lee, okay?

FLAXLEY: And we'll bring your weapons with us 'cause you aint having them back *now*, that's for certain!

(Sighing inwardly, Jazzu gave a curt reply.)

JAZZU: Fine!

FLAXLEY: Better start untying you bitches then!

(He sneered at Jazzu.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz can untie *you* because I bloody well aint.

(With that, he paced around the side of the gathering then bent down to start untying the prisoners with a peeved expression on his face.)

FLAXLEY: I resent this!

(While Flaxley began heavy-handedly untying them, Kritz stooped to untie Jazzu. As soon as she bent to within a foot of her, however, she swiftly leant back and grimaced with disgust.)

KRITZ: Whoa!!!

JAZZU: What???

KRITZ: Your perfume's a bit... strong!

(Jazzu raised her voice angrily.)

JAZZU: Just untie me, you stupid little girl!!!

(Kritz leant forward again and growled at her.)

KRITZ: Don't shout at me!!! I aint under your command, and just for that... I *was* being polite; the truth is your perfume smells like piss!

(Flaxley looked over, grinning like the cat who'd got the cream.)

FLAXLEY: Yeah! Thin pissed on her head!

(Kritz giggled as she continued to untie her.)

JAZZU: Yeah, yeah, laugh it up while you can, cow!

(Once the Trepe were all untied, Flaxley and Kritz angrily pointed them on their way and they started the walk of shame, unarmed, back to Trepe village. For a nation of warriors, this was not a proud moment and heads were hung low as they passed through the gates. Jazzu, however, simply couldn't leave quietly. Utterly humiliated, she turned and glared bitterly back at them, unable to leave town without sharing her bitter feelings first.)

JAZZU: Don't forget this truce is only temporary, Kritzeveltia!

(Kritz and Flaxley stared back with equal anger.)

KRITZ: Damn right, I won't! And it's Lady Flaxley to you!

(As Jazzu stomped away bitterly, Kritz turned to face Flaxley, who was still staring at Jazzu with piercing angry eyes.)

KRITZ: Don't worry, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: She going to pay, Kritz! I swear!

KRITZ: I know... believe me, I know!

(She smiled then gestured to the house.)

KRITZ: Let's go home, darling.

(As Flaxley continued to stare hatefully out the gates, Kritz grinned and stepped up on tip-toe to whisper in his ear.)

KRITZ: Let's go and have sex.

FLAXLEY: Absolutely!!!

(With that, he slipped his arm around her and they headed back to the house. Looking forward to some quiet, erotic time alone, they gave each other several knowing glances as they paced across the porch. Ready to ravage one another as soon as they were inside, they then cast open the front door, only to be greeted by a throng of over one hundred villagers partying like there was no tomorrow.)

FLAXLEY: What the?

(As they stood there stunned, Derek staggered past them looking somewhat pie-eyed.)

DEREK: You never told me about wine, Flaxley, this is good shit!

(Unable to stop, Derek then staggered onwards to where Lefiat was standing by himself against the wall, staring at Mandika with a face as long as a wet weekend.)

DEREK: Cheer up, Lefiat! Have some wine!

(Watching the all merriment before him, Flaxley sighed to himself.)

FLAXLEY: I hate to be a party pooper but...

(With that, he stepped deeper into the room and wafted his arms frantically to draw everyone's attention.)

FLAXLEY: Listen, everyone...

(At once, a loud cheer filled the room.)

THIN: Flaxley!

ULRICH: Top man, Flaxley!!!

MAN 01: The main man's here. Fetch him an ale!

(Flaxley furrowed his brow and spoke up in a raised voice.)

FLAXLEY: Forget the ale!!! I've something important to tell you all!

MAN 02: You were brilliant, Flaxley, what a swordsman!

MAN 03: A living legend, I say!!!

FLAXLEY: Listen, will you???

MAN 04: Them Trepe won't be bothering us again!

(With that, Flaxley threw his arms up in the air in defeat. Kritz, however, had other ideas. Desperate for Flaxley to be heard, she bellowed so loud even Flaxley jumped.)

KRITZ: Shut it!!!

(At once, everyone froze to the spot and glared in her direction nervously. Feeling somewhat pleased with herself, Kritz grinned and gestured to the waiting crowd.)

KRITZ: The floor's yours, my love!

(Somewhat miffed at being deafened, Flaxley gave her a sideways glance then stepped forward and projected his voice to the waiting ears around him.)

FLAXLEY: Bad news, people!!! It's been brought to my attention that the Trepe were only *part* of our problem. The fight isn't over by a long chalk! You see, the real menace is a man called Dim Dum.

KRITZ: Dim Lee!

FLAXLEY: Exactly! This Dim chap is a maniacal warlord from Tang Yul. It appears that Tifaeris won't be safe until we vanquish him!

(Expecting a cacophony of disapproval, he was extremely pleased not to mention astonished by the reaction of his men.)

THIN: No one threatens Tifaeris while I'm around!

MAN 02: Damn right, let's go and kill the bastard!!!

FLAXLEY: We will! And those of you who wish to join us should come back here at four in the morning tomorrow. We'll head to Trepe village...

THIN: Trepe village?

FLAXLEY: Yes! Believe it or not, we'll be fighting *alongside* the Trepe this time.

MAN 01: So... you didn't kill them?

FLAXLEY: No, I was going to... but Kritz here stopped me just in time. Anyway...
(Just then, one of the men of the village leapt up on the table and called out angrily.)

SWAINE: I knew it!!!

FLAXLEY: Knew it?

(Wearing a cold scowl, Swaine jumped down from the table and paced towards Kritz angrily.)

SWAINE: Let me get this straight, Flaxley. This wife of yours, her with the Trepe tattoo, her who didn't take any part in fighting *against* the Trepe, came back just in time to stop you from *killing* the Trepe?

(He raised a distrusting eyebrow.)

SWAINE: And now, having saved the Trepe's lives, she wants us to go to Trepe village, where there's nothing but Trepe warriors, first thing in the morning?

(He scoffed.)

SWAINE: Now forgive for being suspicious here, but if it looks like a Trepe, doesn't fight against the Trepe, stops you from killing the Trepe, then tries to convince you to go to Trepe village where all the Trepe warriors will be waiting for you... then it's probably a bloody Trepe!!!

(He nodded sternly as everyone in the room stared uneasily at Kritz.)

SWAINE: Well, Flaxley? Am I wrong???

(As Kritz snarled at Swaine, on the verge of one of her psychotic episodes, Flaxley looked to Swaine emotionlessly for a moment before releasing an empty shrug.)

FLAXLEY: I see.

(With that, he grabbed Swaine by the scruff of the neck with his right hand and spun him around. Snarling furiously, he then grabbed the back of his trousers with this other hand. As Swaine screamed in terror, Flaxley then swung him backwards before casting him head first into the wall with all his might. At once, everyone cringed as Swaine hit the wall with a tremendous thud then plummeted to the floorboards unconscious.)

FLAXLEY: Now, would anyone else like to disrespect my wife or can I carry on with what I was saying?

(Unsurprisingly, there was silence.)

FLAXLEY: Good. Now, to the rest of you doubters out there, know this. I trust Kritz. She's not a Trepe, she's one of us. And if you don't believe me, ask Derek.

(He gestured to Derek.)

FLAXLEY: He can read minds and believe me, if Kritz had any bad intentions, he'd have told me about them.

(Derek beamed.)

DEREK: It's true. I'm privy to all her thoughts! Kritz is head over heels in love with Flaxley, and desperate to save Tifaeris. If she thinks it, I hear it.

(Still a little tipsy, he then scratched his head and grinned.)

DEREK: She fantasised about making out with Mandika once, which was interesting.

(As a coo of curious excitement filled the air, a highly alarmed Kritz stood behind Flaxley and Mandika fiddled with her hair in silent horror. Determined to get his speech back on track, however, Flaxley stood tall and projected his voice once again.)

FLAXLEY: Right, now we've established that Kritz is one of us... and a few other things!

(He glared at Derek.)

FLAXLEY: I'm going to kill you!

DEREK: Don't blame me; the wine is making me act funny!

FLAXLEY: Let's get back to the point. Tomorrow morning we'll be heading to Treppe village to help put and end to a maniacal warlord, who could pose a severe threat to everyone of us here in Tifaeris. Now I know it's a bit of an anti-climax after we thought we'd defeated our only enemy but that's the way it is. The job is only half done and we have to fight again. (He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: It's a lot to ask, I know, and those of you who don't want to fight again... it's okay, we understand!

(Slowly getting over her embarrassment, Kritz peered around Flaxley.)

KRITZ: Yeah, don't feel guilty. I mean, it's only the whole of Tifaeris you'll be letting down, friends and family included!

FLAXLEY: Kritz!!! No! If you can't make it, men, it's okay. Seriously. Even I can't expect miracles!

(Kritz shrugged then stepped around Flaxley and gestured to the door.)

KRITZ: Anyway, in the meantime, those of you who don't live here had better go home and get some rest! Our resident guests, excluded.

(Sharing the sentiments of all the partying villagers, Thin looked heartbroken.)

THIN: Hey, hang on a minute! Are you saying the party's over?

KRITZ: That's exactly what I'm saying!

MAN 02: Interesting fantasies or not, I don't think much of *her*, Flaxley!

MAN 03: Aye, she's a right party pooper.

(Kritz rolled her eyes.)

KRITZ: Don't worry, if we win tomorrow, we can have the biggest celebration in the history of mankind, but until then we're only half way done!

(Thin looked at her blankly for a moment then his face lit up.)

THIN: Say... if we *do* have this big celebration, tomorrow, will you do a strip for us? You know, completely naked like?

(In true Kritz style, she sneered and clenched her fists, looking ready to launch into him with a flurry of punches. Spotting this, Flaxley swiftly leant close to her and whispered to her in an attempt to pacify her rage.)

FLAXLEY: Don't darling; there's been enough bloodshed for one day. Besides, he's only playing with you... just joke with him!

(Satisfied that he was probably right, Kritz released her anger and shrugged.)

KRITZ: Why stop at stripping? If we *do* win, I'll sleep with each and every one of you if you like!

(Immediately an excited rumble swept the room.)

THIN: Fucking fantastic!!! I'm going home to get myself prepared!

MAN 01: Me too!

ULRICH: I love my wife, but there's no way I'm turning that down!!!

MAN 02: Bloody right! I'm gonna rest my arse off today, sleep like a baby then kill every bloody enemy we see tomorrow. Anything for a piece of that!!!

(With that, all the soldiers sprinted for the door in a blinding hurry, desperate to get some rest and be at their best come the morning. Watching them batter each other to get outside, gushing excitedly about the prospect of having sex with her, Kritz bit her lip nervously.)

KRITZ: Um... they're not gonna hold me to that, are they?

(Flaxley, who'd been giving her a filthy look since she'd said it, answered definitively.)

FLAXLEY: No! They're not!

KRITZ: Don't look at me like that! *You* told me to joke with him!

(Flaxley shook his head and sat down.)

FLAXLEY: Women!

TIFAERIS – THURSDAY AFTERNOON

(For most ordinary citizens of Tifaeris the battle against the Trepe that morning had been a huge anti-climax. Instead of securing a victory that would guarantee the survival of their town for the foreseeable future, they'd merely earned themselves a one day stay of execution. It wasn't easy to accept the fact that they'd accomplished such an outstanding victory against the Trepe, only to be told they'd have to go through it all again against a new unknown foe. For many it seemed horribly unfair. It was, however, a credit to Flaxley's men that instead of being downhearted they were eager to go again and finish their battle against oppression.)

Shortly after midday, Flaxley and Kritz returned to their house from the cemetery where they'd taken the dead. The wounded, including the Trepe warrior with one leg were over at Tifaeris' medical centre and the surviving soldiers were resting up. Looking deeply saddened Flaxley and Kritz sat down with their four house guests as soon as they got inside.)

FLAXLEY: Death is a terrible thing!

BONSON: How many were there, sir?

FLAXLEY: Too many!

(Kritz did a double take in Bonson's direction.)

KRITZ: Bonson? How long have *you* been here?

BONSON: I arrived shortly after the Trepe took you the second time, ma'am!

(He then furrowed his brow.)

BONSON: Therefore I've been here all sodding day. You've only just noticed?

KRITZ: Um... sorry.

BONSON: No harm done, you've been busy, I suppose.

KRITZ: Yeah! Anyway... you look well!

(Bonson gave her a knowing smile.)

BONSON: Of course I do. One look at those long, tanned legs of yours and I feel alive.

KRITZ: You're not even looking at my legs, Bonson.

BONSON: Yes, but if I said cleavage, Flaxley would punch me!

(Kritz chuckled.)

KRITZ: You haven't changed then.

BONSON: Of course not. Why alter perfection?

KRITZ: Yes, Bonson! So, what have you been up to? I mean, where have you been up until now?

(Bonson beamed with more than a slight air of conceit.)

BONSON: Actually, I'm in training to be a wise man! A revered elder, you know? We're known for our wisdom, mystic aptitude and prowess in the sack!

(He grinned at her innocently.)

BONSON: Fantasise about *that* for a while and if you get the urge...

(Mandika glared at him.)

MANDIKA: Bonson!!! We're not going to discuss her filthy fantasies!!!

(She then glared at Kritz.)

MANDIKA: Ever!!!

(She then rounded on Bonson again.)

MANDIKA: Now show some class and stop lusting after married women half your age!!!

(Kritz was livid.)

KRITZ: Half his age??? And the rest! More like a quarter!!!

BONSON: Hey!!!

MANDIKA: More like half! You're getting on now!

KRITZ: I'm twenty two, for fuck sake!

MANDIKA: And married! To a man! So stop fantasising about stuff that's never gonna happen, start wearing more clothes and stop encouraging twisting old perverts like Bonson here.

KRITZ: The cheek! And anyway, I *didn't* encourage him! He doesn't need encouraging!

BONSON: Excuse me?

MANDIKA: Shut up, Bonson, this is none of your concern.

BONSON: Actually, you cantankerous little shit, I beg to differ!

MANDIKA: Beg all you like, I don't care. Fact is, you need to stop lusting after women a fraction of your age, it's embarrassing.

BONSON: A fraction???

MANDIKA: And Kritz...

(As Kritz glared at her coldly, clearly losing her temper, Mandika shrunk in her seat then looked away.)

MANDIKA: Nothing.

KRITZ: Mandika?

(Mandika grinned at her innocently.)

MANDIKA: Yes?

(Pounding her fist, Kritz looked her dead in the eye.)

KRITZ: I'm fantasising about you right now... wanna act it out with me?

MANDIKA: No... I'm good.

KRITZ: Shut up then!

MANDIKA: Okay... um... I love your hair, by the way.

(With that Kritz stopped pounded her fist and beamed.)

KRITZ: Thanks, babes. Yours is looking pretty damn lovely too.

(Mandika also beamed.)

MANDIKA: You think so?

KRITZ: Yeah, I love it.

(Mandika looked uncertain.)

MANDIKA: You don't think it looks lovely in a dirty, sex way, do you?

(Kritz growled at Derek.)

KRITZ: I ought to punch you!!!

DEREK: What? What did *I* do?

KRITZ: You told everyone I fantasised about making out with Mandika!

DEREK: Yes, but... at the time, it seemed relevant to the conversation...

(He whimpered.)

DEREK: Look, I didn't mean any harm! This world is alien to me, don't forget. I can't always know what I can and can't say. Though... it was pretty obvious I shouldn't have said *that*, come to think of it. Sorry.

(Kritz rolled her eyes.)

KRITZ: Whatever. Look, Mandika... it happened once...

DEREK: Twice!

KRITZ: Derek!!!

DEREK: Sorry!!!

(As Derek spammed his forehead, Kritz looked to Mandika.)

KRITZ: Look, all that happened was... it crossed my mind... I just wonder what you'd be like in the sack...

(She then winced.)

KRITZ: Why am I explaining myself? Bottom line is, Mandika, don't act all weird around me. It's not like I fancy you or anything. It was just a curious thought.

MANDIKA: Fine. As long as that's all it was.

KRITZ: It was. And I shouldn't have to feel guilty about it. Everyone has weird thoughts, it's nothing to be ashamed of. It just so happens, big mouth Derek here *told* everyone about mine.

(Derek grinned at her innocently.)

DEREK: Saying sorry isn't quite going to cut it this time, is it?

KRITZ: Look, don't worry about.

DEREK: But I do, I feel awful.

(He looked enlightened.)

DEREK: What if I even things up by telling you some of Flaxley's fantasies? Like...

(Flaxley cut over him.)

FLAXLEY: This conversation ends now!!!

KRITZ: No, wait...

FLAXLEY: No! No more telling people's secrets, Derek.

BONSON: Fucking right!

DEREK: Fair enough.

KRITZ: Spoilsport!

MANDIKA: Was *I* in his fantasies, Derek?

FLAXLEY: Enough!!!

LEFIAT: You'd better not have been!

MANDIKA: Why not? He's always in mine. Sometimes while you and I are doing it.

LEFIAT: Eh?

MANDIKA: What? I like to pretend I'm with a *real* man sometimes!

LEFIAT: Mean!!!

FLAXLEY: Stop that!!!

(As Lefiat pouted miserably, Flaxley rolled his eyes then looked to Bonson.)

FLAXLEY: It's like dealing with school children.

BONSON: Tell me about it.

(Flaxley shook his head and sighed then gave Bonson a questioning glance.)

FLAXLEY: Oh yeah, Bonson, I meant to ask you... this morning at the battle... what happened to your illusion?

(Bonson glanced away and scratched his head.)

BONSON: Oh, yes, that... um... I made a slight miscalculation there, sir!

FLAXLEY: Such as?

BONSON: Well, my illusion was to be of 4,000 warriors on horseback at the top of the hill. I figured that'd scare the Trepe witless, you know? Unfortunately though, from here you can't see the hilltop for trees, thus rendering it useless!

DEREK: So, you couldn't use it?

BONSON: Well, I could, but only if you wanted 4,000 horsemen floating in the sky. How credible would that have looked?

DEREK: I see!

(Kritz looked thoughtful.)

KRITZ: That could be handy for tomorrow's battle though!

BONSON: What? Floating horsemen? I don't think so!

KRITZ: No, there's a hill overlooking Trepe village!

BONSON: Is it tree lined?

KRITZ: No, not at all!

BONSON: Excellent, then my illusion's back in the game. See how that Dim Lee bloke likes the idea of fighting 4000 horsemen. No doubt he'll head for the hills... or should I say, away from the hills... let's just say he'll shit himself and flee.

(Lost in thought, Mandika shook her head and sighed.)

MANDIKA: I can't believe you've got to fight again already.

FLAXLEY: No, me either. I thought it'd all be over now. I had it all figured out in my head. The Trepe were going to be wiped out today and we were going to be celebrating long into the night.

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: So much for that fantasy.

(Half paying attention, Derek waved a dismissive hand at him.)

DEREK: Your fantasies are boring anyway, they're all about Kritz.

(As Kritz exhaled lovingly at Flaxley, Derek grimaced.)

DEREK: Aw, crap. I messed up again.

KRITZ: Far from it!

FLAXLEY: Derek, you're a star.

(As Kritz and Flaxley shared a knowing glance, Mandika sat back and sighed.)

MANDIKA: It's gonna be horrible waiting for you lot to get back from Trepe village tomorrow. I won't know if you've won or not until you get back... and if you're late... I'll worry.

KRITZ: Aint you coming with us then?

FLAXLEY: No, she isn't. In fact I recommend you leave for Guevina in the morning, Mandika. If we lose and Dim Lee comes to Tifaeris...

(Mandika shuddered.)

MANDIKA: He'll kill me.

(In that moment silence filled the room as they all pondered the prospect of defeat.)

LEFIAT: You know... as her knight...

MANDIKA: In name and little else...

LEFIAT: I'd have to go to Guevina with her... but I wanna do the right thing and help you fight.

MANDIKA: Be my guest, I can always get a new knight. A good one this time.

(Lefiat pouted at her.)

LEFIAT: Why are you being so horrible to me???

(Mandika rounded on him angrily.)

MANDIKA: Fine, you wanna know why? Because you're a cock!!!

LEFIAT: Eh?

MANDIKA: You're my knight! You! And yet I had to ask to Derek to come along with us on this trip because I don't feel safe with you to protect me! What does that tell you?

(Lefiat hung his head.)

LEFIAT: Nothing I didn't already know.

MANDIKA: You're a crap knight and a rubbish boyfriend! I'm supposed to feel safe in my boyfriend's arms, not be afraid he'll accidentally set fire to me!!!

LEFIAT: That's not fair! I've only accidentally set fire to two things.

MANDIKA: Yeah, the national flag we bought to replace the one you lost and the entire west wing of Guevina Castle!!!

(She winced.)

MANDIKA: The horror on those peoples face as they watched our flag burn...

LEFIAT: It wasn't that bad.

MANDIKA: They all thought the castle had been invaded by flag burning barbarians!!!

Twenty nine people died in the stampede to evacuate the city!!!

(She shook her head.)

MANDIKA: Some knight. You don't know one end of a sword from the other!

LEFIAT: I do! That was one of the first things Flaxley taught me!

(Flaxley winced and mumbled under his breath.)

FLAXLEY: Even that took him half an hour to perfect.

MANDIKA: Fact is, Lefiat. I don't feel safe with you. And that's not what I want from a boyfriend *or* a knight. You suck at both!

(As Lefiat pouted miserably, Bonson sat back and folded his arms.)

BONSON: Actually, Mandika... as much as I hate defending the lad, I think you'll find he's come a bloody long way on the sword fighting front.

(Mandika gave him a sideways glance.)

MANDIKA: What?

BONSON: You should have seen him against the Trepe; he was like a miniature Flaxley!

(Flaxley was not amused by the comparison.)

FLAXLEY: You take that back!!!

BONSON: Seriously! He was using his weapon and his body in perfect harmony, he was a joy to watch, actually!

KRITZ: Are you winding us up, Bonson?

(Angered by her astonished reaction, Lefiat frowned resentfully.)

LEFIAT: Hey, stop talking about me like that! I fought well!

(Much to Mandika's amazement, Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: I admit, Lefiat, I was impressed!

(Naturally, Mandika was intrigued by the comments.)

MANDIKA: You mean he fought like a knight?

LEFIAT: I am a knight!

MANDIKA: Yes, but, normally even I could beat you in a fight!

(Lefiat was far from amused and leapt to his feet accordingly.)

LEFIAT: Come on then, let's go for it! You and me outside now!

(Mandika looked horrified.)

MANDIKA: You can't ask me for a fight! I'm a girl... and not a butch looking Trepe either, I'm a princess.

LEFIAT: Yeah well, you challenged my status as the man!

BONSON: Which, as your princess, she's fully entitled to do. Now sit down, you fool.

(As Lefiat sheepishly sat down, Flaxley mused out loud.)

FLAXLEY: I think Lefiat has what we used to call selective competence syndrome.

LEFIAT: Eh?

(Flaxley sat forward and nodded to him.)

FLAXLEY: I've seen it a couple of times before, Lefiat. Some of the soldiers in Guevina were bloody useless in training, I'm mean awful.

LEFIAT: Worse than me?

FLAXLEY: Let's not get carried away, Lefiat. They were pretty awful though. If we were out in the field and a cuddyfinkle attacked however, they became very different animals.

LEFIAT: Like giraffes?

(Flaxley looked to him blankly for a moment then turned and spoke to Mandika.)

FLAXLEY: You see, the army was their lives and their fellow soldiers were like their brothers. And when their brothers were in danger, they suddenly found bravery they never knew they had and all the skills I thought they'd failed to learn came right to the fore.

(He shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: Then when the fight was over, they were back to their useless selves again.

LEFIAT: That's just weird.

FLAXLEY: No, not really. People like them don't have many friends, what with their ineptitude and such, but those they do have they cherish to the point where they can defend them like a seasoned veteran. Ask them to clean their swords afterwards though and they might well accidentally stab the unit's mascot while they're doing it.

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: The place was never the same again after Rover met his end... a more faithful pooch you'll never hope to meet.

(He shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: That's how I see it, anyway, Mandika. Lefiat's got no confidence or friends; all he's got is you. You're the one thing he loves and when you're in danger he suddenly finds it in him to fight like a professional.

MANDIKA: Really?

FLAXLEY: That's how it looks to me.

(Lefiat beamed arrogantly.)

LEFIAT: See, I'm not totally useless after all.

(His face then clouded over.)

LEFIAT: Now, are we going to have that fight or not, Mandika?

(Greatly encouraged by Flaxley's assessment of her boyfriend's ability to defend her, Mandika found Lefiat's aggression quite the turn on all of a sudden.)

MANDIKA: Lefiat, I never knew you could be so... primal!

(Realising she wouldn't be accepting his challenge, Lefiat sighed and looked down.)

LEFIAT: If I knew what that meant I'd probably be offended, yeah?

MANDIKA: Far from it!

(While Lefiat tried to figure her out, Bonson added the final piece of the jigsaw.)

BONSON: Just to add my two lig, the way I see it is, despite *outwardly* being a moron with very little confidence or intelligence, Lefiat here has an *inner* personality that's perfect for you, Mandika!

(Mandika frowned, lost by his words.)

MANDIKA: In other words, portcullis, tree stump, handkerchief, fishing line!

(Bonson frowned.)

BONSON: If you didn't understand ma'am, you could have just said!

MANDIKA: Well?

BONSON: Well, like Flaxley said, he bumbles along being the Lefiat we all know and find amusement in... then as soon as *you're* in trouble he turns into this incredibly competent fighting machine!

MANDIKA: Really?

BONSON: That's twice it's happened! He performed heroics against the two witches because *you* were in danger, and he was so desperate to rescue you from the Trepe he performed heroics again just now. Lefiat is your perfect knight; he'd gladly lay his life on the line for you. He'll always protect from the heart and he's actually rather good at it!

MANDIKA: Do you think so?

BONSON: Yes I do ma'am, and I'm wise!

(As everyone nodded in full agreement with Bonson's assessment of Lefiat, Mandika licked her lips and trembled with excitement.)

MANDIKA: In that case, I'm coming with you to fight tomorrow!

(Flaxley looked horrified.)

FLAXLEY: You are?

MANDIKA: Damn right, I am. I wanna see the new sexy, swashbuckling Lefiat in action.

(With that, she grabbed Lefiat by the hand and dragged him out of his seat.)

MANDIKA: Speaking of which. Come on you!

(She then dragged him into the bedroom and slammed the door. Having watched them go, Bonson sighed then looked to Flaxley.)

BONSON: Unfortunately, when Mandika *isn't* in danger he has all the fighting talent of a dead goat, but we needn't tell *her* that!

FLAXLEY: That's what worries me, Bonson. I don't want to take Mandika along if Lefiat's just going to revert to his usual feeble self.

BONSON: I wouldn't worry about that, Flaxley. If there's a battle going on, Mandika won't feel safe and that'll bring out the swordsman in Lefiat, I'm sure.

(Flaxley nodded in full agreement.)

FLAXLEY: Probably will. Still, if things get too hairy tomorrow, I'm going to send her and Lefiat back here to Tifaeris with a view to collecting their carriage and getting her safely back to Guevina.

DEREK: Sounds like a plan.

BONSON: Indeed.

(With her eyes still fixed on the bedroom door, Kritz sighed.)

KRITZ: I wonder if they realise this could be their last time together!

FLAXLEY: Darling, never enter a battle with defeat in mind!

KRITZ: Easier said than done, my love.

(Derek sighed.)

DEREK: It'd be easier if I had some more terra weed!

BONSON: Terra weed? Is that what you used for your nerve magic?

DEREK: Yes actually!

KRITZ: How did you know that?

BONSON: As a wise man, I have to learn all about herbs and such. So far I've memorised over a hundred of them. That terra weed of yours is used in *several* types of magic, actually, included six types of poison.

KRITZ: Wow, you *are* wise.

BONSON: It's a cross I have to bear, ma'am!

(He sighed.)

BONSON: And I bear it well!

FLAXLEY: Well wisdom is one thing, Bonson; I just hope you're feeling brave too!

Tomorrow is probably going to be a tougher battle than any of us ever would have dared to imagine!

DEREK: Well, you know I'll do whatever I can, Flaxley. I've got all my standard magic, that should help!

KRITZ: I've still got the H2O magic you taught me eighteen months ago, Derek.

(She then looked uncertain.)

KRITZ: Do Mandika and Lefiat still use their magic?

DEREK: Mandika still has the glacier I taught her, not sure about Lefiat's lightning.

BONSON: I still have the fire magic you taught me.

(He beamed.)

BONSON: And don't forget my illusion!

(Kritz then smiled and tried to sound upbeat.)

KRITZ: Right, so we have options then, that's cool. I'm pretty handy with my fists and I don't even have to mention what Flaxley here is capable of with his blade. We've got a chance, if we can just plan it right.

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Well that's exactly it, my love. Like any battle, when you're outnumbered, tactics are the key.

(He mused outwardly.)

FLAXLEY: This Dim Doo chap has 3000 troops but there's absolutely no way he'd bring them all just to defeat the Trepe. So I'm anticipating a few hundred. I can't be sure, of course.

(He sighed.)

FLAXLEY: The problem is, if we do defeat the Tang Yul, what's to stop them from sending a second wave of troops a few days later?

DEREK: Exactly. With 3000 troops at their disposal, they can just send wave after wave until they overpower us.

FLAXLEY: Precisely.

(Derek sighed.)

DEREK: The only way I can see us winning is... if we kill their leader and hope whoever takes over his role doesn't seek revenge.

FLAXLEY: That's a long shot, Derek.

DEREK: I know, but it's all I can think of.

FLAXLEY: That said, it's a possibility! Killing their leader might make them think twice. You might well be onto something, Derek.

BONSON: I'm *definitely* onto something, my ninth ale! You know, once you're so drunk your taste buds stop working, this stuff you call beer aint too bad.

(Flaxley glared at him.)

FLAXLEY: For heaven's sake Bonson, we're trying to have a serious discussion here.

(As Bonson shrugged and sunk back his ale, Flaxley rolled his eyes then looked to Derek.)

FLAXLEY: I think you're right, Derek. We'll have to kill this Dim bloke, no matter what.

(He looked enlightened.)

FLAXLEY: Hmm... if we kill the leader and Bonson's illusion works...

DEREK: Ah... I see. His men will think that we have 4,000 horsemen in reserve! Quite the daunting opponent for a leaderless army. They're bound to flee.

KRITZ: That might work! Kill the leader and use the illusions to send a message to his underpants.

FLAXLEY: Underlings.

KRITZ: I meant subordinates actually!

(She blushed.)

KRITZ: I've missed you so much, Flaxley.

(Bonson rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: It sounds like an excellent plan to me! Take out their inspirational figurehead and fool them into thinking we have a huge army, I love it. They'll take to their heels and never look back.

DEREK: Something's bound to go wrong, it always does!

KRITZ: So killing Dim Lee is our priority then, yeah?

(Flaxley rose to his feet.)

FLAXLEY: Indeed it is. And that's where *I* come in, just make sure that you're ready with your illusion Bonson, and leave Dim Dum to me!

KRITZ: Dim Lee!

FLAXLEY: Him too!

DEREK: I like it. As impossible as this battle sounds, this plan gives us a chance!

BONSON: Yes, yes it does.

(Flaxley nodded and headed for the bedroom, gesturing for Kritz to follow him.)

FLAXLEY: With any luck it'll work like a charm. Still, just in case it doesn't and this is our last day on the planet together... Kritz and I have some bonding to do before we meet our maker!

(Kritz jumped to her feet and headed after him.)

KRITZ: We should have sex too!

(Giving her a despairing glance, Flaxley sighed to himself.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, what did you think I meant by bonding?

(As they reached the bedroom door, however, they heard several lusty groans from Lefiat and cringed.)

FLAXLEY: I forgot they were in there!

KRITZ: We need to build more bedrooms!

(As the sounds emanating from inside the room grew louder, Flaxley shuddered from head to toe.)

FLAXLEY: That's obscene. I'm picturing it.

KRITZ: Oh my god, I know. And I really don't want to picture Lefiat doing *that*!

FLAXLEY: And Mandika?

(Kritz furrowed her brow.)

KRITZ: It was just a silly thought I had for pity sake, Flaxley!

(She rolled her eyes.)

KRITZ: Come on, let's go out the back. You can do me over the picnic table.

FLAXLEY: Gladly.

(With that, the two of them disappeared into the kitchen, on route to their back yard, leaving a solemn faced Bonson and Derek behind.)

DEREK: No, randy fun for us two losers, eh?

BONSON: Indeed.

(He sighed.)

BONSON: Why can't *you* be a beautiful maiden?

DEREK: Because I can't! And even if I was one I wouldn't look twice at you, so don't you go getting any funny ideas!

BONSON: Funny ideas? I'm old, not blind!

(Just then, a strange, pained squeak arose from beneath one of the sofas.)

BONSON: What was that?

DEREK: It came from under that sofa!

(With that, Derek ducked down to look under the sofa in question to see little Phisele looking the worse for wear. Carefully, he pulled her out and sat her on the seat.)

DEREK: Are you okay?

PHISELE: That ale you gave me made me ill!

BONSON: You gave a little girl ale???

(Derek shrugged.)

DEREK: Shouldn't I have?

(Bonson frowned.)

BONSON: Now that Lefiat's learnt to swordfight are you trying to take his place as the halfwit of the group?

DEREK: Shut it, Bonson. Let me take you home, Phisele!

(Horried by the prospect of a second dose of Derek's company, Phisele looked mortified and ran out of the door yelling.)

PHISELE: Leave me alone!!! I'm never playing with *you* again!!!

DEREK: But... and you can stop smirking too, Bonson!!!

(Outside in the streets of Tifaeris at this time, the atmosphere was somewhat sour. Half of the men who'd fought at Flaxley's side had lost their lives and all over town, there was very much an air of mourning. As the day progressed, more and more well wishers headed for the gates of the town to lay floral tributes to the fallen. Their loss had hit the people hard. And to

make matters worse, they knew it wasn't over yet. A second battle was looming and the sense of foreboding was immense.

With such an unsettled atmosphere hanging over the town, relaxing was a tall order. That was, however, exactly how the people of Tifaeris spent the rest of the day. Some sat out in the sunshine, others lay upon the beach and some simply stayed in bed. With their town's hope of survival hanging in the balance, a day's graft seemed very much like a futile gesture. Why spend an entire day building something that might well be demolished by a barbaric hoard the next? Under such circumstances, their apathy was very easy to understand.

For the survivors of the battle against the Trepe, a day of simply doing nothing was very much a necessity. They needed time to recuperate from their exertions and a chance to get their heads around losing so many comrades in the battle. Many also needed a chance to sober up. They'd opted to celebrate after the battle with the Trepe, largely because they couldn't face grieving for the ones who didn't make it. They'd learned a harsh lesson that morning. When it comes to conflict, victory always comes tinged with the stinging pain of loss. For many of Flaxley's men, the rest of the day was spent contemplating that fact. The price of victory was a cruel one.

Knowing it might well be them who doesn't make it back next time, didn't make it any easier for Flaxley's surviving troops. They'd always known that death was a risk but seeing it first hand that morning had made it all very real. To these brave men's credit, however, they didn't let it deflate them. Tifaeris was too important to them to give up on and they were determined to see the fight through to the end. The reward for success, after all, was too valuable to put into words. And so, whatever temptation they had to flee was very quickly quashed and they chose to focus on the rewards as they rested up for the day. Victory would bring with it a lifetime of peace for their families, hero status, the greatest party in the history of Tifaeris and of course, the greatest reward of all. A merry time in the sack with Kritz. This was a goal no straight man with eyes would ever turn down the opportunity of achieving.

Having never heard of Dim Lee or the Tang Yul army, or their reputation, none of Tifaeris' brave men had the merest inkling of what they were going to be up against. Had they known about this fearsome warlord, even the offer from Kritz might not have been enough to stop them heading for the hills. Fortunately for them, as things stood, they were blessed with ignorance. Flaxley, Kritz and their four house guests, had no such luxury. They knew all too well how powerful this enemy was. As a result, resting didn't come easily. Overcoming Dim Lee was going to be a nigh on impossible undertaking. Having decided on a plan to outwit his mighty army, however, there was at least a glimmer of hope.

As day turned to night in Tifaeris, all remained quiet. What should have been a day of celebration had been spent in nervous apprehension and as the hours ticked by that anxiety deepened. The second battle was coming ever closer. Still reeling from the battle that very morning it all seemed too soon. And yet, there was no getting out of it. The grieving would go on and they could expect more to follow. For many this was simply too hard to take. As a result, for a second day running, Tifaeris spent the night in emotional turmoil.)

TREPE VILLAGE – FRIDAY MORNING

(As 4 AM came the following day, the ragtag Tifaeris army assembled at Flaxley's home

once again, ready to take their place in what was going to be Tifaeris' ultimate battle for survival. As soon as they were all in attendance, Kritz treated them all to a welcome cup of coffee while Flaxley performed a head count and checked their weapons for damage. Satisfied they were good to go, he then sent Kritz back in the house with the cups and reminded her they were an army not a bunch of holidaymakers. Failing to see how Flaxley's comment was even relevant, she scowled at him, gathered up the cups then took them inside. Wasting no further time, Flaxley then pointed his men to the gate and headed off. Following several excited comments about being on a promise with Kritz, his men then proceeded to follow him, pulling a trailer filled to the top with the Trepe weapons they'd confiscated. The march had begun. Emerging from the house a minute later only to find they'd left without her, Kritz furrowed her brow then raced off and caught them up. Having chastised Flaxley liberally, she then walked the rest of the way, hand in hand with Mandika, bemoaning the evil that is the male of the species. As Mandika joined in, very much on her wavelength, Lefiat swiftly raced ahead to pace alongside Flaxley. Both of them marched solidly forth, never glancing back. Their fear of two women united, plain for all to see.

After the first three miles of the march were complete, much to Flaxley and Lefiat's relief, silence finally descended. With everyone's minds becoming fully focussed on the task ahead, any other thoughts became redundant and they marched the last two miles in virtual silence, arriving outside the Trepe gates at fifteen minutes to six. Hoping he'd heard the last of Kritz's scorn for one morning, before they passed through the gates, Flaxley gave the command to stop and everyone came to a stand still. With that, he turned and nodded to them all before delivering one last address.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, men, listen up...

KRITZ: On behalf of Mandika and myself, you suck, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: Thanks, darling. Very helpful.

KRITZ: You're welcome.

FLAXLEY: Anyway, as I was saying, ladies and gentlemen...

MANDIKA: That's better.

FLAXLEY: If we're going to be successful this morning, we need to kill Dim Lee and then convince the rest of his army that we're extremely powerful. And to do that, we need to put any bitterness towards those pug-faced Trepe bitches to one side for the time being. We need to concentrate on Dim Lee, not on those depraved, self-fisting trollops. For now, the stupid Trepe are our ally, try not to forget that.

(Everyone smirked at him.)

ULRICH: We will if you will, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: Excellent!

(He nodded sternly.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, this is it, men... and women... Trepe village, home of the stupid, fucking... never mind that. This is where our march ends. Now, before we go in there does anyone want to take a few moments to clear their minds or anything?

THIN: Flaxley, we're ready!

MAN 01: You speak for yourself, man! I need a minute.

FLAXLEY: Well, whatever... let's check our armour or something while we wait!

(Thin shrugged then looked to Bonson.)

THIN: How come you're not wearing armour, Bonson?

MAN 2: Yeah, why come to a battle wearing a dinner jacket?

BONSON: This dinner jacket *is* my armour; I suppose you could say I'm a knight in dining armour, sir!

(Highly amused by his comment, he chuckled out loud.)

BONSON: Knight in dining...

(As the sound of crickets chirping in the distance made him aware of the scornful looks he was receiving, Bonson ran his joke over in his head again and his shoulders sunk.)

BONSON: Oh dear, I do apologise!

MAN 2: I should hope so. Bugger this army we're gonna be fighting, any more jokes like that and I'll kill *you* instead!

BONSON: If I make a joke like *that* again, I'll kill *myself*!

(Looking more apprehensive than most about what lie ahead, Mandika raised her hand nervously.)

MANDIKA: Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: Yes?

MANDIKA: What shall I do? You know... when the battle starts. I only came to watch Lefiat and I'm worried I'll be in the way.

FLAXLEY: Well... if you ask me, you should head back to Guevina. It was mad of you to come really.

MANDIKA: Yeah but... I want to see Lefiat fight.

(Flaxley sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Then be careful.

MANDIKA: But what if I end up in the wrong place and get attacked?

FLAXLEY: Well, hopefully, that won't happen. But if it does, you've still got your glacier magic, haven't you?

MANDIKA: Yes, but...

(She whimpered.)

MANDIKA: I'm not a soldier. I shouldn't have come. I suck at fighting. What if I let everyone down? I don't want people running around trying to rescue me when they should be fighting the enemy.

(Flaxley looked thoughtful then shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: Mandika?

MANDIKA: Yes?

FLAXLEY: Who says you suck at fighting?

MANDIKA: Nobody *has* to say it, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: And nobody will. If you end up getting in the fight and you do your best, you won't hear a bad word out of me or anyone else!

MANDIKA: Well, you say that, but my best is gonna be crap!

FLAXLEY: No! It's going to be the best you can do. Which is all anyone can ask of you. Sure, you won't be as adept with magic as Derek, but you have to judge yourself *against* yourself and nobody else! I won't disparage you for trying, and I'll deck anyone else who does.

KRITZ: Me too!

FLAXLEY: So there you have it. We're not judging you, so nor should you.

(A smile appeared on Mandika's face.)

MANDIKA: I never thought of that, thanks Flaxley! I actually feel inspired to join in the fight now. My magic is pretty damn good after all, and if Lefiat's as good at protecting me as you all claim he is...

(Her face contorted and she clenched her fists.)

MANDIKA: Let's kick some arses!

(Nodding along to Mandika sentiments, Kritz clapped her hands together.)

KRITZ: Let's! Catch us up when you're ready, boys, the girls are off to do battle.

(As Mandika and Kritz strolled into the Trepe compound, hand in hand, Lefiat trembled and looked to Flaxley.)

LEFIAT: Does that scare you as much as it does me? First Kritz is having naughty thoughts about Mandika and now they've taken to holding hands... I don't like it. I can't compete with Kritz!

FLAXLEY: Are you seriously afraid that Kritz is going to steal your girlfriend?

LEFIAT: Well yeah. And if you looked like me, you'd be afraid of that too.

(Flaxley gave him a sideways glance.)

FLAXLEY: You're an idiot!

(With that, he glanced over his shoulder and raised his voice.)

FLAXLEY: Okay men, enough procrastinating. We're going in.

(With that, he marched off into the Trepe compound. Moments later, the rest of his men nervously followed him in, dragging the trailer behind them. Many of them had terror in their eyes. The Trepe compound was reputedly the last place a man should ever wish to be and their trepidation was very much understandable. Expecting to find men's head impaled on sticks, alongside a river of molten lava, they were very much relieved to see an ordinary looking town square, filled with groups of nattering female tribeswomen.)

ULRICH: It's nothing like I pictured it.

MAN 01: Aye, there's no vultures anywhere.

(As his men continued to glance about the square nervously, on the lookout for signs of human sacrifice and other demonic rituals, Flaxley paced to where Mandika and Kritz were deep in conversation a good twenty feet inside the compound.)

FLAXLEY: No welcoming committee?

KRITZ: I guess not!

(Just then, Jazzu came storming over to them from a crowd of Trepe warriors, who'd been deep in discussion further down the square.)

JAZZU: You're cutting it fine!

(Not about to entertain her vile tongue, Flaxley immediately cut to the chase.)

FLAXLEY: Never mind that, how many troops do you have?

JAZZU: I'm telling you nothing until you give us our weapons back!

(As the men of the Tifaeris army stepped up behind him, Flaxley scowled.)

FLAXLEY: I asked you a question!

JAZZU: Let me remind you, when you're on Trepe soil you'll do things my way!

FLAXLEY: Like fuck, we will!

(He then rolled his eyes and gestured behind him.)

FLAXLEY: They're in that trailer. Now take them and answer the bloody question!

(Looking indignant to say the least, Jazzu signalled to a few of her troops to gather their weapons back before looking back at Flaxley and snarling.)

JAZZU: Don't you go thinking you're in charge. While you're here, I'm your superior and you'll treat me with respect!

(With respecting Jazzu never likely to become part of Flaxley's agenda any time soon, he scoffed coldly.)

FLAXLEY: Yeah, right. So, madam superior, she who should be obeyed, got a plan have you? All the great leaders have a plan.

(Jazzu paused and shuffled uneasily where she stood.)

JAZZU: Not as such, no!

FLAXLEY: *We* do!

(Flaxley gave her his ultimate annoying grin making Jazzu shudder with irritation.)

JAZZU: Okay, smart arse, what is it then?

FLAXLEY: The plan *is*, stupid, to convince old Dim Dum...

KRITZ: Dim Lee!!!

FLAXLEY: Whatever! To convince him that we're much stronger than he is!

(As Flaxley beamed with pride, Jazzu gave him the most condescending look.)

JAZZU: Right... that's it, is it?

FLAXLEY: That's the crux of it, yes.

JAZZU: And *how* exactly do you intend to pull that one off? Well?

(Flaxley stood tall and beamed.)

FLAXLEY: You don't need to know the details. Just leave it to us and make sure *your* warriors do their bit!

(Jazzu snarled and shook her fist at Flaxley.)

JAZZU: Either tell me or get out of my village!

KRITZ: Since when was this *your* village?

JAZZU: Don't *you* give me lip; I've had enough of your crap, Kritzeveltia! Now, tell me the plan!!!

FLAXLEY: I already told you the *basics* of the plan. I'm just worried the details of it might be too complicated for your feeble mind.

DEREK: Oh go on, Flaxley, what harm will it do if we tell her?

(Flaxley grinned.)

FLAXLEY: Of course I'm going to tell her, I just wanted to annoy the silly old bat!

JAZZU: I'm beginning to lose my patience, boy!

FLAXLEY: Not to mention your looks!

KRITZ: Flaxley, just tell the old boot the plan, will you? The sooner we stop having to look at her, the better.

FLAXLEY: Very well! The plan is that I shall kill Dim Dum with my devastating sword skills, while my friend Bonson here, casts an illusion onto that hill behind us!

(Bonson leant forward to shake her hand.)

BONSON: No pleasure at all, ma'am!

JAZZU: Will it work?

BONSON: It should do, I'm brilliant at everything I do.

JAZZU: Well, let's hope so!

(Jazzu shook her head and snarled.)

JAZZU: If you...

(Before she could make her feelings known, however, her words were interrupted by a Trepe warrior bellowing out from a look out point.)

WARRIOR: Ship ahoy!!!

(Immediately, Jazzu's hair almost stood on end. Wasting no time whatsoever, she spun around and ordered her troops to assume their positions through a series of impassioned screams and animated hand gestures. Following her orders without hesitation, the scantily clad Trepe warriors scrambled all over the village square to take up their positions for the battle with the utmost urgency. Having issued her orders, she then spun around and barked a command to the contingent from Tifaeris.)

JAZZU: Don't just stand there, you lot. Dim Lee's ship is in sight!!!

(Flaxley nodded sternly.)

FLAXLEY: Relax, Jazzu, we know what we're doing!

(He then turned to face his men urgently.)

FLAXLEY: Okay men, you know what to do!

(Much to his embarrassment, however, they all just stared at him blankly.)

FLAXLEY: Go on then!!!

THIN: Go where?

(With Jazzu looking on, he became very flustered, very quickly.)

FLAXLEY: Just assume your positions!!!

LEFIAT: But you're always telling *me* never to assume *anything*!

FLAXLEY: I can stab you from here you know!!!

KRITZ: Don't get flustered, Flaxley! Just tell them what to do!

FLAXLEY: Fine! Look, just get ready for battle; make yourselves useful, you know what to do!!! Spread out or something. Just... go somewhere!!! And I don't mean back to Tifaeris! (With Flaxley's harsh tone as inspiration, everyone soon looked lively. Looking positive, they all headed deeper into the square and took up positions among the Trepe warriors to wait for Dim Lee's ship to arrive. Mandika headed to the back to watch, Bonson found a quiet spot to set up his illusion from and Flaxley made his way to the front with Jazzu. By now, the ship was close to the shore and Jazzu was extremely edgy. She wasn't, however, the only one. Like an eerie echo of the day before, the soldiers of Tifaeris found themselves standing in silence enduring the uncomfortable ordeal of watching their enemy approaching. Like the Trepe warriors around them they were all exceptionally tense.)

(Standing at the front of the heavily armed throng, sharing the deep sense of trepidation that hung over the village, Flaxley and Jazzu squinted as they watched the ship edge ever closer to them in front of a beautiful golden sunrise.)

FLAXLEY: I hate this part! Waiting, I mean,

JAZZU: Don't be so soft!

FLAXLEY: Don't call *me* soft, woman, or I'll kill you where you stand, right now!

JAZZU: Oh, dream on! You aint *that* good a swordsman!

FLAXLEY: No? In that case, do *you* want to fight Dim Dum?

JAZZU: No!

FLAXLEY: Well, shut up then!

(With that, they resumed their uncomfortable silence.)

JAZZU: And anyway, it's Dim Lee!

(Ahead of them, Dim Lee's ship neared the waters edge and a good 400 or so troops leapt from it and into the sea. All the waiting warriors in Trepe village gasped in awe as they started to swim ashore and line up along the beach. Their sheer number was daunting enough but the obvious bulk and strength of each Tang Yul warrior was almost too frightening to comprehend. Confronted with such a formidable looking foe, Flaxley looked back at his bunch of scruffy militia men and the 150 women around them and was almost tempted to suggest running for it. Ever mindful that the survival of his beloved Tifaeris depended on them defeating this mighty army, however, he soon cast that thought aside and stood tall to await them bravely.)

JAZZU: We're seriously outnumbered here, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: Hmm, scared are we?

(Jazzu composed herself.)

JAZZU: Don't be ridiculous!

(Flaxley looked at her coldly then scoffed with disdain. As much as he loved to belittle her, however, he perfectly understood her fears. Within a minute of the first Tang Yul soldiers leaping into the sea, they'd all assembled upon the beach and readied their swords for combat. Their transition from ship to shore had been impressive to say the least. These were no mere amateurs they'd be fighting and he knew she was right to be worried. Not about to share his sense of foreboding with Jazzu, however, he stood tall and tried to look unfazed as a rowing boat arrived on the shore, just behind the Tang Yul soldiers. He did however; release a troubled gasp when Dim Lee stepped from it. He was almost eight feet tall and built like an oak tree. Once again, however, he composed himself and watched on wearing a forced unimpressed expression as the mighty Dim Lee strode forth and made his way up the beach.)

FLAXLEY: I don't know what you're worried about; he looks a bit of poof to me.

(Jazzu, however, said nothing as Dim Lee stepped up to her and snarled. Looking every inch the psycho he was, he stood with his shoulders back, towering over her as his eyes drilled a hole in her soul.)

DIM LEE: We meet again!

(With that, he glanced around the square at the assembled warriors and growled.)

DIM LEE: What's this I see?

(His expression then turned to one of pure fury.)

DIM LEE: Are you going to challenge me Jazzu???

(With quivering lips, she looked up at him and tried to speak but no words would come out. She did, however, eventually manage a whimper.)

DIM LEE: That's easy for you to say!

(With nothing but contempt for Jazzu's quivering demeanour, Flaxley rolled his eyes and barged her out of the way.)

FLAXLEY: What she's trying to say, Dim Dum, is that if you want one million Lig, *you* go and earn it and leave us alone!

(Dim Lee did a double take in Flaxley's direction, utterly perplexed by the fact that Jazzu had allowed a man to barge her out of the way without retaliating.)

DIM LEE: You... you're a man!

FLAXLEY: How nice of you to notice!

DIM LEE: What gives?

FLAXLEY: It's simple Dim Wit, the people of this region are sick of your tyranny and we've come to teach you a lesson!

(Dim Lee started to smile.)

DIM LEE: First you insult the name of the Lee dynasty then you decide to test me. I like your style; you must be very brave...

(He leant forward and growled.)

DIM LEE: Or very stupid!!!

(Undeterred, Flaxley took a step forward.)

FLAXLEY: I'll go with brave!

(Dim Lee seemed curious.)

DIM LEE: Okay, tell me, oh doomed one, what is your name?

FLAXLEY: The only doomed one around here is you, but for what it's worth my name is Sir Flaxley of Tifaeris.

(Dim Lee looked enlightened.)

DIM LEE: Your reputation precedes you Flaxley, but you needn't have come, our next port of call was to be Tifaeris anyway!

FLAXLEY: I know! We figured that out already, numb nuts.

(Dim Lee grinned.)

DIM LEE: You see, word has it that Tifaeris is attracting a lot of wealthy settlers these days. That's just too good to resist! You see, Flaxley, we always knew the Trepe would never raise one million. We just enjoy putting them in their place. But Tifaeris...

FLAXLEY: Don't get too excited, chummy. You'll never set foot in Tifaeris!

DIM LEE: Oh, really? And pray tell, why not?

FLAXLEY: Well for one, your imminent death will see to that!

(Dim Lee laughed.)

DIM LEE: For a man half my size you have quite a mouth!

FLAXLEY: Enough of this, Dim Lee. It's time for you to taste defeat!

DIM LEE: Is that so? And how do your hundred or so pathetic soldiers expect to defeat my mighty army?

FLAXLEY: Like this!!!

(Slipping into battle mode like a true professional, Flaxley drew his sword but was cruelly stopped in his tracks by an eager looking Bonson appearing by his side.)

BONSON: If I may just interrupt for a moment, sir?

FLAXLEY: No you may not interrupt!!!

(Dim Lee was clearly unimpressed by the interruption.)

DIM LEE: Who the hell are you?

BONSON: Just an observer, sir. I thought it fair to warn you that these people are just the front line, they do have reserves!

(Flaxley leant to one side, lowered his voice and growled at him through gritted teeth.)

FLAXLEY: Not yet, Bonson! Wait until I've killed...

(Bonson replied in kind.)

BONSON: Trust me, sir; this is definitely the perfect time! It's all set up and I just have to cast it.

(With that, he flicked his fingers out behind his back to cast his illusion then gestured over his shoulder with his thumb towards the hilltop that overlooked the village.)

BONSON: Be warned Dim Lee, these people are not alone!

(Dim Lee looked hard at the hilltop over the top of Flaxley and Bonson's heads.)

DIM LEE: One man on a... is that a donkey?

BONSON: What?

FLAXLEY: Eh? One???

(They both turned to face the hill top where Bonson's illusion was projected and cringed.)

FLAXLEY: What happened to the other 3,999?

BONSON: I've no idea, sir!

FLAXLEY: And why the donkey???

(As Bonson stood there looking completely bemused and confused, Jazzu piped up looking thoroughly unimpressed.)

JAZZU: Great chaps, good plan, well executed...

FLAXLEY: Blame *him*!

BONSON: What can I say, ma'am? I'm embarrassed!

(With their one hope of striking fear into the mighty Tang Yul army with a show of strength a complete and utter failure, Flaxley gulped then turned around and grinned at Dim Lee.)

FLAXLEY: That stuff I said about killing you...

DIM LEE: Yes?

(Flaxley whimpered.)

FLAXLEY: I was kidding! All that bickering and fighting is so last century. So, um... what say you go back to Tang Yul, we'll all go home and that way no-one gets hurt?

DIM LEE: Better idea, I'll give the order to attack and when *you're* dead, *I* go home unhurt! Besides, I like bickering and fighting!

(Flaxley shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, Dim Do, but *you're* mine! One on one, me and you!

DIM LEE: Agreed!

(With that, he raised his scimitar high in the air and yelled at the top of his voice.)

DIM LEE: Attack!!!

(With that, all his men charged forth wielding their weapons in front of them. Scared witless, the Trepe and Tifaeris warriors who *didn't* run away met them head on and battle commenced. Steel clashed with steel and blood was shed, very little of it being Tang Yul blood. Right from the onset it was obvious that Flaxley and his allies had very much bitten off more than they could chew. They weren't however, without hope. The vast Tang Yul numbers initially worked to Derek's advantage. Being careful not to hit any allies, he sat up on a roof top firing inferno magic into the crowds of soldiers at the back of their throng, who

were yet to reach the battle.)

DEREK: Burn, scum bucket!!!

(As Derek took out several soldiers at a time, Bonson sloped away and took up a vantage point away from the fighting. While he sat and rued his disastrous mistake, Mandika and Lefiat already found themselves desperately fending off waves of Tang Yul advances using a tactic created in a blind panic by the terrified Mandika. She'd thought she'd be relatively safe at the back of the square, but within a minute of the battle beginning, the Tang Yul troops had penetrated every inch of the square. Thankfully, her tactic to keep them at bay had been a good one. She was firing her glacier magic on the ground and Lefiat was slaying everyone who slipped on it.

Some way across the other side of the square, Kritz was, of course, in her element, kicking and punching anyone who came near her. The rest of the allies were also battling bravely and somehow managing to hold their own despite the overwhelming odds. There were, however, several fatalities in their ranks. It wasn't all violence and bloodshed however. In fact, not for the first time in Flaxley's case, the two men who'd get the credit for any victory were still squaring up and were yet to raise a sword in anger.)

FLAXLEY: Your shiny armour doesn't frighten me!

DIM LEE: It's not my armour I'm going to kill you with!

FLAXLEY: Kill me? Many have tried, and as you can see, I'm still here!

DIM LEE: That's because you've never faced *my* wrath before!!!

FLAXLEY: I have faced your kind though, all mouth, no sword skill!

DIM LEE: Oh yeah? Well *you* smell!

(Flaxley was livid.)

FLAXLEY: Damn you!!! Like that, is it? In that case... you're gay!

DIM LEE: Well... you have an awful haircut!

FLAXLEY: Big nose!!!

DIM LEE: Um... I'm out!

FLAXLEY: Me too!

DIM LEE: In that case, let's fight!

FLAXLEY: Good idea!

(With that, these two giants of men clashed like raging bulls. Their swords flashed through the air blurring with speed, but every attack was met with a defence then a counter-attack. Their lightning quick reactions were tested to the extreme but neither man could seem to out manoeuvre the other at any point.)

DIM LEE: Hmm, you're pretty good!

FLAXLEY: Yes, which is unlucky for you, you're shit!

(Unimpressed by Flaxley's lack of respect, next time Dim Lee countered he added a spin kick to Flaxley's thigh.)

FLAXLEY: Yow!

(Knocked back by the forceful kick, Flaxley staggered then fell backwards with quite a thud. Sensing his opportunity, Dim Lee immediately raised his blade over his head and went in for the kill, slashing it violently towards his floored opponent's torso.)

FLAXLEY: Shit!!!

(Reacting swiftly, Flaxley just about managed to fend off the attack in time by lashing his sword across his chest. Dim Lee was not about to give up that easily, however and attempted to wound the grounded Flaxley lower down his body. With his beloved love tackle in danger, Flaxley's eyes bulged and he somehow managed to kick himself backwards and preserve his man parts in the nick of time. Alas his swift move came at a price. As Dim Lee's sword crashed to the ground, the tip of his blade caught Flaxley's boot and cut deep into his foot.)

FLAXLEY: Yow!!!

(Flaxley jumped to his feet then hopped on one leg furiously.)

FLAXLEY: You aimed for my gonads!

DIM LEE: And?

FLAXLEY: You just don't do that!!!

DIM LEE: Why not? I don't care. They're not *my* gonads!

FLAXLEY: I see... you fight without honour, do you? Why does that not surprise me?

(Dim Lee scoffed.)

DIM LEE: You're just upset because you know you're no match for me!

FLAXLEY: Bullshit! I'm still here, aren't I?

(With that, the two gladiators resumed their heavyweight contest. Flaxley may have been injured but there was absolutely no way he was going to give anything but one hundred percent for the cause. Like the rest of his allies, he knew he couldn't let up for a moment against such a formidable foe. Even Mandika, a pampered princess, and Lefiat, a normally pointless failure of a man, were also giving their all to the effort.)

MANDIKA: Another one, Lefiat!

LEFIAT: Righto!

(Mandika had made at least forty of the Tang Yul soldiers slip on her Glacier magic and Lefiat had mercilessly dug his sword into each and every one of them.)

LEFIAT: We're a great team, Mandika!

MANDIKA: I am, aren't I?

(Derek was also giving everything he had to the cause, so much so in fact, he was actually starting to enjoy himself. Standing up on a rooftop, wearing a devilish grin, he spotted a Tang Yul warrior below and called out to him.)

DEREK: Hey!

(Looking somewhat thrown, the warrior turned to face him then snarled.)

DEREK: Yeah, you! Inferno!!!

(With that, he sent a fireball crashing into him, killing him instantly.)

DEREK: If you can't stand the heat, keep away from the alien!

(He then laughed an evil laugh to himself. For him, the battle was going extremely well. Little did he know, however, not everyone was having his degree of success. In fact, Kritz was in serious trouble. Having taken on way more opponents than she could handle, she'd been isolated from the rest of the battle and was now being backed into the far corner of the square by four of the Tang Yul elite swordsmen.)

KRITZ: Come on, guys, let's not be hasty now! Can't we just put it down to my youthful exuberance?

TANG YUL 1: No! Your time has come!

TANG YUL 2: Yes, you have thrown your last punch!

KRITZ: Four onto one though, that's hardly fair.

TANG YUL 3: *You* attacked *us* remember? Six of us! You didn't think it was unfair *then*.

KRITZ: I got carried away. And the other two did die quickly, that has to count for something right?

(She whimpered then yelled out loud.)

KRITZ: Um... I need some help over here!!!

TANG YUL 1: You will suffer the same fate our two comrades did!

TANG YUL 3: Except with a great deal more pain!

TANG YUL 2: Such a waste of tremendous boobies!

KRITZ: Um... someone!!!

TANG YUL 1: No-one can help you now!

(Looking merciless, they kept coming at her until her back hit the wall.)

TANG YUL 2: You are out of room, any last requests?

KRITZ: Yes, let me go! Help!!!

TANG YUL 1: Come now, are you to die with dignity or like the worthless Trepe tart you are?

(Calling Kritz a tart was never a good idea, but to call her the other 'T' word that she hated, was simply unforgivable. Immediately, a red mist seemed to descend over her and her face contorted with rage.)

KRITZ: Tart??? Trepe???

(With that, she leapt up and kicked one of her assailants in the chin, breaking his neck. Upon landing she then span around a full 360 degrees, kicking the other three to the ground. With the four of them dazed upon the ground, she then proceeded to beat them up in a fit of undiluted rage. Moments later, as her four adversaries all lay dead in the corner, she walked away clapping her hands together with satisfaction.)

KRITZ: Call *me* a tart indeed! And a bloody Trepe!!! I may still dress like one... and have the tattoo...

(She then looked thoughtful and shrugged.)

KRITZ: Fair enough, I can see why you made that mistake... but tart? Wankers!

(She then beamed to herself and charged at two Tang Yul soldiers on the fringe of the main battle.)

KRITZ: Oh violence, how I missed you.

(As she charged into the fray, however, she had no idea quite what she was getting in to. Things had taken quite the turn for the worse. The allies may have coped well early on but in the last minute or so there'd been quite the dramatic downturn. Following a spate of fatal blows to the allied soldiers, their number had now been reduced to their point where they had to adopt an all out defence strategy merely to prolong their lives. The Tang Yul numbers, however, were still immensely high and with every fatality, the allies had to defend even harder. Right now, their already slim chance of victory was rapidly evaporating.

Feeling horribly guilty about it all, Bonson looked up from his safe vantage point to see the sad state of affairs and put his head in his hands.)

BONSON: They're all going to die and it's all my fault!

(Things were indeed starting to look bleak. Even Flaxley was beginning to struggle, his injured foot giving him much agony.)

DIM LEE: You don't stand a chance, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: I'll never let you destroy Tifaeris!!!

(With that, he attacked Dim Lee with a sword swinging frenzy only to be thrown back by a martial art style punch. Looking somewhat shocked, Flaxley crashed to the ground. Very much weakened, but not quite broken, he sat up swiftly as Dim Lee paced towards him arrogantly.)

DIM LEE: I could defeat you even without a sword!

FLAXLEY: Go on then!

DIM LEE: No!

(Determined to fight on, Flaxley then struggled to his feet only to be punched back down again.)

DIM LEE: Before you die, foolish knight, let me show you something. Imagine this is Tifaeris!

(He yelled out.)

DIM LEE: Begin the burning!!!

(Looking tortured, Jazzu rushed over to him with her hands clasped together desperately.)

JAZZU: Please Dim Lee, I beg you!!! Don't do this!!!

DIM LEE: Jazzu, you will pay the ultimate price for this defiance!

(Jazzu looked at Flaxley and bellowed.)

JAZZU: This is your fault!!!

(In a blind rage, she went to kick him only to be thrown back by a snarling Dim Lee.)

DIM LEE: This fool is mine!!! One on one... or half in his case.

(Not about to give up, Flaxley pulled himself to his feet and stared hard at Dim Lee as he caught his breath.)

FLAXLEY: Do you really think I'll die that easy?

DIM LEE: Yes! So far I've only been playing with you!

FLAXLEY: I so hope that's a lie!

(With that, he raised his sword and once again tried desperately to defend himself as Dim Lee launched another attack on his person.)

DIM LEE: Toying with you is fun, Flaxley.

(At the end of the square nearest the beach at this time, several children raced from a small building screaming in terror. The roof of the building was ablaze and a group of Tang Yul warriors with torches were standing beside it, laughing joyfully at their distress. Finding their actions, too despicable for words, Derek snarled then raced across the rooftops to the building next to it.)

DEREK: H2O!!!

(With that, he released a torrent of water from his palm and doused all the flames. Looking mightily relieved he then gritted his teeth and mumbled to himself.)

DEREK: What sort of people are these Tang Yul bastards??? There's people in these buildings.

(He then gave a resolved nod.)

DEREK: No more. No bugger's gonna be burning anything down on my watch, you sick bastards.

(True to his word, he then followed the fire starters via the rooftops. Not about to let anyone get burned alive, every time they threw their torches onto a roof to start a blaze he'd arrive moments later and give it a good soaking. Unfortunately for him, however, the Tang Yul soldiers were not impressed with his actions and didn't take long to decide to remove him from the equation.)

TANG YUL: Stone him!!!

(Seconds later, Derek's eyes bulged in panic as several dozen stones started to rain down on him. With more and more stone throwers joining in, he ducked and dived frantically but the stones kept coming with such regularity he wasn't getting a chance to fire off any magic at them. Only able to defend, he'd been well and truly neutralised.)

DEREK: This isn't good!!!

(His assessment of the situation was spot on. Things were far from good. With Derek busy, other Tang Yul soldiers were free to begin burning the Trepe buildings and did so with little hesitation and absolutely no consideration for civilian life.)

DEREK: Fuck!!!

(Down in the square at this time, things had gone from bad to worse. Allied numbers had dwindling to the point where Lefiat had gone into excellent swordsman mode just to protect Mandika from the many Tang Yul soldier's advances. The way things stood, it seemed it'd be only a matter of time before the two of them joined the extremely long list of fatalities.)

LEFIAT: I don't like this, Mandika!!!

MANDIKA: Just keep doing it!!! I'm scared.

(Just then, the warrior that Lefiat was fighting was blown to smithereens by a powerful bolt of lightning.)

LEFIAT: Eh?

MANDIKA: What the?

(In that moment, vast swathes of Tang Yul warriors stared to one side of the square looking somewhat daunted.)

LEFIAT: What's going on, Mandika?

MANDIKA: I don't care; let's just slip away while they're not looking.

(Agreeing with her sentiments entirely, Lefiat took her hand and led her towards the gates of the compound.)

LEFIAT: Let's go home!

(Much to his annoyance, however, just as they reached the gate, Mandika stopped and turned to face into the compound.)

MANDIKA: Flaxley... Kritz... Derek... Bonson... I love them, Lefiat... I can't...

(She looked puzzled and pointed ahead of her.)

MANDIKA: What's going on?

(Much to her amazement, well over one hundred of the Tang Yul warriors, we're charging towards a tall woman, dressed in a dark hooded-cloak that hid her entire body. Their efforts, however, were being thwarted by a magical pulse that kept pushing them back.)

MANDIKA: Who's that?

(Deep inside the compound at this time, the Tang Yul who'd been throwing stones at Derek had stopped to watch the bizarre occurrence. Utterly dumbfounded by it all, unfortunately, Derek didn't take the opportunity to slip away and stood agape as he watched the mysterious woman, blast lightning magic into the Tang Yul soldiers with one hand while keeping them at bay with force magic from her other hand.)

DEREK: Who the hell is that?

(As the fight came to a halt in the half of the square where the mystery woman was casting her magic, the half that Flaxley was in remained a scene of carnage and violence. Getting no respite from Dim Lee whatsoever, Flaxley was close to collapsing from exhaustion and was barely managing to soldier on.)

FLAXLEY: Let it be known, Dim Dum... I don't like you very much.

DIM LEE: I'm about to kill you, of course you don't.

(Towards the back of the rampaging battle at this time, Kritz tumbled out of the fray to avoid a flailing sword blade then shook her fist.)

KRITZ: Careful with that thing, Suma!

(She rolled her eyes.)

KRITZ: Swinging your sword about randomly like an idiot... pay attention!!!

(She then glanced to one side and did a double take at the mysterious, cloaked mage.

Recognising her immediately, her jaw dropped.)

KRITZ: Vooda?

(Just then, Suma rushed from the fray waving her hand at her apologetically.)

SUMA: Sorry, Kritz, I didn't see you there!

KRITZ: Well of course you didn't, you had your eyes shut!

(She then nodded towards where Vooda was striking down the Tang Yul warriors with her powerful magic.)

KRITZ: Look!

(Suma glanced to where she was nodding and her jaw dropped.)

KRITZ: There's hope for us yet, Suma. Vooda's got the kind of power most gods would die for!

(Suma bit her lip nervously.)

SUMA: She fights? I've never seen her in a fight before.

KRITZ: I've never seen her outside in the daytime before either, but look!

(As Kritz stared towards Vooda and clenched her fists tight, a glimmer of hope appeared

within her heart. Sharing her optimism, many of the allies gained a second wind at this point. Only a few moments ago they seemed to be going through the motions and doing no more than prolonging their inevitable demise. Now there was a chance. Tang Yul soldiers were dying in large numbers and survival had started to look possible.

As he watched on from his safe vantage point, drowning in a pool of despair, Bonson looked up at Vooda then rubbed his eyes in astonishment. A few moments ago, his allies seemed doomed to die at any moment but now, this mysterious figure had appeared and all of a sudden there was hope.)

BONSON: A goddess? A goddess came to save us?

(Starting to believe that his allies could finally achieve victory thanks to the appearance of this all powerful stranger, Bonson clenched his fists excitedly.)

BONSON: Go on, finish them off.

(Just then, however, disaster struck once more. A strong gust of wind blew up off of the sea, billowing out Vooda's robe and blowing the hood back from her head. Immediately, she screeched in consummate agony as if she'd been scorched by the heat of a thousand suns then disintegrated in a pile of dust. Now the Trepe knew why they hadn't seen her out in daylight before. Even at night she was never seen without her heavy robes on and she was always certain to hold her hood firmly down. Using two hands to cast her magic, however, she'd been unable to do this, and now she was gone.

What Vooda was or where she came from, nobody had ever known. Nobody had ever dared ask. And right now, nobody cared. All they knew was that when she died she took their last hope with her. With Vooda gone, the Tang Yul immediately resumed fighting and the allies looked doomed once more. Lefiat and Mandika came under attack again, as did Kritz and Suma. Derek was once again pelted with stones and all the allies once again found themselves defending for dear life.

Having watched in horror as, Vooda, their only hope of survival had perished, defeated by a gust of wind, Bonson swiftly fell into a deep depression. Looking devastated, he held his head in his hands and whimpered remorsefully about his failure.)

BONSON: This is all my fault! All I had to do was create one simple illusion. I failed and now everyone I care about is gonna die. What have I done? Two civilisations are going to be wiped out by a maniacal warlord and it's all my fault.

(He then looked up in wonderment and seemed to regain the will to live.)

BONSON: Warlord!!!

(With that, he raced from his vantage point straight into the middle of the battle like a man possessed. With something very much on his mind, he ducked under a flailing blade then charged straight in between Flaxley and Dim Lee.)

BONSON: Wait, Dim Lee!!!

(Flaxley just managed to throw him out of the way of Dim Lee's sword in time.)

BONSON: Whoa, close!

FLAXLEY: And you call yourself a wise man? Fancy standing there!

DIM LEE: Enough chat, Flaxley. I'm bored of you now!

(With a snarl, Flaxley pushed Bonson back a bit then held his sword towards Dim Lee.)

FLAXLEY: Is that so?

DIM LEE: Yes!

(With that, he raced forward, battered Flaxley's sword hand aside then lifted him up over his head. As Flaxley protested vehemently, Dim Lee then spun him around and cast him over his shoulder. Having landed in a heap, Flaxley looked up and winced. He was severely winded

and his body ached all over.)

FLAXLEY: This can not be!

(As Dim Lee started to bound towards Flaxley to continue tormenting him, however, Bonson stepped in his way. He was well aware of what Daman Siria had said about willingly placing himself in danger, but right now he didn't care. Even if doing so meant annulling his entitlement to membership of the council of the wise, nothing was going to stop him from trying to save his friends.)

BONSON: I said, wait, Dim Lee!!!

(Dim Lee looked furious.)

DIM LEE: Do you also have a death wish, old man?

(Looking somewhat nervous, Bonson swiftly glanced around to see everyone in dire straits then nodded to himself to reaffirm that he was doing the right thing. Derek was being stoned, Kritz, Lefiat and Mandika were being attacked by a large group of Tang Yul warriors and Flaxley was on the verge of annihilation. Seeing this, he knew what he had to do, even if it cost him his life.)

BONSON: I was right about you, Dim Lee! You *are* a fake!

(Naturally, Dim Lee didn't like the accusation and grabbed Bonson by the collar, demanding that he explain himself. Rapidly perspiring, Bonson gulped then proceeded to do just that.)

BONSON: Call yourself a warlord?

DIM LEE: No! I am the *ultimate* warlord!

BONSON: You're a fraud!

(Furious at the accusation, Dim Lee growled then lifted Bonson two feet from the ground to pull his face close to his.)

DIM LEE: Have you such little will to live?

BONSON: Be honest with me, you're no warlord, you're just a big bully!

DIM LEE: Bully???

BONSON: Yes, a real warlord goes to war, you just sail around bullying weaker nations!

(As if he weighed nothing, Dim Lee threw Bonson straight to the ground.)

DIM LEE: Your insolence will now be the death of you!!!

(Bonson's eyes bulged.)

BONSON: Another murder to your name? You could at least declare war on us and act like a real warlord!

(Giving no consideration whatsoever to showing the elderly butler any mercy, Dim Lee raised his sword ready to strike him down.)

DIM LEE: Very well, old man, just for you... this... is... war!!!

(With that, Dim Lee started to thrust his sword down towards Bonson with a venom.)

FLAXLEY: Bonson!!!

(As Flaxley yelled in anguish, convinced Bonson had breathed his last, Dim Lee froze to the spot and started to shake violently. Spotting this, Bonson immediately took the opportunity to roll out from under his sword and jump to his feet again.)

FLAXLEY: What the hell?

(At once all the allies stopped dead and gaped in amazement as the entire Tang Yul army started to vibrate where they were standing, unable to move. Dim Lee's eyes bulged in an unseemly manner and steam began to billow from his ears. In a state of shock the allies continued to stare with their mouths wide open in trepidation at the strange phenomenon in front of them, when a thick ray of blue light flashed through Dim Lee's body and snaked its way across the earth to each and every Tang Yul soldier. With an explosion and a sudden billowing of smoke, they were then thrown one by one into the air in a chain reaction.

Moments later, as the smoke began to subside they could clearly see the Tang Yul bodies strewn all over the village square. Every last one of them was dead. Stunned to the very core

of his being by what he'd just witnessed, Flaxley staggered to his feet then stepped aside Bonson, gaping at the remains of Dim Lee with a baffled look upon his face.)

BONSON: Key of peace doesn't seem so bad *now*, does it, sir?

(Still agape, Flaxley turned to face Bonson who gave him a satisfied grin in return.)

FLAXLEY: What the fuck was that???

BONSON: Well, you always wondered what the key of peace did. Now you know!

(Bonson then smiled the widest of smiles as a huge cheer erupted, echoing across the hills and streets nearby. Absolutely overjoyed by the miraculous victory, all over the square, the allies started hugging each other tearfully. Dim Lee and his mighty army had been defeated.

They'd somehow fought an impossible fight and won the thing. Unsurprisingly, as Derek doused the last few fires, the village square become a scene of joyous celebration.)

KRITZ: We did it!!!

MANDIKA: We did, we did!!!

LEFIAT: Group hug?

MANDIKA: You stay away from her!

KRITZ: Damn right! I'm going to find Flaxley.

LEFIAT: But...

MANDIKA: Hug *me* instead!

LEFIAT: Gladly.

(As they huddled tightly together, Mandika exhaled.)

MANDIKA: You fought like a god. You were amazing. You're *so* getting some later.

LEFIAT: Result!

(Further inside the compound at this time, positively radiating with excitement, Kritz and Derek ran over to Flaxley and Bonson from separate directions. First to arrive, Derek bounced excitedly.)

DEREK: Was that freaky magic something to do with you, Bonson?

(Bonson beamed.)

BONSON: Well, you know...wisdom has its uses, sir!

DEREK: Nice one!

(As Derek and Bonson shared a high five, very high in Derek's case, Kritz ran and jumped sideways into Flaxley's arms.)

KRITZ: We did it darling, it's over!!!

(Immediately, Flaxley put her back down and looked into her loving brown eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Not quite, my love.

(With that, he paced purposefully over to where Jazzu was chatting excitedly to some of her warriors.)

FLAXLEY: Jazzu?

(She turned to face him with an uncertain look in her eye.)

JAZZU: Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: It's time!

JAZZU: Time for what?

(With a sneer, he raised his sword and fixed his stance.)

FLAXLEY: Now it's me and you! One on one.

(Barely able to believe he'd challenge her, right there in Trepe village, she turned her head sideways and scrutinized him with one eye.)

JAZZU: Are you insane?

FLAXLEY: Far from it. You have to die.

(Jazzu raised a bitter eyebrow at him.)

JAZZU: I thought we had a truce, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: As you said, a temporary truce. The fact remains, it's you who killed my

parents, it's you who put my wife through hell, and you're the one who put my son to death before he'd even got chance to take his first breath. Now it's you who has to pay!
(As several Trepe warriors stepped behind Jazzu to back her up, Kritz stepped beside Flaxley wearing a curious expression.)

KRITZ: What's going on?

(Ignoring her, Jazzu stared hatefully into Flaxley's eyes.)

JAZZU: You do realise that, if you challenge me, you challenge all of us!

FLAXLEY: I have no beef with the Trepe... right now!

(He then looked her dead in the eye and scowled.)

FLAXLEY: This is personal!

(At once cold silence seemed to descend around Flaxley and Jazzu as they stood dead still, staring hard at each other.)

FLAXLEY: Raise your sword, Jazzu!

JAZZU: Very well.

(As she started to lift her sword, however, Kritz stepped in front of Flaxley.)

KRITZ: Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: Step aside my love, this needs to be done!

(With a gentle sigh, she looked into his eyes and offered him a loving smile.)

KRITZ: My love, you're tired and you're wounded. Don't do this, not now!

FLAXLEY: I'm fine.

KRITZ: You've got a gaping hole in your foot.

FLAXLEY: Don't worry about that, I've got another one.

KRITZ: But, Flaxley...

FLAXLEY: Darling, she killed our son. She has to die, right now!

(Kritz stepped up on tip toes to see into his eyes better and pleaded him in an impassioned voice.)

KRITZ: Please, Flaxley. If you strike her down, the others will kill you, they're sworn to protect the Trepe way at any cost! Don't do it.

(Flaxley gave an astonished glance.)

FLAXLEY: Surely you wouldn't want me to let her to get away with what she did?

KRITZ: No, but, there's still time to have another son. Please don't throw your life away for *her* sake! I love you.

(Looking down into Kritz's troubled eyes, he sighed with discomfort then shook his head. The look in her imploring eyes was almost impossible for him to argue against.)

FLAXLEY: But... she needs to die, my love.

KRITZ: Please, Flaxley! Lower your sword. I don't want to lose you, don't do that to me.

(Unable to resist her eyes any longer, Flaxley shook his head then sighed bitterly.)

FLAXLEY: Damn you, Jazzu!

(With that, he lowered his sword then turned and slowly trudged away.)

FLAXLEY: Bitch.

JAZZU: Knob!

(As if she'd personally scared him into relenting, Jazzu then turned around and smirked arrogantly at her Trepe warriors.)

JAZZU: Men are just pathetic; you saw that, right, ladies?

(Standing just behind Jazzu, wearing a saddened expression, Kritz watched Flaxley slowly trudge away then bent down and picked up a sword left by a dead Tang Yul warrior. At once, her face turned pale and she spoke quietly to herself as she looked towards her beloved husband.)

KRITZ: My darling Flaxley, you shall have your son, he'll grow to be as proud of you as you are of him!

(As her heart sunk, her voice became sorrowful and subdued.)

KRITZ: I only wish I could be here to bear him for you!

(With a hatred that would frighten the devil, she then spun around and skewered Jazzu's back with her sword, twisting it as she pushed it right through her torso. The fact that a large group of Trepe warriors were standing right there with Jazzu didn't matter to her one bit. She simply didn't care. All she wanted was for Flaxley to live and for Jazzu to die. Having met this end, she then stood tall with her arms out, waiting to be slaughtered in revenge by a myriad of Trepe warrior blades. Almost instinctively sensing the danger from twenty feet away, Flaxley swiftly glanced over his shoulder at Jazzu falling to her knees on the verge of death and his heart sunk.)

FLAXLEY: No!!!

(All too aware that Jazzu's stabbing had been Kritz's handiwork, he desperately tried to scramble back to her before Jazzu's warriors could exact their revenge on her. Such was his desperation to save his one true love he couldn't be help but let out an anguished cry as he sprinted towards her.)

FLAXLEY: Why???

(Expecting immense pain Kritz had her eyes firmly closed, but much to her amazement, the next thing she felt was Flaxley grabbing her and dragging her backwards. Utterly astonished that she hadn't been killed, she opened her eyes and watched on in bewilderment as the Trepe warriors just stood there, watching the life drain from Jazzu's body with smirks on their faces.)

KRITZ: Why??? Why didn't you kill me?

(As a pool of blood spilled out from beneath Jazzu's lifeless body, one of the Trepe looked up and shrugged.)

TREPE: Why? I didn't see anything amiss!

KRITZ: But... your oath?

TREPE: We're sworn to protect the Trepe way, not to protect a tyrannical leader! She turned us into a tribe of hatemongers and killers. If you ask me, letting her die *is* protecting the Trepe way!

(Kritz looked shocked for a second then nodded sternly and turned to hug Flaxley.)

KRITZ: I won't argue with that!

(As Kritz sunk into Flaxley's arms and closed her eyes, he held her tight then whispered forcefully in her ear.)

FLAXLEY: Don't you ever do anything stupid like that ever again.

(With her eyes tightly closed, Kritz replied in a soft voice.)

KRITZ: You wanted to kill her too. I guess we're as bad as each other.

FLAXLEY: Maybe... but I'm taller.

(Kritz chuckled.)

KRITZ: Only by a foot and two inches, about the same length as...

FLAXLEY: Almost, yes.

(Just then, Bonson, Lefiat, Mandika and Derek gathered around them to look down on Jazzu's corpse. Knowing just how much pain she'd caused Flaxley and Kritz, seeing her laying there devoid of life, made them all feel somewhat vindicated on their two friend's behalf.)

MANDIKA: Good riddance to her.

DEREK: Absolutely.

LEFIAT: Yeah.

BONSON: A fitting end for a warrior though. She died how she lived.

MANDIKA: By the sword?

BONSON: Butt ugly!

(As everyone stared down at Jazzu's corpse, nodding in full agreement with Bonson's words,

the old man in question shrugged then rubbed his hands together excitedly.)

BONSON: Anyway, may I just point out that we've just defeated the Tang Yul army. I think it's time we celebrated, don't you?

(As everyone looked to Bonson wearing approving smiles, one of the Trepe who'd been standing by Jazzu when she died, bit her lip and looked to Bonson with uncertainty.)

TREPE: We killed Dim Lee and the soldiers he brought with him, yeah. But he had 3000 men, I heard. When he doesn't return to Tang Yul, they're bound to send more troops to find him, aren't they? What will we...

(Bonson held his palm to hush her then beamed merrily.)

BONSON: Worry not, ma'am, for unless they come in peace, the same fate awaits *them* too! Thanks to Dim Lee, the Tang Yul are now at war with Trepe village and Tifaeris, so any attempt by them to mount an attack will be seen as an act of war by the key of peace.

FLAXLEY: And let me guess, more human fireworks and burning yellow flesh?

BONSON: Exactly, you racist bugger.

FLAXLEY: Racist? How's that racist? They *are* yellow!

BONSON: Even so, you shouldn't go pointing it out.

DEREK: That's rich coming from you, Bonson. You're always pointing out the colour of *my* skin!

LEFIAT: And my curly hair!

(Bonson rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: The curly haired aren't a race, halfwit. Though if they were, there'd definitely be grounds for justified genocide. And as for you, Derek... you're green, get over it!

DEREK: I *am* over it!!! It's you who...

(Giving up, Derek rolled his eyes then looked to Mandika.)

DEREK: He's...

MANDIKA: I know, Derek, I know.

(As Mandika shook a despairing head, the Trepe they'd been talking to, clutched hopeful hands to her chest.)

TREPE: Wait so... are you saying, if the Tang Yul attack again they'll just fry like they did this time? So it really is over? And you're sure about that?

(Bonson chuckled playfully.)

BONSON: I'm as certain as I am ugly.

(The Trepe warrior looked overjoyed.)

TREPE: So you're positive!

BONSON: Fuck you!!!

TREPE: I have to tell everyone!!!

(As she raced off to spread the news that the Tang Yul would never again be able to torment them, Bonson watched her go and furrowed his brow.)

BONSON: Stupid, bloody Trepe! Nice arse though!

(With the confirmation from Bonson that the Tang Yul army were no longer a threat, Flaxley and Kritz both felt like the weight of the entire world had been lifted from their shoulders. Finally, everything in their world was it should be. They were at peace with the Trepe, Jazzu was no more and the Tang Yul were neutralised. Their lives together in Tifaeris were no longer under threat. They were finally free. Revelling in the moment, they stood there in the square holding each other close with their eyes firmly closed for several minutes. As they stood together letting their love breeze into each other, Bonson, Derek, Mandika and Lefiat watched on with approval, very much aware of how big this moment was for the two of them.)

MANDIKA: Wonderful.

LEFIAT: Beautiful.

DEREK: Fantastic.

MANDIKA: It's all worked out perfectly for them.

(Continuing to watch them hug, Bonson sighed then hung his head.)

BONSON: I'm ashamed to say, watching them makes *me* want a hug too.

(Mandika chuckled and threw her arms around him.)

MANDIKA: There you go, misery guts.

(Bonson hugged her back and snarled in her ear angrily as he did so.)

BONSON: Not *you*, stupid!!! There's a bloody fit Trepe standing behind Lefiat, she's about my age and she's been giving me the eye. That was a subtle hint for *her* to hug me, you dozy bint.

(Mandika stepped back from the hug and scowled.)

MANDIKA: You're a disgrace.

BONSON: Don't even talk to me, Mandika. In fact, don't even look at me. You ruined the moment! That was the perfect opportunity and you blew it for me. Now I'll never get to fondle her massive...

MANDIKA: Bonson!!!

BONSON: I said don't talk to me!!!

(Oblivious to the sulking Bonson, Derek grinned and gestured towards the hugging twosome of Flaxley and Kritz.)

DEREK: Well, I think it's safe to say they're happy, don't you?

BONSON: Glad someone is.

DEREK: Lucky buggers. They're so in love.

(Lefiat smiled at Mandika.)

LEFIAT: Yeah, I'm in love too.

MANDIKA: Yeah... you know... despite everything, so am I.

(They shared a loving glance for a moment then Lefiat raised a suspicious eyebrow.)

LEFIAT: What do you mean, despite everything?

MANDIKA: Don't worry about that, darling, it's way too complicated for your feeble brain, let it go and give me a hug.

LEFIAT: Yeah, okay.

(With that, he beamed and placed his arm around her.)

LEFIAT: Hey, what do you mean, "my feeble brain"?

(As Mandika chuckled to herself, Flaxley and Kritz continued to hold one another tight and shut out the rest of the world. It was a profound moment for both of them and neither of them wanted it to end. Unfortunately for them, however, their moment of peaceful togetherness was soon brought to an abrupt halt by a Trepe elder. Determined to get Kritz's attention, she took it upon herself to tap her repeatedly on the shoulder in the most annoying way possible. Finding the relentless tapping extremely aggravating, it wasn't long before Kritz's inner harmony was thrown into chaos and she couldn't stand it any longer. Looking absolutely furious, she stepped back from hugging her husband and span to face the Trepe elder with her fists clenched, ready to start punching.)

KRITZ: Fucking stop that!!!

(Delighted to have her attention finally, the elder warrior and the comrade at her side beamed.)

TREPE 1: Hello there!

TREPE 2: Hi!

(As the two elder warriors went on to just stand there smiling at her warmly, offering no hint as to what they wanted, Kritz stared at them bitterly and shook her fist.)

KRITZ: You'd better not have battered me half to death like a deranged woodpecker, ruining the perfect romantic moment in the process, just to say 'hello'!!!

TREPE 1: No, no, not at all.

TREPE 2: We were just waiting for you to say 'hello' back.

(Kritz just stared at them coldly and raised a curious eyebrow.)

KRITZ: Hello!

(She then furrowed her brow.)

KRITZ: Now what do you want?

TREPE 1: Well, now Jazzu's dead... thanks for that, by the way... she was such a bad person...

KRITZ: You're welcome.

TREPE 1: Anyway, we were just discussing the future and we elders are all in agreement that *you* should be our new leader!

TREPE 2: Yes. You'd be perfect!

KRITZ: Hang on, hang on!

(With that, she stepped back and leant against Flaxley allowing him to wrap his arms around her.)

KRITZ: I can't be your leader!

TREPE 1: Why not? You're perfect for it. You're tough, you're intelligent, but above all you care about *people*!

KRITZ: Even so, you're forgetting something!

TREPE 2: What?

KRITZ: I'm not a Trepe!

TREPE 1: Oh! You're not?

KRITZ: No!

(She twisted her neck to look up at Flaxley.)

KRITZ: I'm a loving wife from Tifaeris.

(Looking thoughtful for a second, Kritz raised a finger and gave a considered nod.)

KRITZ: You know who would be a good leader, though?

TREPE 2: Who?

KRITZ: Suma!

TREPE 1: The girl on prison duties?

KRITZ: Yeah!

(At once the two elders looked at one another as if she was mad, before falling about laughing.)

TREPE 1: Good one!

(Annoyed at their attitude, Kritz frowned.)

KRITZ: I'm serious!!!

(All at once, they ceased laughing and did a double take in her direction.)

TREPE 2: What? Why Suma?

KRITZ: She knows what it means to love, she's felt true compassion. Jazzu was a cold bitch who cared about nothing and nobody!

TREPE 1: But... Suma's a useless warrior!

KRITZ: So? Are you not to become a peaceful people?

TREPE 2: Well... I'd like to think so!

KRITZ: Then be guided by a heart that knows how to love, and move on. That's exactly what you need if you ever want to rid yourself of Jazzu's stench! Thanks to her, the whole world hates the Trepe.

TREPE 1: Yeah, but Suma?

KRITZ: Give it some thought anyway!

(Just then, Bonson stepped up to the Trepe elder and grinned innocently.)

BONSON: And while you're thinking about it, could you fetch me an ale? I'm parched!

DEREK: It's only seven in the morning, Bonson!

BONSON: Aren't I allowed to be thirsty at this hour then?

TREPE 1: I see your point... Bonson... is it?

BONSON: Yes. Soon to be overlord or grand duke Bonson of the council of the wise.

TREPE 1: Impressive.

BONSON: I know.

TREPE: Well, Bonson, I agree with you. We *deserve* a drink.

(She then smiled the wildest of smiles.)

TREPE 1: In fact, in light of what we've achieved here today, I think we deserve several. We defeated Dim Lee and it's time to celebrate!

(Bonson looked delighted and gave her a knowing smile.)

BONSON: Celebrating sounds good to me!

(He then raised his eyebrows up and down at her seductively.)

BONSON: Say, I don't suppose Trepe celebrations would happen to involve lots of drunken fornication, would they?

TREPE 1: Excuse me?

(He hid his face and mumbled.)

BONSON: Um... nothing, I said sunken formulation...

(As he started to blush and slope off, however, she grabbed his arm and smiled warmly into his eyes.)

TREPE 1: Don't wander off; we've got some celebrating to do. In my room. Naked.

BONSON: You mean... sunken formulation?

TREPE 1: Like rabbits!

(Looking utterly jubilant, Bonson shook his fist at the sky and exhaled with delight.)

BONSON: About bloody time too!!!

(He beamed.)

BONSON: Quick, let's go before the gods change their minds.

(And with that, the two of them disappeared at a rate of knots towards the elder's quarters across the square.)

TREPE 2: Right... *I'll* arrange the celebration then, shall I?

(She rolled her eyes.)

TREPE 2: So typical of her... she's such a slut.

(Sure enough, within minutes, a trailer of wine and ale was led out into the square and the celebrations commenced. Trepe warrior and Tifaeris citizen alike, mingling to rejoice in the moment. It was a time of sheer delight for all to revel in. After a second near brush with death it only seemed right to mark the moment in style. The two neighbouring settlements had come back from the brink of devastation and were now free to flourish. It had been the ultimate battle for survival and the ultimate victory.

Every survivor would have their own tale to tell about this historic battle. Some would tell tales to evoke fond memories of those unfortunate heroes who didn't make it back. Some would speak of the moment of victory and what it meant to all concerned. In Bonson's case, his tale would mostly be a disturbing and graphic portrayal of his time with the Trepe warrior he slipped away with before the celebration. Some would exaggerate their stories, others would play their parts down, the tales rarely being accurate or consistent. The one thing these tales did have in common, however, was the simple fact that everyone had one. Even the citizens of the two settlements who weren't present at the time could tell you precisely where they were and what they were doing when they heard the battle had been won. Such was the

magnitude of this epic victory.)

ROAD TO TIFAERIS – FRIDAY AFTERNOON

(That afternoon as the survivors walked home to Tifaeris, Flaxley barely said a word. Limping tiredly along with the rest of his exhausted comrades, all he could think of was how of the fifty plus men that had joined him near the hill three days earlier, only five remained alive. The fact they'd all spent the last few hours celebrating wildly despite such a tragedy had left a sour taste in his mouth. Bonson, however, couldn't stop smiling.)

BONSON: Best celebration ever!

DEREK: How would *you* know? You weren't even there!

BONSON: Oh, I was, Derek. Maybe not in the square, but I was there. I was having my own personal celebration, and let me tell you, there's life in the old dog yet!

(Derek read his mind then shuddered from head to toe.)

DEREK: Good god, Bonson, control your thoughts, damn it. That's obscene!

BONSON: Stop reading my mind then!!!

(As Derek and Bonson glared at one another, Kritz offered the unhappy Flaxley a loving smile.)

KRITZ: Cheer up love, we won!

FLAXLEY: Did we though, Kritz?

KRITZ: Yes!

FLAXLEY: Well it doesn't feel like it. Those brave men I trained... so many dead. So many wives left without a husband. Kids left without a father. And they were all good men, Kritz. Great men in fact, like little Phisele's dad and... Thingy, what's his name and... Thin!

THIN: I'm dead??? You might of bloody told me, Flaxley, I wouldn't have bothered walking back if I'd known.

(Flaxley looked up and saw Thin walking alongside him.)

FLAXLEY: Sorry Thin... remembering names isn't my strong point.

(He then sighed dejectedly.)

FLAXLEY: I hardly knew any of their names and now I never will!

THIN: Don't feel bad, Flaxley. I knew all of 'em, and when we get back to Tifaeris we can erect a memorial to 'em or something!

(Flaxley sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Excellent idea, Thin, it's the least we can do!

(Just then, Kritz flinched and a baffled expression crossed her brow.)

KRITZ: What the?

FLAXLEY: You okay, my love?

(Kritz gave him an uncomfortable glance for a moment then scratched her head.)

KRITZ: A girl in a red headscarf...

FLAXLEY: Where?

KRITZ: No... I just pictured a girl in a red headscarf for some reason. No... I didn't picture it... I remembered it. She was kind and... I think she loved me.

(Flaxley looked to her wearing an uncertain expression.)

FLAXLEY: Brown eyes and brown hair like you?

KRITZ: Yeah. Pretty thing, she is.

FLAXLEY: That sounds like Kassamandra, your sister.

(Kritz stopped at once and looked to him in bewilderment. Taking it as a welcome opportunity for a break, everyone else also stopped to catch their breath. Having been up at the crack of dawn, fought a battle then celebrated wildly, they were all thoroughly shattered.)

KRITZ: You think I'm remembering my sister?

FLAXLEY: Well... I can't be sure. I can't see inside your mind, but Kassy *did* wear a red headscarf a lot.

KRITZ: She did?

FLAXLEY: Yeah. Your father claimed it was to keep the sun off of her head, but we all knew it was there to put men off looking at her.

(He smiled.)

FLAXLEY: It didn't work though, because she'd take it off as soon as she was out of sight of the house.

(Kritz smiled.)

KRITZ: I don't blame her.

(She then shook her head in bewilderment.)

KRITZ: Why have I suddenly remembered that?

FLAXLEY: I don't know, darling.

(Just then, Bonson stepped up to her looking somewhat smug.)

BONSON: I think I can shed some light on that! In fact, I know I can. Wisdom is my gift, after all.

(He then bit his lip.)

BONSON: Unless they decide to remove my wise status for jumping in front of Dim Lee's sword, of course.

(He then shrugged.)

BONSON: It'd be a bit harsh if they did though, I did it to save the day...

KRITZ: Bonson...

BONSON: To punish me for that would...

KRITZ: Bonson!!!

(Bonson looked at her and furrowed his brow.)

BONSON: What?

KRITZ: What where you going to say?

BONSON: I was going to say punishing me for that would be completely out of order.

KRITZ: I mean about *me* remembering my sister.

(Bonson looked enlightened.)

BONSON: Oh, right... yes. Well, it's not rocket science. It's far more complicated. To make a rocket you just need to shove some dynamite in a tube, put a stick and a paper wick in it, then light the bugger. No, it's far less simple than that. That Vooda used magic to suppress your memories and now *she's* dead, so is the magic.

(Kritz looked uncertain.)

KRITZ: But, all I remember is my sister, surely I should remember more than that.

BONSON: Not necessarily. You're not going to remember *everything* anyway. You'll have forgotten some things naturally. Others should come back to you in time.

KRITZ: I see.

BONSON: Sometimes memories need to be triggered by a certain sight or smell. You know?

(Kritz smiled.)

KRITZ: Makes sense, thanks, Bonson.

(Looking somewhat shifty, Flaxley glanced from side to side.)

FLAXLEY: And anyway, my love. Try not to remember too much, you might give yourself a headache.

BONSON: Doubtful.

FLAXLEY: Besides, it's the future that counts... let's look forward rather than dwelling on the past and making me look bad.

KRITZ: Making you look bad?

(At once her brow furrowed.)

KRITZ: What are you frightened I'll remember?

(Flaxley gaped for a moment then faked an innocent grin.)

FLAXLEY: Nothing.

KRITZ: Then why do you look so guilty???

FLAXLEY: I do?

(He then sighed and hung his head.)

FLAXLEY: Fine, I'll tell you.

(He sighed then proceeded to lie through his teeth.)

FLAXLEY: I just don't want you to remember me from back then because I wasn't the manly man you know and love now.

(Kritz smiled then gave him a hug.)

KRITZ: Like *that* would bother me. I'll love you no matter what, Flaxley.

(As Kritz hugged him tight, Flaxley looked down to Derek and grimaced uneasily. Knowing Derek had read his mind, he couldn't help but feel uncomfortable. Happy to put his mind at rest, however, Derek smiled back and projected his thought straight into Flaxley's mind.)

DEREK'S THOUGHT: Relax. I agree with you actually. Kritz is much better off not knowing you used to date her sister. It was a long time ago and raising it would only cause unnecessary heartache. So don't worry, your secret is safe with me.

(He then furrowed his brow.)

DEREK'S THOUGHT: Besides, your secret is nowhere as bad as Bonson's. If that ever got out... damn!

FLAXLEY'S THOUGHT: Bonson has a secret?

DEREK'S THOUGHT: Yes. And it'll remain a secret!

FLAXLEY'S THOUGHT: Fair enough.

(With that, Flaxley stepped back from hugging Kritz and looked towards Tifaeris.)

FLAXLEY: We should head on.

DEREK: Agreed.

(With that, they all started to pace onwards once again. As they did so, Flaxley grimaced and shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: My bloody foot is killing me. Stupid Dim Lee!

KRITZ: Your limp's getting worse, my love.

BONSON: At least his limp is understandable. What I want to know is, why is Lefiat also limping?

(Mandika then looked to them and sighed.)

MANDIKA: As soon as the Tang Yul died, and he knew I was safe, he went to sheath his sword and missed.

LEFIAT: I dropped it on my foot. There was blood everywhere!

MANDIKA: There was pretty much one drop, Lefiat. You barely pricked yourself.

LEFIAT: Even so... it bloody hurt.

(Mandika sighed then looked to Bonson.)

MANDIKA: You were right. When I was in danger... what a guy! As soon I wasn't though... back to being...

BONSON: A dick? That figures!

LEFIAT: Hey! I can't help the way I am!

(Mandika looked to him and smiled.)

MANDIKA: I know that, darling. And it's fine. Knowing I'll be safe with you is all I need. If you can just try to stay away from fire, I think I can tolerate your many other shortcomings and our love will continue to grow.

LEFIAT: I hope so, Mandika. I love you.

(As Mandika and Lefiat stared at one another lovingly, Kritz looked somewhat baffled and

glanced at Flaxley.)

KRITZ: I remember something else!

FLAXLEY: Oh, crap!

KRITZ: There was a wooden, carved statue in the centre of Tifaeris... wasn't there?

(Flaxley looked mightily relieved and beamed.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, actually. The Trepe set fire to it and destroyed it!

KRITZ: And that makes you happy, does it?

(Having not noticed he was smiling, Flaxley grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: Yes... that statue was ugly.

(Kritz shook her head.)

KRITZ: I wish I could remember more. It's horrible not knowing simple stuff about where I came from. A big chunk of my life is missing. I hate Vooda!

(Flaxley put his arm around her and smiled.)

FLAXLEY: It'll come back to you my love.

(Derek looked stumped.)

DEREK: What the hell was Vooda anyway? Such magic... she was amazing. And then to die in such a silly manner... weird.

KRITZ: Nobody knows what she was, Derek. They never have.

(Bonson scoffed.)

BONSON: Again, you underestimate the soon-to-be mystic wise-man, neo-god that walks among you!

FLAXLEY: What? Who?

BONSON: Me, you tit!

FLAXLEY: Hey!

BONSON: I know exactly what Vooda was. I've spent many an evening reading about ancient cultures and forgotten races, that's why I'm so wise. I bothered to learn.

(He ruffled his neck indignantly.)

BONSON: In my younger days, while everyone else I knew was out enjoying themselves, I was busy learning stuff so that I could... so that I could... regret having wasted my life in a library while everyone else was enjoying theirs.

(He then looked defiant and nodded.)

BONSON: But that's not the point! Fact is, thanks to my many wasted hours spent learning pointless crap, I know exactly what Vooda is.

FLAXLEY: And?

(Revelling in being able to show the world his immense knowledge, Bonson beamed arrogantly and a strut crept into his gait.)

BONSON: According to a much revered book by a well respected historian and author from East Edea, there were many subterranean races centuries ago. Caves aren't just for bears, you know? They were the natural habitat of several human-like races. One of whom were called the Noctura. Now, from the brief glimpse I got of Vooda's face before she evaporated, it was plain to see that she was one of them. Fascinating really because they were long thought extinct.

(He shrugged.)

BONSON: I can only assume she escaped from whatever wiped out the rest of her race and took refuge in Trepe village. Of course, she'd have never ventured outside much...

KRITZ: She went out at night sometimes, but always with her heavy robes on. Never saw her in the daytime though.

BONSON: Of course not. As the book said, they were afraid of the sun. And now we know why.

(As he paced on in awe of himself, Kritz absorbed his words and smiled.)

KRITZ: Interesting. Though it makes me wonder... what did the Trepe do to maintain an all female tribe before *she* came along and used her magic to ensure only girls were born?

FLAXLEY: They probably killed all the boys.

BONSON: Or raised them as slaves.

FLAXLEY: True. Fascinating stuff indeed, Bonson.

BONSON: Of course.

DEREK: It was. Very interesting indeed.

(Bonson looked genuinely lifted.)

BONSON: Well, if you *really* find it that interesting, maybe all those years spent learning weren't wasted after all.

KRITZ: Oh, they were.

MANDIKA: Yeah, I mean it was interesting but I wouldn't have lost any sleep if I hadn't heard that.

DEREK: Oh, absolutely.

FLAXLEY: Yeah, as interesting as it was, knowing Vooda's origin changes nothing at the end of the day.

KRITZ: Precisely. Now we know where she came from, great. But if we didn't know, who cares? You should have gone out and enjoyed yourself.

(Greatly angered by their words, Bonson scowled at the ground as he paced ahead, oblivious to the fact that everyone was grinning to themselves.)

BONSON: Fine. Like that, is it? Bloody philistines!

(He sighed.)

BONSON: I hate you lot.

TIFAERIS – FRIDAY AFTERNOON

(As they arrived back through the gates of Tifaeris, the small party of survivors were greeted by most of the population who'd been nervously awaiting their return with much trepidation for several hours. At once, several screams of anguish rose above the silence from the families of those who weren't among their number. Feeling entirely responsible, Flaxley desperately avoided looking at them. Kritz for her part, offered them sorrowful smiles. Thin, however, only had one thing on his mind. Having very much expected to be one of the first to die, he spotted his wife in the crowd and yelled out triumphantly.)

THIN: We won! We saved Tifaeris!!!

(At once, a loud cheer erupted and all those with nobody to mourn instantly swamped the returning heroes. Eager to shake their hands or pat them all on the back, they swarmed around them, blocking the street in their excitement. Tifaeris was very much in a celebratory mood. Riddled with guilt over his fallen men, however, Flaxley very much wasn't. Eager to get away from the excited throng, he edged his way through the crowd, determined not to look anyone in the eye, when his path was blocked by the elder. Holding a suitcase in each hand, he looked to the ashen-faced Flaxley and forced a saddened smile.)

ELDER: Well, I guess this is goodbye then, Flaxley!

(Flaxley sighed and very much against his own better judgment, engaged him in conversation.)

FLAXLEY: Why? Where are you going?

ELDER: Wherever the wind takes me! Wherever my wisdom will be needed and respected. There's nothing for me here now, even the dogs have all left town!

FLAXLEY: Never mind the dogs! Why are *you* leaving?

ELDER: Like I said, I'm not needed around here anymore. The people have made their

feelings quite clear. They want *you* as their leader, and it's time I faced facts, you've been exactly that ever since you returned here!

FLAXLEY: Rubbish, the every day running of Tifaeris...

ELDER: Is all based on *your* ideals, Flaxley! I'm nobody now, the people have spoken.

FLAXLEY: Even so, leaving town's a bit drastic isn't it?

ELDER: Please don't try to stop me...

(Accepting the elder's decision, Flaxley shrugged then edged past him towards his house.)

FLAXLEY: Fair enough.

(The elder sighed and hung his head.)

ELDER: I've made my decision, so now I'll just...

(Realising he was talking to himself, he looked about for Flaxley in bewilderment.)

ELDER: Hey, where'd he go?

(Spying Flaxley edging away through the crowd, he sighed in defeat then looked to the gates. Taking one last glance back down the street, he then headed out of the gates to start his new life.

Once they eventually managed to fight their way through the crowd and into Flaxley and Kritz's home, Derek, Lefiat, Mandika, Kritz and Bonson immediately threw themselves down on seats, greatly relieved to finally be able to rest their weary legs. Flaxley, however, paced up and down unable to get his mind off the deaths of his men.)

KRITZ: Sit down, my love!

(Lost in his thoughts, Flaxley didn't answer and continued to pace.)

BONSON: Don't be so down on yourself, Flaxley. You became a knight to stop tyranny and evil, and that's exactly what you've done.

(Flaxley stopped pacing and looked at Bonson with a saddened look on his face.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, but at the same time, we've left so many widows and orphans behind... how do I live with such a thing?

(At this point, little Phisele ran through the front door followed by her tearful mother carrying a vase. As Phisele ran and jumped on Kritz's lap to cry in her arms, Flaxley's heart sunk and he looked at the floor in shame.)

PHISELE'S MUM: Mr Flaxley... sir?

(Drowning in his own guilt, Flaxley breathed a sigh of sorrow then slowly raised his head to face her.)

FLAXLEY: Ma'am, I can not apologise enough for what's happened!

(With that, he looked back to his feet again.)

PHISELE'S MUM: Sir Flaxley...

(She fought back a tear.)

PHISELE'S MUM: I'd like to thank you for what you've done for us...

(Flaxley looked up in astonishment.)

FLAXLEY: But, your husband...

PHISELE'S MUM: My husband trusted you. He wanted Tifaeris to be free so Phisele could grow up in a safe environment.

(She then forced a weak smile.)

PHISELE'S MUM: And he was right to trust you. Our enemies are gone and now Phisele will be safe, just as he wanted. So, as a thank you...

FLAXLEY: Thank me? Why would you thank me? He's gone! I've made you a widow and left Phisele without her father...

PHISELE'S MUM: On the contrary Flaxley, you've saved our home and given Phisele a chance to grow up in a better world. That was everything my husband yearned for and now she has it.

(She nodded sternly as she forced back her tears.)

PHISELE'S MUM: Wherever my husband is right now, I'm sure he'll be thanking you too!

(As he absorbed her words, Flaxley smiled as if the pride had returned to his soul.)

FLAXLEY: Thank you, you've given me great heart!

PHISELE'S MUM: Well, we'll never be able to thank you properly, but when Phisele came over earlier to do her chores, she found these broken pieces of vase... so we fixed it for you!

(She handed him the vase that Lefiat had broken the day he arrived in town and smiled.)

FLAXLEY: You fixed it?

(Phisele slid from Kritz's lap and paced to her mother's side.)

PHISELE: I helped!

(Smiling gratefully, Flaxley knelt down and kissed Phisele on the forehead.)

FLAXLEY: Thank you, Phisele!

(With that, he placed the vase back on the table then turned and watched as Phisele and her tearful mother left the house. Feeling slightly vindicated, he smiled at Kritz then yawned and stretched his arms to the ceiling.)

FLAXLEY: Darling... it's been an exhausting day and I'm shattered. I'm going back to bed!

(Kritz climbed from her seat and smiled.)

KRITZ: We might as well!

(She then pointed to where Bonson, Mandika, Lefiat and Derek all sat sleeping like babies.)

KRITZ: Do you think they were tired?

FLAXLEY: Hmm, it's possible!

(As they headed for the bedroom, Kritz took his arm and leant her head on his shoulder.)

KRITZ: Seeing as it's the middle of the afternoon still, before we sleep would you mind sexing me up for a bit?

FLAXLEY: Starting with mutual oral?

KRITZ: Obviously!

FLAXLEY: Then what can I say? I'd love to. Seriously, love to.

(With that, they shared a brief kiss then headed inside their room and slammed the door shut. Ten seconds later, however, there was a deafening hammering on the front door and Flaxley came storming back out again. Slowly pacing after him, Kritz sighed with annoyance and watched on as he yanked the door open.)

FLAXLEY: Yes?

(Looking thoroughly excited, one of the callers nodded to him joyfully.)

THIN: Alright there, Flaxley?

(Before Flaxley could reply, Thin, along with two of the other survivors of the battles, then paced past him and strode up to Kritz in the centre of the room.)

FLAXLEY: Do you mind?

(As Flaxley pushed the door closed, Thin glanced back at him and smiled.)

THIN: Never mind us, Flaxley, we're here to see your lovely wife.

(He then looked to Kritz and nodded sternly.)

THIN: Well, we did our part, now it's your turn! The others will be over later on, when they can get away from their wives.

(Kritz looked completely baffled.)

KRITZ: Excuse me?

THIN: How do you want us, all at once or one at a time?

KRITZ: What do you mean?

(As Flaxley stood fuming behind them, one of Thin's companions smiled.)

MAN 01: If you want us in individual sittings, I'm happy to go last. I say a good shag is worth waiting for.

THIN: Well, maybe, but *look* at her, I want to go first, right now.

MAN 02: Aye, so do I.

THIN: In that case, you take her bottom half first and I'll take the oral. Then we can swap.

MAN 02: That works!

(Kritz looked utterly appalled.)

KRITZ: Are you suggesting what I think you're suggesting???

(Thin looked amazed that she asked.)

THIN: Aye, a promise is a promise, after all. You said, you'd sleep with us if...

KRITZ: I was joking!!!

(Just then, a half awake voice rose up from the sofa.)

BONSON: Now, now, Kritz. You can't make promises then take them back when it suits you.

(He nodded firmly.)

BONSON: That would be dishonourable.

(He then rubbed his hands together gleefully.)

BONSON: I say we get this show on the road.

THIN: Agreed!

BONSON: As a revered elder, I think *I* should go first! And don't worry, Kritz, you're quite welcome to ride me backwards if looking at my face is likely to make you heave. I'm a considerate lover, if nothing else.

(As they all stood there excitedly looking into Kritz's shocked eyes, Thin glanced about the room.)

THIN: Hey, what's that grating sound?

(Feeling more than a little uneasy, they all turned round and saw Flaxley grinding his teeth as he turned redder and redder with rage.)

MAN 01: That's a bad sign, right?

THIN: That's a *very* bad sign. Run!!!

(A split second later, two of the men scrambled desperately out of the front door looking terrified and Thin flew after them, head first, several feet off the ground.)

THIN: But she promised!!!

FLAXLEY: She was joking!!!

(As the door slammed again, Flaxley spun around then joined Kritz in glaring at Bonson.)

BONSON: What?

(Kritz started to chuckle.)

KRITZ: I could kill you, you silly old sod!

BONSON: More than likely, Kritz. Having sex with a hotty like you at my age, makes a heart attack a definitely possibility.

(He then nodded to Flaxley.)

BONSON: Thanks for getting rid of them for me, Flaxley.

(He then looked to Kritz again.)

BONSON: Now let's go and steam up some windows, sweet cheeks.

(Trying not to explode, Flaxley looked to him calmly and spoke in a quiet voice.)

FLAXLEY: Bonson?

BONSON: Yes?

(With that, Flaxley slowly drew his sword.)

FLAXLEY: Have you ever wondered how eunuchs are created?

(Bonson trembled and sat back.)

BONSON: Come to think of it, I'm very tired. I'll go back to sleep.

(He then sat back in a comfortable position and stared at Flaxley with one open eye.)

FLAXLEY: Goodnight, Bonson.

BONSON: Afternoon technically, but fine... goodnight.

(With that, Flaxley allowed himself a chuckle then headed away towards the bedroom with Kritz.)

FLAXLEY: We're gonna have to keep an eye on those randy buggers, my love.

KRITZ: Yes we are!

(She rolled her eyes.)

KRITZ: I thought it was pretty obvious I was joking but I guess they only heard what they *wanted* to.

FLAXLEY: So it would seem. Still, don't worry, if they persist, I'll threaten them with castration a few times. That'll put an end to it.

KRITZ: I hope so.

(They shared a warm smile then Flaxley pushed open the bedroom door.)

FLAXLEY: Anyway, where were we before they so rudely interrupted?

KRITZ: At the beginning. I hadn't even got my top off.

FLAXLEY: Ah yes. Well... soon remedied.

(As they went inside their room and slammed the door closed behind them, Bonson sighed then nestled his head into the sofa.)

BONSON: Oh well, you can't blame a bloke for trying.

(By early evening a huge celebration had got underway in the centre of Tifaeris. Those who could entertain, entertained, those who could cook, made food and all the remaining men supplied a vast quantity of ale. Almost the entire town had turned out, even those grieving the loss of a loved one. The only one's not in attendance yet were Flaxley, Kritz and their four house guests. Almost inevitably the reason they were delayed was because Mandika wasn't ready. The others had been ready to go for a good ten minutes, but Mandika was still brushing her hair in a mirror and taking her own sweet time about it. Naturally, Bonson wasn't amused.)

BONSON: Hurry up, damn it! There's ale out there and I'm missing out!

MANDIKA: I won't be much longer!

LEFIAT: What are you doing anyway?

MANDIKA: I'm brushing my hair. What are you, blind?

(Lefiat grinned playfully.)

LEFIAT: I must be to fancy you!

MANDIKA: You sod!

(She laughed and threw her brush at him. Watching them as they proceeded to playfully throw the brush back and forth, Lefiat failing to catch it every time, Flaxley rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Kids, eh?

BONSON: Aren't they just!

KRITZ: Leave them alone, they're happy!

(Standing by the window, paying no attention to Mandika or Lefiat, Derek nodded thoughtfully.)

DEREK: You know, I like Tifaeris! It's warmer than Guevina and the people here accept me already!

BONSON: I admit, 'tis a lovely place!

DEREK: I might even move here!

(At once, Bonson's face turned a funny shade of pale.)

BONSON: No Derek!!! Please, you can't leave me with Lefiat and Mandika!

DEREK: Move here too then!

BONSON: I can't! I won't get a paid retirement if I move!

DEREK: Yes, but...

BONSON: I beg you!!!

(Highly amused by Bonson's panic, Flaxley chuckled to himself then clammed up. As a thought occurred to him, he scratched his head then raised a curious eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: Incidentally, Bonson? What happened with your illusion? One man on a donkey? Where were the other 3,999 and why a donkey?

(Bonson looked to him and grinned sheepishly.)

BONSON: I hoped you weren't going to bring that up!

FLAXLEY: Well? Why a donkey?

BONSON: It wasn't... put it this way... I'd like to see *you* try to draw a horse!

KRITZ: Yeah, but you said there would be 4,000 horsemen!

BONSON: There was, ma'am... unfortunately... in single file!

(Flaxley laughed for a moment then offered him a grateful smile.)

FLAXLEY: Credit where credit's due though, Bonson, if it hadn't been for your quick thinking regarding the key of peace, we'd have all been killed.

(Kritz nodded sternly.)

KRITZ: Yeah, if you hadn't tricked him into declaring war, we'd *all* have died in Treppe village and Tifaeris would have been reduced to a pile of rubble by Dim Lee by now.

DEREK: Amazing really, isn't it? Such a fine margin between success and failure. We owe it all to one man having a good idea.

FLAXLEY: Indeed. Nice work, Bonson, we all owe you our lives.

(Upon hearing this, Bonson stood up and smiled a wide smile before gripping the lapels of his jacket with pride.)

BONSON: I suppose you could say, never in the field of human conflict, have so many... owed so much... to one very, very wise man. Me!

(As he beamed with self adoration, Flaxley furrowed his brow bitterly.)

FLAXLEY: Right! I need an ale. Let's go.

(With that, Flaxley, Kritz and Derek all headed for the front door, giving Bonson scornful glances as they went.)

BONSON: What? Why the dagger looks?

KRITZ: Take *all* the credit, why don't you? We were there too, or didn't you notice?

BONSON: I'm only taking the credit I deserve.

(As he continued towards the door, Flaxley turned to Mandika and Lefiat.)

FLAXLEY: Mandika? Lefiat? Catch us up; we're going to the celebration. We've waited long enough.

LEFIAT: Eh?

(Having been put off by Flaxley mentioning his name, Lefiat threw the brush at Mandika and missed by a country mile.)

LEFIAT: Oh, crap!!!

(As the brush looped over Mandika and smashed Flaxley and Kritz's newly repaired vase back into little pieces again, it was all he could do to crumple to his knees in distress.

Expecting to receive quite a pummeling, Lefiat's face bore a horrified look but much to his relief, Flaxley simply shook a despairing head and sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Why, Lefiat? Just... why?

BONSON: That's Lefiat for you, Flaxley. Just be grateful you don't have a log fire and a west wing!

(And with that, they headed out of the door to enjoy a night of fun and festivity at the biggest party Tifaeris had ever thrown.)

THE FOLLOWING MORNING - TIFAERIS

(With Tifaeris safe, Lefiat's mission complete and Mandika finally satisfied that Lefiat was the man for her, all that remained for the six allies was to say their farewells and part company once again. And so, following a hearty breakfast, Kritz and Flaxley found themselves standing outside their home watching Mandika and Lefiat climb into the royal carriage, while Derek and Bonson scrambled up on top of it. Delighted that Lefiat was finally in the coach and that his house wasn't on fire or in need of urgent repair, Flaxley smiled up at Derek as he took the reins in readiness to get the horses moving.)

FLAXLEY: Well, thanks again, chaps.

DEREK: It was our pleasure, Flaxley.

(Having overheard, Mandika poked her head out of the carriage window and scowled.)

MANDIKA: You have warped idea of pleasure, Derek.

(Derek glanced over his shoulder and sneered.)

DEREK: You know what I mean.

MANDIKA: I'm sure I don't. We could have died.

DEREK: I didn't mean that part. That was awful, obviously. I'm talking about being able to selflessly help a friend. *Helping* is a pleasure.

(Mandika furrowed her brow.)

MANDIKA: Nope, you've lost me.

(Kritz smiled to herself and stepped up to the carriage window.)

KRITZ: Take care, babe.

MANDIKA: You too, Kritz.

(They shared a warm smile as Lefiat poked his head out of the window.)

LEFIAT: Bye, Kritz.

KRITZ: Bye, Lefiat.

(Mandika glanced at him briefly then snarled.)

MANDIKA: She has a face, you know?

(Lefiat averted his gaze from Kritz's cleavage and stared in horror at Mandika.)

LEFIAT: I slipped!

MANDIKA: Your eyes slipped?

LEFIAT: Um... yeah.

(Mandika snarled then glared at Kritz from the window.)

MANDIKA: Next time we're in town, put some bloody clothes on, will you? You know, ones that cover the basics at least!!!

(As Kritz scowled back at her, she sat back in her seat and mumbled under her breath.)

MANDIKA: Tart.

(She then glared at Lefiat.)

MANDIKA: You wait until I get you home.

(Letting Mandika's rant go, Kritz took Flaxley's arm and smiled up at Derek.)

KRITZ: Have a safe journey.

DEREK: I'm sure we will, thanks for having us.

FLAXLEY: It's been a pleasure, Derek.

DEREK: Can't say I'm looking forward to going back to be honest.

(He sighed.)

DEREK: The king's going to be livid.

FLAXLEY: How come?

DEREK: Mandika, Bonson and I kinda sneaked out of the castle with Lefiat and didn't tell him. I'm sure he's going to be demanding an explanation.

(At this point, Mandika poked her head out of the carriage window again.)

MANDIKA: Leave the king to *me*. All you guys did was follow my orders.

DEREK: Even so...

MANDIKA: Look, I'll just tell him you came to protect me because I insisted. And if he's still angry I'll just call him "daddy" a lot and use my small voice. I've got him wrapped round my little finger, so don't worry about a thing. We'll be fine.

(Derek smiled as Mandika slipped back into the coach again.)

DEREK: Very well then, I guess we're in the clear.

(He smiled to Flaxley and Kritz.)

DEREK: On that note, take care of yourselves, won't you?

KRITZ: You too, take it easy, guys.

FLAXLEY: Don't be strangers, come and visit again soon, okay?

(Sitting aside Derek with a face like thunder, Bonson rolled his eyes and snarled.)

BONSON: For heaven's sake, what's with all the bloody farewells? We've said goodbye already, can't we just get going? There isn't a coach stop for 6 hours and I need an ale.

DEREK: Fine.

(He held the reigns tight then looked thoughtful.)

DEREK: Oh, actually, before we go, there was something I wanted to ask you, Flaxley...

(Bonson rolled his eyes and growled.)

BONSON: Oh for pity's sake, Derek.

(He sighed then sat back and closed his eyes.)

BONSON: I'm gonna take a nap, wake me when get to an ale house... I mean coach stop.

(Derek rolled his eyes at him then looked back at Flaxley.)

DEREK: Anyway, as I was saying, I was wondering... what was that delicious meat you were keeping in the kitchen? I want to get some when I get back to Guevina.

(Flaxley and Kritz looked at one another in bewilderment.)

FLAXLEY: There was meat in the kitchen?

KRITZ: The only meat we've got at the moment is the chickens out in the backyard.

(Derek mused outwardly.)

DEREK: What did Mandika reckon it was?

(He looked enlightened.)

DEREK: Rabbit! That's it. Mandika said it was probably rabbit. I just want to be sure. I'll be getting some more of that stuff, it was lovely.

(Flaxley and Kritz looked to one another in bewilderment.)

FLAXLEY: Rabbit meat?

(Kritz chuckled.)

KRITZ: The only rabbits in the kitchen are Faith, Hope and Charity, our pets.

(They both laughed.)

FLAXLEY: I hope you didn't eat *them*.

(At once, their faces dropped and they both turned pale.)

KRITZ: Oh god no.

FLAXLEY: You don't think...

(With that, they both raced into the house leaving a horrified Derek trembling in the coachman's seat. Moments later two shrill screams echoed out from inside the house and sent the birds spraying into the skies from out of all the nearby treetops. Seconds later, the furious Flaxley and Kritz raced outside the house turning the air blue with a torrent of alien related death threats. Once they reached the street however, they could only watch and fume as the coach disappeared into the distance, travelling at a devil's pace. Watching it go, Kritz's nostrils flared and her eye twitched.)

KRITZ: I'll kill him.

(Flaxley sighed ruefully.)

FLAXLEY: Idiot, alien.

(He shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: Having said that, I told you it was dumb idea to keep their hutch in the kitchen.
(Kritz was far from happy with his comment and rounded on him immediately.)

KRITZ: Oh, so it's my fault now is it?

FLAXLEY: No, I'm just saying how it's understandable that Derek mistook them for food.
(He looked to one side and mumbled.)

FLAXLEY: If you'd just moved them into the living room like I suggested...

KRITZ: I'm gonna clobber you in a minute!

(Just then little Phisele appeared behind them holding some carrots and lettuce leaves.)

PHISELE: Hiya!

(They both slowly turned to face her wearing cheesy grins. Phisele's heart immediately sunk.)

PHISELE: Oh no, you've got your patronising faces on.

(She sighed.)

PHISELE: I hate being a little kid.

(Kritz knelt before her and kept up her fake smile.)

KRITZ: Listen sweetheart, we won't need you to come over and feed the rabbits anymore.

(Flaxley grinned down at her and nodded.)

FLAXLEY: That's right, they've gone to a better place, you see.

(Phisele gave them a condescending glance.)

PHISELE: The alien ate them, didn't it? I'm not stupid. They've been missing for days and there were animal carcasses in the waste barrel.

(Flaxley and Kritz looked at her wearing clearly fake innocent expressions.)

KRITZ: No, not at all.

FLAXLEY: He'd never do that.

PHISELE: Whatever. I'm still fired, aren't I?

(She then threw her arms in the air and wandered back to her house.)

PHISELE: I've lost my dad and my job all in the space of two days. I'll just have to go on the game to help mum make ends meet. Life sucks.

(As they watched her go Flaxley and Kritz shared a troubled glance.)

KRITZ: Six years old and already she sounds just like Bonson.

FLAXLEY: Hmm... disturbing, isn't it?

(They shared a saddened sigh then both wandered back to the house.)

KRITZ: Sex?

FLAXLEY: Definitely.

(He gave her a cheeky smile and chuckled to himself.)

FLAXLEY: Stupid question really, of course I want sex. I didn't fret for days on end about how about I was going to save you because I was missing your conversation.

(He stopped and spammed his forehead as Kritz continued on into the house.)

KRITZ: Just talked your way out of a good thing there, didn't you?

(As she went inside he looked to the heavens and sighed to himself.)

FLAXLEY: Why, gods, why? Why curse me with a sense of humour?

(He then kicked his heels and wandered into the house.)

FLAXLEY: Idiot.

(And so the Tale of Tifaeris was written. A tale that would span many centuries, becoming folk lore and the subject of many a future song. Upon returning to Guevina the following day with Bonson, Derek and Mandika, Lefiat once again received a hero's welcome. Due to the king's spies making the mistake of misidentifying him, he was given credit for all Flaxley's efforts in saving Tifaeris from the Trepe army. At once, his legend escalated. Delighting in his hero status, he never did question the king's lies regarding the shoe of Dero. As far as he was concerned, if his reputation was going to grow with every false mission, he was happy to

keep taking them.

Within a month of the victory over Dim Lee and the Tang Yul, in Tifaeris town square, a monument was built to the heroes who laid down their lives to give their loved ones the chance of a brighter future.

It was thanks to these brave few that, instead of being wiped from the map, Tifaeris grew into a sprawling metropolis. At one time or another, for centuries to come, you could guarantee every citizen would be told... The Tale of Tifaeris.)

THE END.

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