

Futile Fantasy Creations Presents...

FUTILE FANTASY THREE

THE QUEST FOR ZANNE

(The picturesque town of Tifaeris at night was a joy to behold. The sight of its tree-lined thoroughfares and quaint log cabins illuminated by a silvery moon was enough to take your breath away. With a backdrop of lush green hills and a river winding through its heart, the element of moonlight only added to its already idyllic charm. With a cooling breeze taking the edge off of the balmy temperatures, Tifaeris at night truly was a wonderful place to be. All in all, it was easy to see why Tifaeris had become a magnet to many settlers in search of a nicer place to live.

One particularly warm summer's night everything inside the walls of the town were dormant. No lanterns burnt in any dwelling and all was still, except for the old fisherman who spent his nights down on the beach, revelling in the peacefulness of it all and Derek, the three foot tall green alien from the planet Tryme 17. Sitting on the porch of his good friend's, Kritz and Flaxley's home, he looked bored rigid. Having arrived in town from Guevina earlier in the day with Princess Mandika, Sir Lefiat and retired butler, Bonson, he'd barely got to say hello before everyone headed straight to bed. Unfortunately for him, humans needed to sleep a lot more than he did and more often than not he'd find himself alone at night trying to escape from boredom.

As he sat in the moonlight sipping from a grail of fruit juice, his mind started to wander. He thought back to the last time the four of them paid a visit to Tifaeris, exactly one year ago. Disaster had struck and along with his five friends, he'd managed to save the town from not one but two evil aggressors. It had been an eventful visit to say the least. He then pictured the princess' joyous expression as they left their home city, Guevina, for *this* break in the sunshine and smiled to himself. Only a few short years ago, he'd crash-landed on this planet, and he couldn't stop thinking how lucky he was to have made such good friends so quickly.

As the night wore on and his five friends continued to sleep soundly in the house, however, he started to grow more than a little restless. He'd already been to chat to the fisherman and he was hardly a conversationalist. Bored out of his mind, he stood up and let out a huge sigh before heading down the steps in front of the house. He had no destination in mind, he just wanted to take a walk to relieve the boredom. And so, with a shrug he headed towards the Tifaeris monument in the centre of town, when he thought he heard a familiar voice and stopped dead in his tracks.)

DEREK: Z-Zanne?

(He stood there feeling a little shocked for a moment, then shrugged and walked on thinking he'd imagined things. Seconds later, however, he heard the voice again.)

DEREK: Zanne, is that you???

(His face bore an expression of shocked delight and he looked around to see where the voice was coming from. Expectantly, he turned full circle in the darkness but much to his dismay, he saw nothing but the silent, empty township around him.)

DEREK: Where are you?

(For almost a minute, he looked about himself awaiting a reply. Sadly, however, the reply never came. Bitterly disappointed by the lack of a response, he shook his head then dropped his shoulders before resuming his walk towards the monument.)

DEREK: I must be losing my mind!

(As he trudged along feeling dejected, however, the voice entered his head quite clearly. At once, he stood rigid and listened intensely with joy emblazoned across his face.)

DEREK: Okay, I'm coming Zanne!

(With that, he about turned and raced towards the town gates. Overwhelmed with joy he then sprinted through them mumbling excitedly as he went.)

DEREK: I'm coming right now, Zanne, I'm coming!

(He then continued on into the moonlight until he eventually disappeared into the darkness over the horizon.)

(Shortly after the sun rose on the following morning, Flaxley, Kritz, Mandika, Lefiat and Bonson found themselves sitting down to breakfast around the table in the main room of Flaxley and Kritz's home. For the hosts this was a great chance to entertain their friends and show off the extensions they'd made to their beautiful home.

As they tucked into their bowls of nutritious fruit and sipped their coffee at the large wooden table they all chatted happily, except a somewhat distracted Bonson who was admiring the sword which Flaxley had mounted upon the wall.)

KRITZ: Derek's coffee's gonna go cold!

LEFIAT: Where is he anyway?

MANDIKA: Perhaps he went fishing in the night!

KRITZ: Well I hope he comes back soon!

FLAXLEY: Don't worry about, Derek, my love. He came here for a week of rest and relaxation and if he's found something to do, then good for him. That's what holidays are all about, after all!

(He then glanced to one side and sneered.)

FLAXLEY: Besides, at least while he's out we know nobody's devouring our pets.

(Kritz cringed.)

KRITZ: Don't.

(She then shrugged.)

KRITZ: Anyway, he apologised for that a million times and he *did* replace them.

FLAXLEY: True, don't worry. I won't mention it again.

(He mumbled to himself.)

FLAXLEY: Not to his face, anyway.

KRITZ: Still, I wonder where he went.

FLAXLEY: Could be anywhere, but I'm sure he's enjoying himself wherever he is.

KRITZ: True! He'll turn up when he's ready, I guess.

BONSON: Quite! He'll come back when *he* wants to, as is his right as a grown alien. He's not a child, he's an adult! And adults should be allowed to *go* wherever they bloody well please!

(He then glared at Mandika. Caring very little for his disdainful glance, Mandika just raised a cold eyebrow at him.)

MANDIKA: Whatever, Bonson. Sure, you can go wherever you like when you're on your own, but I'll not have you stopping at a brothel while you're with *me*!

BONSON: That wasn't a brothel, it was an inn!

MANDIKA: Madame Zuzu's boudoir doesn't sound like an inn to me!

BONSON: Look, it *was* an inn and I was thirsty! And even so, I'm 60 years old, I should be able to do as I jolly well please!

MANDIKA: No, like I said, when you're alone... fine, do what you like! But when you're

travelling with me, we'll go wherever *I* say we go! And anyway, how could you have been thirsty? You'd only just had six ales when we stopped two hours earlier!

(Flaxley smiled.)

FLAXLEY: Eventful journey was it?

MANDIKA: Yes! We would have been here a lot earlier if it wasn't for him trying to pull into every inn, pub and knocking shop we happened to pass!

(Bonson looked offended.)

BONSON: Hey, it's not my fault we got here so late!!! *You're* the one who insisted taking the long route!

MANDIKA: I told you, cutting through the forest can be dangerous!

BONSON: Yes, but so is crossing the plains! At least the forest has a road running through it... a road with a quaint little rest stop on it, in fact!

(Mandika looked at him blankly for a moment then rolled her eyes.)

MANDIKA: So that's why...

(She then furrowed her brow.)

MANDIKA: I can't believe you're still complaining about that. It's not like you could have gone in the rest stop anyway! Shortly after we were done arguing about which road to take, you fell into a drunken sleep until we got here.

BONSON: I did not!!!

MANDIKA: Yes you did!

BONSON: I was resting my eyes!

MANDIKA: You were snoring!!!

(Bonson glared at her angrily then folded his arms.)

BONSON: I don't have to justify myself to you, I'm a wise man, you know!

(Mandika rolled her eyes.)

MANDIKA: So you keep saying!

FLAXLEY: Look, let's not argue, eh? You're here now, that's all that matters!

BONSON: Quite!

MANDIKA: Silly old fool!

(Bonson gave her a disdainful look then pointed to the sword on the wall.)

BONSON: Anyway... that's a splendid piece of weaponry you've got mounted up there, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: Yes, it is! Kritz aside, it's my prize possession.

KRITZ: I'm your possession??? You think you *own* me???

(Flaxley looked to her and grinned.)

FLAXLEY: Well... when you read your vows, you *did* say everything you are, you give to me unconditionally.

KRITZ: I didn't mean it literally!!! It was just romantic wedding day twaddle, you know that! *You* told *me*, you'd fly to the moon and back for just one kiss, for pity's sake.

(Flaxley rolled his eyes at her.)

FLAXLEY: Don't get angry, Kritz, of course I don't think I own you. I was joking!

KRITZ: You'd better have been!

FLAXLEY: Of course I was! Didn't you see my whimsical grin?

KRITZ: Yeah, but you grin like that when you're being conceited too.

FLAXLEY: Yes well... even so... look, never mind that...

(With that, he shook his head then looked to Bonson.)

FLAXLEY: Where were we?

BONSON: Well, I was going to ask about that sword you've got up there, but now I'd rather discuss what on earth possessed you to write something so ridiculous in your vows. Fly to the moon?

(Flaxley glared at him coldly.)

FLAXLEY: For your own safety, Bonson, I suggest you stick to asking about the sword!

BONSON: We can come back to that...

FLAXLEY: Bonson! We can either discuss the sword or I can stab you to death with it, pick one!

(Bonson looked to him uneasily for a moment then gestured to the sword and grinned innocently.)

BONSON: Such a pretty sword. Let's talk about *that* for a while.

FLAXLEY: Good idea.

(Bonson continued to grin at Flaxley for a few moments then looked to the sword with a serious expression upon on his brow.)

BONSON: Cowardly backtracking aside, that really *is* a pretty sword.

FLAXLEY: Yes, yes it is.

BONSON: So, what is it exactly?

(Lefiat looked utterly bewildered by the question.)

LEFIAT: It's a weapon, obviously!

BONSON: I know that, you gibbon, I mean what *kind* of sword is it? Does it have a story behind it?

(Thoroughly bored already, Mandika rolled her eyes.)

MANDIKA: Must you discuss weapons?

KRITZ: Boys will be boys, Mandika!

MANDIKA: Aint that the truth!

KRITZ: I tell you what, while they bore the world with their weapon talk, I'll show you the extension we're building. We're putting in a third bedroom above the new guest room. We've built quite a lot since the last time you were here.

(Mandika looked to her blankly and rolled her eyes.)

MANDIKA: Whoopee! The excitement.

KRITZ: Then what *do* you wanna do?

(Mandika shrugged.)

MANDIKA: I dunno. We could always go and look for Derek, I suppose. Anything's better than listening to them discussing swords and looking at half built rooms.

KRITZ: Okay! Let's do that then.

(With that, Kritz upped and headed for the door.)

KRITZ: I fancy some fresh air anyway.

(Finding the idea of a morning walk very much appealing, Mandika swiftly rose from her seat then minced after her.)

MANDIKA: Me too.

(As the two ladies bid the men farewell and left the house, neither Flaxley, Bonson nor Lefiat even acknowledged them. Flaxley had begun describing the sword and he had Bonson and Lefiat's full attention.)

FLAXLEY: It's called, 'The Sword of Friendship' and it was made over a century ago by the king of Ashrin's personal blacksmith! I acquired it from the elder. When he gave up his post as leader of Tifaeris last year, everyone decided to put me in charge, you see. That sword has become a symbol of the leader's position within the community, passed down from leader to leader. Like a badge of office, I suppose. So now I've got it.

BONSON: I see.

(He looked over the sword once more then puffed out in awe.)

BONSON: That blacksmith was a damn fine craftsman; I have to say, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: One of the best, they say!

BONSON: Look at the detailed gilding on the handle, and the engraving is so intricate.

FLAXLEY: Quality craftsmanship, Bonson.
BONSON: Quite! So... is it heavy?
FLAXLEY: Immensely so! You could never use it in battle!
(Bonson nodded approvingly.)
BONSON: Good, it's too beautiful an object to take into battle anyway!
(Lefiat looked consummately baffled.)
LEFIAT: But... it's a sword!
BONSON: Indeed it is, Lefiat. Once again you've proven your observation skills are second to none.
LEFIAT: But what's the point of a sword that's too heavy to use in battle?
FLAXLEY: It's symbolic Lefiat!
LEFIAT: Symbolic?
BONSON: Yes, like how your gormless face is symbolic of what a pillock you are, Lefiat!
FLAXLEY: Bonson!
BONSON: Sorry, Flaxley, but he's just so annoying. Anything of ornamental value is completely lost on him!
LEFIAT: What does that mean?
(Flaxley rolled his eyes.)
FLAXLEY: Look, Lefiat, it's simple. About a hundred years ago this sword was made as a gift from the monarchy of Ashrin to the leader of Tifaeris. It's not for going into battle with, it's a symbol of friendship between the two townships!
(Lefiat looked enlightened.)
LEFIAT: Right!
(His enlightened expression, however, soon faded.)
LEFIAT: Then how come *you* 've got it?
FLAXLEY: I just told you. I'm the leader of Tifaeris!
LEFIAT: Yeah, but a hundred years ago you weren't!
(As Flaxley and Bonson stared at him despairingly, Lefiat shrugged defensively.)
LEFIAT: What? You weren't! So how *did* you end up with it? That's all I'm asking.
(Flaxley just stared at him in defeat.)
FLAXLEY: You don't fucking listen, do you?
BONSON: Things go in one ear and out the other with him.
LEFIAT: Eh? I was only asking
(Flaxley rolled his eyes.)
FLAXLEY: I'm not going to repeat myself, Lefiat. Shall we go and find the ladies, Bonson?
BONSON: Yes, Flaxley, we shall!
(With that, they turned away from Lefiat and headed for the door. Feeling somewhat aggrieved by the coldness towards him, Lefiat followed on coyly, pouting at the floor.)
LEFIAT: I was only asking...
BONSON: Well don't!

(As Flaxley, Bonson and Lefiat made their way into the town looking for them, Kritz and Mandika stepped from the grassy slope that led down towards the sea and onto the deserted sandy beach. Even at this early hour, the sun was high and the sea was giving off the most refreshing breeze. Revelling in the sensation of warm sunlight on her face, Mandika smiled and looked to Kritz as they headed across the sand, towards the calm sea.)

MANDIKA: What a glorious day!
KRITZ: Yeah, it's not bad.
(Mandika gave her a sideways glance.)

MANDIKA: Not bad?

KRITZ: Yeah, it's nice out in the sun like this, but it's still a bit too chilly in the shade for my liking.

MANDIKA: Chilly?

(She sighed.)

MANDIKA: I guess it depends what you're used to. Guevina's kinda windy and we hardly ever have hot days like this, so to me this is a scorcher.

(She smiled.)

MANDIKA: You're so lucky living here.

KRITZ: Says the girl who lives in a castle.

MANDIKA: Yeah, a castle in a cold country! Well, maybe not cold, summers are quite nice, I guess, but nothing like this.

KRITZ: Even so, you live in a castle, Mandika. You have people attending to your every need. There's no way you'd swap that to live here.

MANDIKA: True, but... even so... I kind of envy you in a way.

KRITZ: Yeah?

MANDIKA: I don't envy your appalling dress sense, of course. Or your many other faults.

(Unsurprisingly, Kritz was livid.)

KRITZ: Excuse me??? What faults???

MANDIKA: Don't get uppity, Kritz. It's not your fault you're an illiterate slob, most peasants are.

KRITZ: I'm gonna slap you in a minute!!!

(Mandika reeled back from her and whimpered.)

MANDIKA: Don't be like that... I was just about to list all the things that I *do* envy about you.

(Kritz snarled.)

KRITZ: Yeah? Go on then! And make it good or I'll slap you into oblivion, missy!

(Mandika wiped sweat from her brow and offered her a cheesy grin.)

MANDIKA: It *will* be good. I envy you so, so much.

KRITZ: Because?

MANDIKA: Well, you're... you have nice hair!

KRITZ: And?

MANDIKA: You want more???

KRITZ: Much more!

(As Kritz pounded her fist, Mandika looked to her in horror for a moment then sighed.)

MANDIKA: Fine, you're really pretty, okay? There, I said it.

KRITZ: Yes, I am. I have nice boobies too. Awesome in fact.

(Mandika rustled her neck uncomfortably.)

MANDIKA: So they say, yeah.

KRITZ: I've got nice legs too.

(Mandika furrowed her brow.)

MANDIKA: Yeah, fine, whatever. You're really pretty!

(She then looked away and mumbled.)

MANDIKA: Really pretty for a short arse, anyway.

KRITZ: I'm not deaf, Mandika!!!

(Scared witless, Mandika immediately leant away and whimpered again.)

MANDIKA: I was kidding!!!

KRITZ: No you weren't. You were being horrible. And anyway, you're what? Two inches taller than me? Big deal! I'm better looking than you *and* I could kick your arse to kingdom come without even breaking a sweat! You *should* envy me!

(Fearing Kritz's rage might well end in violence, Mandika trembled.)

MANDIKA: And I do!!!

(She then sighed and hung her head.)

MANDIKA: I actually really do.

(As Kritz paced at her side giving her a distrusting glance, Mandika shook her head then shared her sorrows with her.)

MANDIKA: You can come and go as you please. You can do whatever you like. There's no protocol telling you what you can say and where you can go. You're free. And unlike me, you can be with the one you love whenever you want to. That I really, really *do* envy.

(Taking pity on her, Kritz let go of her anger and smiled.)

KRITZ: Feeling a bit trapped are you, babe?

MANDIKA: Yeah... kind of. I mean, don't get me wrong, I love being a princess, the gods know, I really do. It's just... it's frustrating.

KRITZ: In what way?

MANDIKA: You and Flaxley can be together whenever you want, you know, in a physical sense.

KRITZ: You mean like fucking and that?

(Mandika gave her a belittling glance.)

MANDIKA: Remember those faults I mentioned?

KRITZ: What?

MANDIKA: Never mind. Yes, as in making love. You and Flaxley can do it whenever you want to. Lefiat and I... we don't have that freedom.

KRITZ: No?

MANDIKA: No. I'm an unmarried princess and he's my knight. There are rules.

KRITZ: Then break them.

MANDIKA: We do but... it's not easy. My dad makes sure Lefiat is out of my room at night and posts guards on the door so he can't sneak in and I can't sneak out. And under Guevina law, a princess' personal knight has to be back in his own quarters by nine o'clock every night. That's a new law my dad created especially for Lefiat.

KRITZ: Wow, that sucks.

MANDIKA: It *really* sucks. We have to sneak romantic moments whenever we can, you know? Whatever chance we can get to meet up, away from prying eyes. My father's really paranoid about it. Before we set out on this trip, he physical checked my chastity belt was fitted and locked personally! He never used to be that thorough. He even made Derek swear on his life he'd only let me take it off when I needed the toilet. Derek took it off for me just outside Guevina and he'll lock it back up for me just before we get back, but still... that's not the point. My dad is leaving no stone unturned when it comes to keeping Lefiat and I apart in a romantic sense.

KRITZ: Damn. Still, with the risk of getting caught... you know, the thrill of danger, an' all... that must be an added turn on, surely.

MANDIKA: Knowing my boyfriend will be castrated or hanged if we get caught is hardly a turn on, Kritz. Quite the opposite. We have sex in fear! It's not fair.

KRITZ: Still, at least you've got a week here in Tifaeris to make up for lost time, eh?

MANDIKA: Oh, absolutely. Last night was awesome. Thanks for making Bonson sleep in the living room, rather than bunking with Lefiat and I in the new room, by the way.

KRITZ: Actually, that was *his* choice.

MANDIKA: Well, whatever. It was nice. We hadn't had sex with one another for almost a month until last night.

(Kritz looked horrified.)

KRITZ: A month??? I could never go without sex for *that* long, I'd die!!!

(Mandika looked to her and nodded forcefully.)

MANDIKA: I know, right? The longest I've ever gone is a week and *that* was torture.

KRITZ: But you just said you hadn't been with Lefiat for a month!

(At once, Mandika's eyes bugled and she stared at Kritz, gaping in horror.)

MANDIKA: Yeah, but... right... what I meant was...

KRITZ: Mandika? Have you been doing the filthy with your guards or something?

(Desperate to look shocked by the accusation, Mandika frowned furiously.)

MANDIKA: What a ridiculous thing to say!

KRITZ: Was it though?

MANDIKA: Yes!

(She nodded firmly.)

MANDIKA: I can honestly say that in the last two years, I've never had sex with anyone except my sworn protector.

KRITZ: Aren't the entire army sworn to protect you, though?

MANDIKA: Shut up!!!

(As Kritz glared at her coldly, Mandika sighed then offered her an apologetic smile.)

MANDIKA: I didn't mean to shout.

(She then whimpered and looked to the sand as it passed beneath her feet.)

MANDIKA: It's all been a huge misunderstanding and I deny everything, so can we change the subject?

(Kritz offered her half a smile and shrugged.)

KRITZ: Sure.

MANDIKA: Thank you.

KRITZ: Though if you want to talk about it...

MANDIKA: Nothing to talk about, you clearly misunderstood but I'm willing to overlook that and move on.

(Kritz gave her a sarcastic glance.)

KRITZ: How kind of you.

MANDIKA: Well, you know me.

KRITZ: Right.

MANDIKA: You might annoy me with your crass and uncouth ways, but despite your lack of class, Kritz, I consider you my friend. My best friend actually, so I'll let it go.

(Kritz furrowed her brow at her.)

KRITZ: Thanks! I'm honoured.

MANDIKA: Well, it's the least I can do. You're always honest with me and you understand the importance of having nice hair. That makes you pretty special in my eyes.

(She then looked to the sky again and exhaled.)

MANDIKA: That's why I didn't mind letting you have Flaxley.

(Far from impressed with her words, Kritz glared at her accordingly.)

KRITZ: Excuse me? You *let* me have him?

MANDIKA: Of course. You're a commoner, there's no way you could have competed with my greatness but seeing as you wanted him so badly, I decided not to fight for him.

(Kritz stopped walking and stared at her in disbelief as she paced on towards where the sea met the shore.)

KRITZ: Unbelievable.

MANDIKA: I know, right? And yet that's what I did. Selfless to the end.

(She exhaled.)

MANDIKA: I'm a good person. I reckon that's why we get on so well.

(Kritz shook her head and mumbled to herself.)

KRITZ: It's going to be a long week.

(With that, she sighed then proceeded to pace forth to catch Mandika up. Moments later, the two of them arrived at the edge of the sea and watched the tide gently wash up towards their feet then roll away again.)

MANDIKA: This beach is so big. I love it.

KRITZ: It's not always like this; the tide's out. By this afternoon, this bit will be several feet below the water.

MANDIKA: I see.

(As they both stood there, revelling in the gentle breeze and the glow of the warm morning sun, Mandika looked thoughtful.)

MANDIKA: Oh...

(She chuckled.)

MANDIKA: I just realised something. We were supposed to be looking for Derek.

(She shrugged.)

MANDIKA: You were talking so much, I plain forgot.

KRITZ: Me???

(Mandika smiled.)

MANDIKA: Don't feel bad. I'm sure Derek's fine.

KRITZ: Why would *I* feel bad???

(She then rolled her eyes and gestured to the sea.)

KRITZ: Look, forget that. Seeing as it's a reasonably nice day, let's have a swim!

MANDIKA: We're not dressed for swimming, Kritz. You're not dressed for anything really... well, soliciting maybe.

KRITZ: Hey!

MANDIKA: What? I'm just saying. Never mind. Let's go and find Derek. If you want a swim you can come back later wearing the appropriate attire.

(She then looked sheepishly from side to side.)

MANDIKA: That's assuming you know what appropriate attire is.

(Kritz scowled at her bitterly.)

KRITZ: Of course I do.

(She then grinned from ear to ear.)

KRITZ: And the appropriate attire for swimming is... as nature intended.

(Mandika looked horrified.)

MANDIKA: What??? You can't do that!!!

(Kritz gave her a sideways glance.)

KRITZ: No? Watch me!

(As Kritz started to lift her top, Mandika's hair almost stood on end and she raised her voice angrily.)

MANDIKA: What are you doing??? Stop that!!!

(Annoyed at being yelled at, Kritz stopped undressing and furrowed her brow.)

KRITZ: Why should I?

MANDIKA: Because someone might see, obviously!!!

(Kritz scoffed.)

KRITZ: Oh yeah, like who?

MANDIKA: Whoever passes by!!!

KRITZ: There's no bugger here, Mandika, it's first thing in the morning! There never is.

(As Kritz once again went to peel her top off, Mandika flapped angrily.)

MANDIKA: Stop it! There might be people about!!!

KRITZ: The only person here is you, Mandika!!! Bloody prude!

MANDIKA: But if someone comes...

KRITZ: They won't!

(Mandika snarled.)

MANDIKA: Look, stop undressing! It's embarrassing enough being seen out with you in those slutty rags you call clothes, there's *no way* I'm gonna be seen with you strutting about naked!!!

(Fed up with Mandika's protests, Kritz pulled her top back down and growled.)

KRITZ: Look, if you're that worried about it then you'll just have to keep look out, won't you? I'm taking my clothes off whether you like it or not!

MANDIKA: No, you're not!

KRITZ: Yes, I am!!! You can't tell *me* what to do

MANDIKA: Yes I can! I'm a princess!!!

(She then ruffled her neck indignantly.)

MANDIKA: And let's face it, you're just a common nobody, so do as you're told!

(Infuriated by Mandika's comment, Kritz replied through gritted teeth.)

KRITZ: I'm sick of you saying crap like that to me! I'll do what I like and if you don't like it you can sod off.

(With that, she started to pull her top up angrily.)

MANDIKA: Don't!!!

(Determined to get her way, Mandika reached forward and started to pull it back down.)

MANDIKA: Keep it on!

KRITZ: No! Get off me or I'll break your bleeding nose!

(As they continued to wrestle with the top, they were completely oblivious to the fact that Flaxley, Bonson and Lefiat had arrived at the top of the beach. Spotting the ladies as soon as they set foot on the sand, they immediately started to run in their direction, yelling for them to stop fighting. Unfortunately however, they were making too much noise of their own to hear them.)

KRITZ: Get off of me, I mean it, bitch!

MANDIKA: No way! There's no way I'm gonna let you embarrass me! Unlike you, I have standards!!! I can't be seen out with some skinny dipping trollop!

(Not about to back down, Kritz pulled her top up as hard as she could but much to her annoyance, Mandika matched her determination and her top remained firmly in place.)

KRITZ: Get off!

MANDIKA: No!

(Looking furious, Kritz then grabbed the top of Mandika's dress.)

KRITZ: Fine, let's see how *you* like having your clothes pulled at then.

(With that, she proceeded to tug at Mandika's cleavage. Infuriated by her actions, Mandika squirmed and bellowed at her furiously.)

MANDIKA: Unhand me, peasant!!!

KRITZ: Unhand me first, you stuck up cow!

(With Mandika and Kritz getting angrier and angrier by the second, violence seemed inevitable. Well aware that this could only mean bad things for Mandika's teeth, Flaxley continued to bellow out at them as he raced forth with Bonson and Lefiat.)

FLAXLEY: You two!!! Stop that!!!

(As his voice finally reached the two battling ladies, Mandika immediately stopped struggling and stared at Flaxley in bewilderment. Having not heard him, however, Kritz continued to yank at Mandika's dress. Before the stunned princess could even begin to react, the dress whooshed down her body and Kritz went sprawling to the sand with it. As soon as she landed, she immediately glanced up in horror at the sight of the mortified Mandika standing there in front of the approaching men with only her knickers and shoes on.)

KRITZ: Whoops!

(As Bonson turned away and hid his face, Mandika let out an anguished scream then ran as

fast as she possibly could into the sea. Utterly bemused it all, Flaxley and Lefiat watched her go with baffled expressions on their faces, while Kritz knelt upon the sand, giggling.)

LEFIAT: What's that all about, Flaxley?

(He sighed.)

LEFIAT: Why do women do these strange things? I don't understand them one bit!

BONSON: Never mind that. Is it safe to look yet?

FLAXLEY: Yeah, she's crouching in the sea.

BONSON: Thank heavens.

(Having reached Kritz, Flaxley looked down to where she was kneeling and furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: I thought you two were supposed to be friends!

KRITZ: Yeah, so did I!

FLAXLEY: Then why did you pull her dress off?

(Kritz furrowed her brow at him.)

KRITZ: Hey, don't blame *me*, this is all *her* fault! I was just trying to take my clothes off and she got in my way!

FLAXLEY: So you pulled *her* dress off???

KRITZ: Yeah... that how it ended up, I guess.

(She shrugged.)

KRITZ: It's funny how things work out sometimes, isn't it?

(With that, she climbed to her feet, threw the dress to Bonson then headed back down the beach.)

KRITZ: Anyway, I'm going home, my love. I've had enough of her for one morning. I'll explain what happened later.

FLAXLEY: Right you are, darling.

(As Kritz paced away, Bonson exhaled lovingly at the sight of her leather clad hips swaying forth then turned to face Lefiat.)

BONSON: Lefiat, go and take Mandika's dress to her, will you?

LEFIAT: Why me?

BONSON: Well, you are her man, old chap!

(He then handed Lefiat the dress.)

LEFIAT: Okay!

(As Lefiat took the dress, Bonson looked to him and smiled warmly.)

BONSON: I use the term 'man' loosely of course!

LEFIAT: Oh, shut up, grandad!

(Bonson was extremely narked.)

BONSON: Hey! I might be old, but I'm certainly not related to you!!!

(Satisfied he'd said his piece, he then paced away, back towards town.)

BONSON: Let's leave them to it.

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Good idea.

(With that, Flaxley turned and paced after Bonson, leaving Lefiat with the task of taking Mandika her dress. Having always been utterly terrified of the sea, the unfortunate lad in question watched them go and turned very pale. Trembling, he then turned to face where Mandika was crouching in two feet of water.)

LEFIAT: Aw, crap.

(With fear in his eyes, he gulped and placed a tentative toe into the sea and shuddered all over.)

LEFIAT: I'm scared.

(He withdrew his toe and a chill run down his spine.)

MANDIKA: What on earth are you doing, Lefiat?

(Not wanting to look a fool, he waved at her and forced a smile.)

LEFIAT: Um... coming.

(Knowing he had no choice but to force himself to go in the sea, he puffed out and remembered some advice Flaxley had once offered him. Taking a long deep breath, he mumbled to himself repeatedly.)

LEFIAT: Face your fear, face your fear...

(With that, he waded out into the shallows.)

LEFIAT: I'm doing it, I'm doing it.

(He beamed with pride in his achievement when a piece of seaweed floated past his leg. Fearing for his life, he released a high pitched scream, threw the dress at Mandika then sprinted back to the beach.)

LEFIAT: Save me!!!

MANDIKA: Idiot!!!

(Safely on land, he spun round and watched Mandika grab her soaking dress out of the water.)

LEFIAT: Oh, crap, that's gonna cost me.

(Sure enough, Mandika was livid.)

MANDIKA: What the hell??? Stop being such a pansy.

(He was most offended.)

LEFIAT: I'm not a pansy, I just hate the sea! I'm all man, I'll have you know.

MANDIKA: Yeah, the way you just screamed like a girl then threw my dress like one was *very* manly.

(As Lefiat pouted, Mandika stomped out of the sea and stepped up to him.)

MANDIKA: Worst throw ever! Now my dress is soaked.

(She then whimpered.)

MANDIKA: And I'm practically naked in full view of everyone. So bloody embarrassing.

(Lefiat averted his gaze and grimaced.)

LEFIAT: Yeah, alright... just put your dress on, will you?

MANDIKA: What do you *think* I'm doing?

(As she squelched her body into the soaking wet dress, she glanced and the squirming Lefiat and sneered bitterly.)

MANDIKA: Why are *you* looking away? *You're* allowed to look! I mean it's not like you've never seen my naked boobies before.

LEFIAT: Not in public, I haven't.

MANDIKA: What difference does that make? *You* can still look.

(He nervously turned to face her as she continued to slip into the sodden dress.)

LEFIAT: Why did she pull it down, anyway?

(He stared into her eyes, terrified to allow his gaze to drop.)

LEFIAT: That was just mean of her.

MANDIKA: She's a bitch, that's why! She's just horrible.

(Lefiat nodded solemnly.)

LEFIAT: So it would seem. If she wasn't ten times harder than me, I'd give her a piece of my mind.

MANDIKA: Like you have any to spare.

LEFIAT: Eh?

MANDIKA: Never mind.

(With that, she finished dressing and flicked back her hair, causing Lefiat to release a sigh of relief.)

LEFIAT: Thank heavens for that.

(Greatly annoyed by Lefiat's words, Mandika screwed her face up angrily.)

MANDIKA: Why are *you* so relieved that I'm dressed? Do you hate my body that much?

LEFIAT: No, I hate other people looking at it!!!

(He pouted and looked into her eyes.)

LEFIAT: I don't want men looking at you and thinking dirty thoughts.

MANDIKA: Well, that's what men do anyway, isn't it? Whether I'm naked or not.

LEFIAT: Maybe...

(He shrugged.)

LEFIAT: It's just, you're a beautiful woman and you have an amazing body, right...

(Mandika smiled and looked into his eyes.)

MANDIKA: Go on.

LEFIAT: But if some guy sees you naked that's *all* he'll think. Pretty woman, nice body. He won't respect you; he'll just have filthy thoughts. I hate the idea of anyone doing that. He won't even try to see the woman I see. He'll just see something sordid.

(Mandika looked stunned.)

MANDIKA: Wow, that really bothers you, does it?

LEFIAT: Yeah, of course it does.

MANDIKA: So...

(She tilted her head and gave him a coy smile.)

MANDIKA: When you say he won't see the woman *you* see... what *do* you see exactly?

LEFIAT: Hold on a sec, that was a really confusing sentence, give me a minute.

(He ran the sentence over his mind then scratched his head.)

LEFIAT: No, it's gone. What was the question?

(Mandika rolled her eyes.)

MANDIKA: When you see me, what do you see?

(He looked enlightened.)

LEFIAT: Oh... I see the woman who stood by me when Flaxley wanted to kill me. I see the woman who chose to make *me* happy despite having her pick of much better looking men...

(Mandika nodded.)

MANDIKA: Much, much better looking men.

LEFIAT: I see the woman who makes me feel like a man.

(Mandika was so moved she was almost in tears.)

MANDIKA: I love you so much, Lefiat.

LEFIAT: I love you too.

MANDIKA: I thought you might say you see the woman who moans at you all day, blames you for everything and makes you do all her chores.

(Lefiat scoffed.)

LEFIAT: Of course I see that but like I'd be stupid enough to say it.

(Immediately his hair stood on end and he started to sweat.)

LEFIAT: You're gonna shout at me now, aren't you?

(Much to his surprise, Mandika smiled.)

MANDIKA: No. After all, I *do* work you like a donkey, nag you and blame you for stuff. I can't deny it. But I also love you.

LEFIAT: Exactly. That's why I don't mind the other stuff.

(She took his arm and smiled.)

MANDIKA: Walk me back, darling. I need some dry clothes.

LEFIAT: Cool, okay.

(With that, he proceeded to lead her across the sand feeling wonderful inside.)

MANDIKA: You know, I'll never change. I'll always be on your case, insulting you and putting you down. It's just the way I am.

(Lefiat puffed out.)

LEFIAT: Yeah well, I'll always be a bumbling buffoon, that's the way *I* am.

MANDIKA: Guess we're stuck with each other then.

LEFIAT: I'm not complaining.

(They shared a warm smile then Mandika's brow furrowed.)

MANDIKA: Stupid Kritz, my dress is ruined and it's all her fault.

LEFIAT: Don't make yourself angry, Mandika, it'll spoil the moment.

MANDIKA: Fine, but I won't forgive her for this, you mark my words.

(Three full hours after midday had came and went again, Derek was still nowhere to be seen. Far from troubled by his absence, inside Flaxley and Kritz's home at this time, Mandika was still in a temper with Kritz and swearing revenge, while Lefiat was desperately trying to convince her not to upset Kritz for health reasons. The romantic moment had passed and they were back to being their normal selves. Enjoying their tomfoolery, Bonson sat watching them with much amusement as he made his way through several flagons of Flaxley's ale. Mandika's rage was such that she was bound to say something to incur Kritz's wrath and he wanted to be there to see it when she did. Unfortunately for him, however, he'd have to wait for the fireworks to commence as Kritz wasn't around to hear Mandika's angry ramblings. As she did on most afternoons, she was outside the front of the house giving the town's younger children a self defence lesson.

As Flaxley watched her from the porch, Kritz paced before her angelic group of children wearing a kind smile. Watching as they performed aggressive defensive hand movements, she nodded to herself then stopped pacing and stood tall.)

KRITZ: Very good, that's the way. You're all going to be big and strong when you grow up. (She beamed.)

KRITZ: Okay, that's enough for today!

(At once, all the children stopped what they were doing and stared at her attentively.)

KRITZ: Right, before you go home, children, what are the three rules of self defence again?

(As she placed her hand behind her ear in a gesture for the 10 or so children to speak, they all stood tall raised a clenched fist.)

CHILDREN: No doubts, no fear, no mercy!

(Delighted by their disciplined display, Kritz couldn't help but smile.)

KRITZ: Excellent, off you go then!

(At once, the children seemed to disperse all over town, except Kritz's favourite pupil, Phisele, who raced up to her and threw her arms around her legs.)

KRITZ: Hey, how's my special girl? Did you enjoy it today?

PHISELE: Of course I did. Thanks to you, I'm well tough. I could even beat my mum up if I wanted to!

(Kritz grimaced and scratched behind her head nervously.)

KRITZ: Um... well don't!

(Just then, Flaxley stepped from the porch and paced up to her with a smile on his face.)

FLAXLEY: They're really coming along, aren't they?

KRITZ: Of course. Great teacher Kritzeveltia at your service.

(Flaxley then started to chuckle.)

FLAXLEY: Though, you know... the three rules of self defence are actually; never be the one who starts a fight; be prepared for anything; and don't get hurt.

(Kritz furrowed her brow at him.)

KRITZ: Since when?

FLAXLEY: Since the knight's code was written.

KRITZ: I'm not a knight! I was taught to believe in myself, show no fear and always go for the kill.

(Flaxley chuckled.)

FLAXLEY: Yup, I've said it before and I'll say it again, you can take the girl out of the Trepe tribe but you can't take the Trepe tribe out of the girl.

(Utterly infuriated by his comment, Kritz grabbed him by the neck and snarled.)

KRITZ: What's that supposed to mean?

FLAXLEY: Well it *was* supposed to be a joke but judging by your reaction...

(With that, Kritz swiftly released his neck and chuckled.)

KRITZ: I'm kidding.

(She then offered him a cheesy grin and scratched behind her ear as her face started to turn red.)

KRITZ: I love you.

(As Kritz glanced away innocently, Flaxley chuckled to himself for a moment then looked skyward.)

FLAXLEY: Derek still isn't back, you know?

KRITZ: Well, unless he sprouted wings, you won't find him up there.

(Flaxley looked down at her and frowned.)

FLAXLEY: I know that. I was just wondering where he is!

(Just then, Phisele looked up nervously.)

PHISELE: Is Derek that alien who likes playing with my skipping rope?

(Flaxley and Kritz grinned at one another.)

FLAXLEY: The very same!

PHISELE: I'm not playing with *him* again, he hogged the skipping rope. I didn't even get to have a go!

(She sneered.)

PHISELE: That was really mean. Next time I see him, I'm gonna whoop him one!

KRITZ: Don't even think about it, Phisele! Your skills are for self defence; you can't just go hitting people because you don't like them.

PHISELE: But I really wanna bash him! And I can too! I'm hard now, thanks to you! I'm afraid of nothing!

(Just then, she screamed at the top of her lungs and fled back towards her house.)

PHISELE: Mum, hide my toys!!! Hide *me*!!! If anyone calls, I'm not in!!!

FLAXLEY: What the?

(Baffled by Phisele's panic, Flaxley and Kritz swiftly about turned to see what had made her react in such a way and saw Derek coming through the gate into town. Although he looked thoroughly worn out, he was seemingly overwhelmed with joy. Struggling forth with severely aching limbs, he strode up to them, beaming all over his little green face.)

DEREK: I'm going home chaps, I'm going home!!!

FLAXLEY: Home?

DEREK: To Tryme 17!!!

(Flaxley was sceptical.)

FLAXLEY: Right!

DEREK: I just came back to say thank you and goodbye to everyone!

(Kritz looked astonished.)

KRITZ: Wow! In that case I'll fetch the others!

(With that, she raced into the house.)

FLAXLEY: So... where have you been?

DEREK: Zanne has come for me!

FLAXLEY: Zanne?

DEREK: Yes, Zanne, my significant other, what you'd call a wife!

FLAXLEY: She came for you?

DEREK: She used her spacecraft to call to me telepathically from the East Grange Mountains!

FLAXLEY: You went all the way over there? That's miles away!

DEREK: Don't you think it was worth it?

FLAXLEY: No, I was just thinking, if she has a spacecraft she could have come to you.

DEREK: She didn't know where I was, Flaxley. And seeing as I left my spacecraft in my other trousers, I had no way to call back to her and let her know my location.

(Flaxley furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: Yeah, alright, there's no need for sarcasm.

DEREK: Sorry...

(He then bounced with joy.)

DEREK: Anyway, I couldn't just leave without saying farewell... I'm going home, Flaxley!

(Accepting his words, Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Well, we'll miss you old friend, but this is what you wanted!

(He smiled.)

FLAXLEY: So, are you going to introduce us to this wife of yours then?

(Derek looked stumped.)

DEREK: How? You're here and she's with the spacecraft over at the East Grange Mountains.

FLAXLEY: You left her there?

DEREK: Well yeah... I wanted to say goodbye before I left. Couldn't have you all worrying that I was eaten by a cuddyfinkle.

FLAXLEY: I'm confused, if she has a spacecraft, why didn't you just fly over here with her?

(Derek smiled.)

DEREK: It's not that simple, Flaxley. A spacecraft isn't like a carriage, you know. You can't just jump in and go for a spin. You have to do checks.

FLAXLEY: Checks?

DEREK: Yeah. She flew millions of miles to get here, Flaxley. A lot of wear and tear can happen over a journey that far.

FLAXLEY: Okay...

DEREK: So, after each long flight, and before you go on another, you have to re-check everything. You know, recalibrate the engines and such. The usual aeronautic safety procedures basically.

FLAXLEY: I see.

DEREK: You don't though, do you?

FLAXLEY: Well, how could I possibly?

DEREK: True. Put it this way, the old spacecraft that I gave you chaps a lift in a few years back, that was knackered so I used it as a carriage. It was only fit for that. The one Zanne is in though, different story. It's ready for spaceflight. You don't use a craft like that to travel from town to town. It gets checked, does a long trip through space, lands then gets thoroughly checked again. No little jaunts to visit friends in between.

FLAXLEY: Right, okay.

DEREK: So, anyway, I left Zanne to do the checks and came over here to say my farewells.

(He smiled.)

DEREK: Normally the checks are done by a team and they only take an hour, but it takes over 10 hours to do the checks on your own, so I figured while she was doing that, I'd use the time to say goodbye.

(Flaxley grinned.)

FLAXLEY: You buggered off and left her to do all the work?

(Derek shrugged innocently.)

DEREK: It's not as bad as it sounds, Flaxley. I'm a pilot, not a technician. As Melmero alluded to once, I'm not exactly gifted in the technical department. Anyway, she'll be fine. I doubt she wants me in the way while she's working, anyway.

FLAXLEY: Yeah, Kritz is the same when she's cooking. Won't let me in the kitchen.

DEREK: So you know.

FLAXLEY: Indeed.

(He then sighed and shook his head remorsefully.)

FLAXLEY: I can't believe you're leaving us, Derek. You'll be missed.

DEREK: Thanks, Flaxley. I appreciate that.

(At this point Kritz returned with a stunned looking Mandika, Lefiat and Bonson.)

BONSON: Is it true, Derek?

DEREK: Yes my friend, I'm going home! I'll miss you all, but I need to be with my people!

MANDIKA: Damn it, Derek. The castle won't seem the same without you!

(Lefiat started to sniff.)

LEFIAT: I hate farewells!

(He turned away and whimpered.)

DEREK: Worry not, Lefiat, I'll be okay!

(There was a sad silence for a few moments as they all reflected on their diminutive friends affect on their lives, then Derek spoke up determinedly.)

DEREK: Zanne is waiting at the East Grange Mountains! She's gone through a lot to get all the way to this planet, so I can't keep her waiting! Goodbye, my friends.

(With that, he held out his palm to shake Flaxley's hand.)

FLAXLEY: Actually, Derek...

DEREK: Yes?

FLAXLEY: Seeing as the royal carriage is here, why don't we give you a lift?

LEFIAT: What? To Tryme 17?

FLAXLEY: No, to the East Grange mountains, you idiot!!!

LEFIAT: Oh! Eh?

MANDIKA: Anyway, it's not *the* royal carriage, it's *my* royal carriage!

BONSON: Surely you don't begrudge him a lift, ma'am?

(They all looked directly at her and she felt the weight of their looks squashing her resolve.)

MANDIKA: Well... of course I don't... just ask next time!

BONSON: That's settled then.

(He then gave Derek and quizzical glance.)

BONSON: So... just out of curiosity, Derek, what happened exactly? How did your woman find you and... seeing as she did... why are you here while she's all the way over at the East Grange mountains?

DEREK: Flaxley will explain.

FLAXLEY: No, he won't. Couldn't if he wanted to.

DEREK: Right... well, she called me in the night using a mind reading device in the spacecraft.

(He beamed.)

DEREK: So, I went to meet her.

(He then shrugged.)

DEREK: Anyway, to cut a long story short, I just came back here to let you know I'm okay and to say goodbye.

BONSON: And you didn't bring her with you??? Or the spacecraft for that matter?

DEREK: Couldn't. Like I told Flaxley, it's not like a carriage. It's needs to be checked and recalibrated before every journey.

(He then grinned.)

DEREK: Well, that's not entirely true. If it was up to me, I *would* have flown it here with her, but Zanne's a stickler for the rules and regulations, you see. The craft is perfectly capable of being used as a transport from town to town, but regulation 19 forbids it, so she refused.

(He then grimaced with annoyance.)

DEREK: So I had to *walk* back here on my own. Took bloody ages.

BONSON: Women, eh?

MANDIKA: Hey!

KRITZ: Up yours, Bonson.

BONSON: No, no, Kritz. Up *your* sweet...

FLAXLEY: That sentence ends *now*!

BONSON: Quite.

DEREK: Anyway, now you know. I'm here and Zanne's doing the recalibrations as we speak.

BONSON: Right, so when you say recalibrations...

DEREK: I'll explain while we get the carriage ready. Let's go.

(Greatly saddened by the fact that Derek was soon to leave their lives forever, Bonson, Flaxley, Kritz, Mandika and Lefiat all felt a heavy weight upon their hearts. Losing him would be hard to bear. Despite their sadness however, they all knew how he missed his home and were genuinely happy for him. And so, rather than mourn his leaving, they opted to give their friend a helping hand and wasted no time in preparing the carriage and horses for the trip to the East Grange Mountains. Kritz even prepared some snacks to eat along the way.

As soon as preparations for the journey were complete, Flaxley locked up the house and joined Bonson atop the carriage. As he did so, Kritz, Mandika, Derek and finally Lefiat, clambered inside it.)

LEFIAT: Can I sit by the window?

(Having sat herself down next to Derek, Kritz gave Lefiat a belittling glance. The carriage had windows on both sides and two long seats which faced each other. Lefiat would have no choice *but* to sit by a window.)

KRITZ: There's four of us, how can you *not* sit by the window?

LEFIAT: Eh?

KRITZ: Four people, four corners, Lefiat. You'll be sitting by a window whether you like it or not.

(Derek chuckled as Lefiat sheepishly took a seat next to Mandika.)

DEREK: Maybe he thought we were going to put him in the storage compartment underneath the seat.

(Lefiat glared at Mandika.)

LEFIAT: It wouldn't be the first time.

(Mandika gave him a cold glance.)

MANDIKA: I already explained that. I was going to visit my cousin and didn't want to be seen with you.

KRITZ: Wow, that's really cruel.

MANDIKA: No it isn't. I have standards to maintain and that includes the company I keep.

LEFIAT: Hey!!!

MANDIKA: Look, I told her my knight was strong, handsome and brave, if I'd turned up with you she'd have known I was lying.

(Lefiat folded his arms and pouted out of the window.)

LEFIAT: You're mean.

DEREK: Don't be downhearted, Lefiat. You wanted a window seat and you got one. In fact we *all* did, so everything's turned out fine.

(Spotting that Derek was right, Lefiat beamed joyfully.)

LEFIAT: Cool, that worked out well then.

(Upon the roof of the carriage at this time, Bonson and Flaxley were carrying out a few last minute safety checks. A stickler for safety, Flaxley wouldn't be prepared to set off unless he was absolutely certain everything had been double-checked.)

FLAXLEY: Reins are secure enough. And you're sure the horses have been fed?

BONSON: They were fed just an hour ago, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: And watered?

BONSON: Of course.

FLAXLEY: And you double checked the couplings?

BONSON: Yes, yes, yes, don't worry, the carriage isn't going to come loose, overtake us and fly off a cliff any time soon.

(He chuckled.)

BONSON: Though it'd be bloody funny if it did.

(Flaxley glared at him coldly.)

FLAXLEY: My wife's in there, Bonson.

(He coughed back his laughter and nodded.)

BONSON: Quite. It'd be a tragedy.

(He grinned.)

BONSON: But could you imagine their faces if they came whizzing past us, completely out of control in a runaway carriage...

(He took one look at Flaxley then hid his face.)

BONSON: No, me either.

FLAXLEY: Are you done? Or do you have any other anecdotes regarding my wife's hilarious demise?

BONSON: No, I'm done.

FLAXLEY: Good. Let's go then.

(With that, he gripped the reins tight and stared dead ahead. Just as he was about to set the carriage in motion, however, a puff of white mist appeared on the grass before them. Fearing a witch attack, Flaxley immediately let go of the reins and reached for his sword.)

FLAXLEY: What the?

(As the mist wafted away, revealing the mystic wise man, Daman Siria, Flaxley slid his sword away and drew a sigh of relief.)

FLAXLEY: Oh, it's you. Hello there, Daman.

(Looking extremely excited, Daman forgot all about pleasantries and glanced up at Bonson enthusiastically.)

DAMAN: Bonson, come quickly, I have something to show you!

BONSON: You have?

(Bonson then furrowed his brow. No matter how many times he saw it, he knew he'd never get used to a person appearing out of thin air.)

BONSON: Can't you ring a bell or something before you materialise, Daman? You could give a man a heart attack suddenly appearing like that.

(Too involved in his own excitement to acknowledge Bonson's request, Daman paced

excitedly to the side of the coach and looked up to him wearing a triumphant smile.)
DAMAN: I've discovered the ability to accurately predict weather! Let me show you!
BONSON: Can it wait?
DAMAN: Wait? Didn't you hear what I said? I've discovered weather predicting!
BONSON: Daman, I need to do something important, can I see you afterwards?
(Daman looked cross.)
DAMAN: Okay, but it had better be important!
BONSON: Friendship *is* important to me! Derek's leaving and we're all going to see him off.
(Daman looked stunned.)
DAMAN: He's leaving?
BONSON: He's going back to his planet.
DAMAN: I see.
(He nodded and gave Bonson the thumbs up.)
DAMAN: Very well, in that case I'm coming with you!
(With that, he paced over to the carriage, swung open the door and clambered inside.)
DAMAN: Shift up, Lefiat!
(As Daman closed the door behind him, Flaxley and Bonson looked to one another, silently listening to Lefiat complain about how unfair it was that he was the only one without a window seat. Seconds later after an angry demand from Mandika, his complaints fell silent. Still looking at Bonson, Flaxley picked up the reins and raised an eyebrow.)
FLAXLEY: So, weather prediction, eh?
BONSON: Curiouser and curiouser, sir!
FLAXLEY: Indeed!
(With that, they both looked ahead and nestled into their seats.)
BONSON: Right, let's get going then! You know exactly where we're headed, I assume?
FLAXLEY: The foot of the East Grange Mountains. More specifically, Derek said we need to head for the one mile marker on the lower road and stop there.
BONSON: Then that's good enough for me. Let's go.
FLAXLEY: Indeed.
(With that, Flaxley flicked the reins to get the horses moving. Their journey was finally underway.)

(A short while later, as the carriage thundered across the plains en route to the East Grange mountains, Derek found himself very much the centre of attention. Trying desperately not to show any outward signs of her sadness at his leaving, Mandika was bombarding him with questions. It was she all could do not to burst out crying.)
MANDIKA: But what are you going to do once you get there? Where will you live???
DEREK: I'll live where I lived before, with my wife! As for what I'll do, I'll just go back to my old job, I suppose.
MANDIKA: What was that?
(Derek gave her a sideways glance.)
DEREK: I used to fly a spaceship, obviously.
(Mandika sucked her teeth.)
MANDIKA: Hmm... are you sure you want to go back to doing that? Clearly you weren't very good at it.
DEREK: What's that supposed to mean?
(He shook his head then threw his arms up in defeat.)
DEREK: You all assume I crashed on this planet because I made a mistake. For all you know the spaceship may have malfunctioned. Is that so hard to believe?

(Mandika pouted.)

MANDIKA: Don't be angry, Derek.

(Derek sighed.)

DEREK: I'm not... it's just, that's always bugged me.

MANDIKA: Well it shouldn't. We didn't *assume* you crashed, at all. Flaxley told us!

(Derek looked most put out.)

DEREK: You what? He did?

LEFIAT: He told *me* you were distracted by images of naked alien women!

DEREK: The bastard!

(He growled and glanced away.)

DEREK: I told him that in confidence.

MANDIKA: So it's true!!!

DEREK: Oh, for pity's sake.

(Mandika sighed.)

MANDIKA: I didn't peg you as a pervert, Derek.

(Kritz shook her head.)

KRITZ: You're *surprised* he's a pervert, Mandika?

(Mandika sneered at her.)

MANDIKA: I'm not talking to you.

DEREK: Hey, never mind that! How dare you call me a pervert???

(Kritz shrugged.)

KRITZ: You are a pervert though! You're a male, Derek. A man.

LEFIAT: No, he's an alien.

KRITZ: Yes, but an alien *man*.

LEFIAT: Eh? He can't be both!

MANDIKA: Do shut up, Lefiat.

(Kritz offered Derek a smile.)

KRITZ: Look, I'm just saying. Men, the male of the species, of all species it seems, are inherently perverted!

LEFIAT: That's a lie!

DEREK: It's downright slanderous.

(Having listened silently with interest up until this point, Daman nodded thoughtfully.)

DAMAN: And yet her accusation isn't without foundation.

DEREK: Shut up, you.

KRITZ: Don't get upset, guys. It's true. If I drop anything in the centre of Tifaeris, I can't even bend over to pick it up without several men dropping to the floor to look up my skirt.

(She sighed.)

KRITZ: And men rarely look me in the eye when they talk to me, they just stare at my chest.

MANDIKA: Of course they do, your tits are on display to the entire world half the time and you wear skimpy skirts with no underwear! If you'd put some bleeding clothes on, you know something that actually *hides* your naughty bits rather than encouraging men to look...

(Kritz glared at her.)

KRITZ: I don't like your tone!

MANDIKA: And I don't like your face!

KRITZ: No?

(Kritz then snarled at her coldly.)

KRITZ: Then I don't like your hair!

(At once, Mandika sat back and gaped at her in horror.)

MANDIKA: How dare you???

(Immediately feeling overcome by guilt, Kritz whimpered.)

KRITZ: I went too far!

MANDIKA: You went miles too far! That really hurt!!!

KRITZ: I'm sorry. Let me take it back! Please.

MANDIKA: Do it!!! Take it back!!!

KRITZ: I take it back, I take it back!!!

(With that, they both burst into tears and sat forward to hug one another.)

DAMAN: So in conclusion, men are indeed perverts but women are bloody stupid!

(At once, Mandika and Kritz rounded on him.)

MANDIKA: Hey!!!

KRITZ: Do you want a slap or something?

(Daman whimpered and hung his head.)

DAMAN: I was joking. You were hugging and getting emotional over something trivial and I thought... I thought, you know...

(He then sighed in defeat.)

DAMAN: Bonson would have found it funny.

MANDIKA: Bonson would find it funny if a child ran past him with its hair on fire.

DAMAN: Well... that's true. I'll be quiet.

(As Daman sat back and grimaced nervously, Mandika and Kritz shared victorious nods.)

KRITZ: That told him!

MANDIKA: Yeah it...

(Remembering she wasn't talking to her, Mandika snarled and sat back.)

MANDIKA: *Some* women *are* stupid though. Like those in their twenties who can't even read yet.

(As Mandika pouted bitterly, Kritz rolled her eyes then looked to Derek.)

KRITZ: Look, sorry if my words offended you.

(Derek smiled.)

DEREK: Your words have never offended me, Kritz.

(He then chuckled.)

DEREK: It's your thoughts *before* you say these things that do the damage.

KRITZ: Well... sorry, anyway.

DEREK: Don't be.

(Lefiat then sighed and offered Derek a smile.)

LEFIAT: The castle won't be the same without you, Derek.

DEREK: No?

LEFIAT: Bonson's so much easier to deal with when you're around to take his mind off of being mean to me.

DEREK: Well, I do what I can.

MANDIKA: You're so modest. I'm gonna miss having you around to give me advice.

DEREK: You'll be fine, Mandika.

MANDIKA: Hardly, without you I'm gonna be left with Bonson and dopey here to confide in.

(Lefiat looked to Kritz.)

LEFIAT: Why did she call you dopey?

KRITZ: She didn't!

LEFIAT: She didn't?

(He looked extremely peeved.)

LEFIAT: Hey!!!

MANDIKA: Oh, pipe down, Lefiat. You know I'm right. If I ask you or Bonson for advice, I'm either gonna get shrugged at by a gaping halfwit or tricked into doing something embarrassing.

LEFIAT: I'd never trick you into...

MANDIKA: I wasn't talking about you!

(Lefiat sighed.)

LEFIAT: I know, I was just hoping...

MANDIKA: Bottom line is, Derek... having you around has been a real privilege.

LEFIAT: Yeah it has.

KRITZ: I have to admit, even factoring in the incident with our rabbits, Derek, you're a great guy and I'm gonna miss you.

(Derek beamed.)

DEREK: Thanks, guys. That means a lot. I'm touched.

MANDIKA: You're welcome, Derek. We love you.

(As tears welled in Mandika's eyes, Lefiat sighed and shook his head.)

LEFIAT: Yeah, we do. Life at the castle is gonna suck without you.

(Up on the roof at this time, as Flaxley guided the carriage forth, Bonson was also pondering life at the castle without Derek.)

BONSON: Can you believe that bastard alien is bugging off and leaving me with those two annoying little shits? So bloody selfish.

(He growled.)

BONSON: I'm gonna be left to tolerate her royal self-righteousness and that annoying brain dead boyfriend of hers and all because that tiny green pansy can't stick it out like a man and wants to go home!

(He shook his fist and snarled.)

BONSON: I've been betrayed! Stabbed in the back! Honestly.

(He then shook his head and sighed in despair.)

BONSON: You know, I can accept it when a little schoolboy cries and makes an issue of wanting to go home, but Derek's a fully grown alien! Disgraceful.

(Flaxley gave him a sideways glance.)

FLAXLEY: You can hardly compare a schoolboy wanting to go home to an alien stranded on another planet.

BONSON: I can and I did!

FLAXLEY: Yes, but... you're being obtuse, Bonson.

(Bonson glared at him for a moment then looked away.)

BONSON: Actually, I'm just venting my anger, Flaxley. I know perfectly well why he wants to go and it's fine really.

FLAXLEY: Then why...

(Bonson looked to him and shrugged.)

BONSON: You know damn well why. I'm about to lose a good friend, Flaxley. I'm going through the five stages of grief. Anger, rage, resentment, bitterness and revenge.

(Flaxley grinned.)

FLAXLEY: I see.

BONSON: I'm gonna miss the little green blighter. I really am.

(As the carriage headed onwards, Flaxley and Bonson proceeded to reminisce about all the great times they'd had with Derek and the funny things that had happened. With every anecdote, they'd laugh heartily then pause to consider their friend's leaving. It was almost as if every chuckle was tinged with sadness.

Inside the carriage, Daman could only watch and smile as Kritz, Lefiat, Mandika and Derek also took a trip down memory lane, sharing stories about their experiences together. Had Mandika not spent much of the time snarling at Kritz, it would have been perfect.

Thankfully, Kritz successfully managed not to bite to any snide comments that were thrown

her way and the atmosphere wasn't soured. She was determined to make this trip something of a farewell party for Derek and even Mandika's bile wasn't about to spoil it.)

(Shortly before sunset, the carriage arrived at its destination, the one mile marker at the foot of the East Grange Mountains. Their journey was at its end. Carefully veering onto the grass at the side of the road, Flaxley slowly straightened the carriage then brought it to a halt.)

BONSON: Nicely done, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: Thank you, old chap.

(With that, Bonson and Flaxley immediately proceeded to climb down from the carriage. As soon as his feet were both on the grass, Flaxley paced to Bonson's side of the carriage then stretched and took a deep breath of the fresh mountain air.)

FLAXLEY: That's better! I was starting to get a bit of cramp in the old forearms there.

(Somewhat annoyed by Flaxley's actions, Bonson rolled his eyes then paced aside the carriage and reached to open one of its doors with a bitter expression on his wrinkled brow.)

BONSON: You just stand there, Flaxley, I'll go.

(He then mumbled under his breath.)

BONSON: I'm supposed to be retired, for pity's sake. Making me do all the donkey work...

(Flaxley rolled his eyes and paced up behind him.)

FLAXLEY: Nobody's making you do anything, Bonson!

BONSON: Well, I didn't see *you* hurrying to do it!

FLAXLEY: I took two seconds to stretch, you silly old fool.

BONSON: *I'm* the silly old fool? You're the one getting cramp in your joints, Flaxley!

(He then scoffed and swung open the carriage door.)

BONSON: Right, we're here! Off you go then, Derek! Bye!

(As she stepped to her feet to exit the carriage, Mandika scowled.)

MANDIKA: Bonson, don't be so rude!

BONSON: Excuse me?

(Furrowing her brow, Mandika climbed majestically from the carriage and stepped to one side.)

MANDIKA: What's the hurry anyway?

(Shrugging nonchalantly, Bonson stepped in the way of the door and turned to face her.)

BONSON: Daman and I have important things to discuss!

MANDIKA: More important than Derek?

(Before Bonson could reply, Lefiat attempted to squeeze his way past him and tumbled out of the carriage, thudding face first to the ground. Ignoring the bumbling halfwit, Bonson just shook his head and continued his conversation.)

BONSON: Of course not *more* important than Derek...

(Mandika shrugged and stepped away from him as he spoke.)

BONSON: How rude!

FLAXLEY: Never mind that. Move out of the way and let everyone out!

BONSON: What?

(Noticing he was standing in the way of the door, he took two steps to the side to let the others out.)

BONSON: Sorry!

(With that, Kritz leapt out and landed on the still prostrate Lefiat.)

LEFIAT: Ow! That's my back you're treading on! At least let me get up first!

KRITZ: I didn't see you down there, did I?

(She then quickly helped him to his feet before Daman Siria could climb out and stand on him too.)

LEFIAT: Thanks, Kritz. At least somebody cares.

(He glared at Bonson then about turned just in time to see little Derek jump sad faced from the carriage. As one, everyone gave him a warm smile as he looked up to scour their faces. The thought of Derek leaving their lives forever was bringing them all great sadness but they were all determined to hide it for his sake. Returning home to be with his people was something they could never begrudge him or make him feel guilty about. And so, they all pushed away any outward signs of emotion and tried to comfort him with their weak smiles. Having read their minds, however, Derek knew exactly how they felt and just how hard saying goodbye was going to be. Not looking forward to such a painful farewell, he sighed and shook his head.)

DEREK: Saying goodbye is going to suck.

(Just then, his entire demeanour changed. A smile enveloped his brow and he pointed excitedly to the grassy ridge to their right.)

DEREK: Still, let's worry about that when the time comes! Let me show you the spacecraft. Come on, it's just over the other side of that embankment!

(Eager to get the discomfort of an emotional parting out of the way as soon as possible, Bonson frowned.)

BONSON: Can't we say goodbye here?

MANDIKA: Bonson!!! Stop being so callous.

(Bonson gave her dagger looks.)

BONSON: I'm not!!!

DEREK: It's okay, Mandika, I know exactly how he feels. He's dreading saying goodbye and wants it over with, I respect that.

BONSON: See?

(He rolled his eyes and mumbled to himself.)

BONSON: Stupid princess!

MANDIKA: What did you say?

(Eager to intervene and stop them arguing, Derek raised his voice slightly.)

DEREK: Let's not argue, not now. He wasn't being callous, he'll miss me just as much as everyone else, let's just leave it at that.

(He gave Bonson a warm smile.)

DEREK: And *I'll* miss *him* too.

(Bonson's face then burned red with embarrassment.)

BONSON: Don't be so bloody girly!

(He scoffed and rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: Anyway, about this spacecraft of yours...

(Derek nodded and gestured to a lush green incline on their right.)

DEREK: This way.

(As Derek swiftly headed away towards the grassy bank, Flaxley hurried to his side while the others followed on, still trying to keep their emotions in check. Having missed the opportunity to chat with him in the carriage, Flaxley paced aside his departing green friend and sighed to himself.)

FLAXLEY: Seems like only yesterday when I found you unconscious on those rocks that night, you know?

(Derek nodded.)

DEREK: I barely remember it, to be honest. I just remember sensing someone being there and thinking they meant me no harm. I might have figured that out from reading your mind, I don't know. It's all just a blur to me still.

(Flaxley chuckled.)

FLAXLEY: I thought you were a small child at first glance then I noticed the horns. It

freaked me out to be honest.

(Derek gave a single laugh.)

DEREK: Yes, I suppose it would have.

FLAXLEY: Still, little green man or fellow human being; it's my duty to save those in danger.

DEREK: And thank heavens you did. You're a saint, Flaxley.

(As they stepped up the incline, Flaxley waved a dismissive hand at him.)

FLAXLEY: Hardly.

DEREK: No, no, you are. Despite what I am, you rescued me, gave me shelter and food and nursed me back to health. You even kept me hidden from those who might persecute an alien being like me. I just wish there were more people like you in the universe, Flaxley. It'd be a better place, that's for certain.

(Flaxley gave him a warm smile.)

FLAXLEY: Thanks, old friend. Your endorsement means a lot.

DEREK: Well, it's true; I can never repay you for what you've done.

FLAXLEY: Ah, but you already have. Last year when Tifaeris was in trouble and Kritz was taken away, you we're outstanding.

(Having been listening in as he paced behind, Bonson rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: Hark at you two. I'm half expecting you to hold hands and proclaim your undying love for one another in a minute.

(Flaxley and Derek glared back at him.)

FLAXLEY: There's nothing gay about letting a good friend know he's appreciated.

DEREK: Exactly. If you had any friends, you'd understand that.

BONSON: I do have friends actually! There isn't a landlord or barman in the whole of Guevina who doesn't know *me*.

FLAXLEY: Hardly the same thing, Bonson. You're their customer not their friend.

BONSON: Oh, who cares? They give me beer. In *my* eyes that makes them bloody *good* friends.

(He took a deep breath and briefly paused his march up the slope.)

BONSON: Good grief, Derek...

(He resumed his walk.)

BONSON: Why did you have to leave the spacecraft on top of a hill?

DEREK: I didn't leave it anywhere. Zanne landed it in a dell where it's less likely to be spotted.

FLAXLEY: Besides, I'd hardly call this embankment a hill, Bonson.

BONSON: Flaxley, when you're as old and knackered as me it's a hill, trust me.

(As they neared the top of the slope, Derek beamed excitedly.)

DEREK: Any second now. You're going to love the spacecraft; it's a much better model than the one I destroyed in Wendigo back when I met most of you. Not that you have any point of reference really, but I swear, it's a top of the range craft.

(He exhaled.)

DEREK: I can't wait to introduce you chaps to Zanne.

(With his spirits very much at their highest, he then ran excitedly up the last few feet to the top of the embankment before freezing in horror. As he stood there agape, looking as if his world had been torn apart, Flaxley and Bonson paced to his side, closely followed by Mandika, Lefiat, Kritz and Daman Siria. Oblivious to Derek's distress, they all stood at the top of the bank and stared down into the dell below. At the bottom of the dell was a gleaming silver spacecraft with blood, bones and fur strewn all around it. As they surveyed the sight below them, Kritz raised a disturbed eyebrow.)

KRITZ: Bloody hell, Derek, what did she land on? A herd of buffalo?

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Indeed, she seems to have landed on some kind of beast's lair.

BONSON: Quite! Who taught her to fly, Derek? You?

(They all glanced around the torn up flesh and fur and cringed.)

MANDIKA: Hopefully it was a grendith's lair. I hate those things.

BONSON: I just hope they weren't cows. The farmer's going to be livid.

(As Flaxley glanced at Derek expecting him to comment, his face dropped. Derek was gaping in horror and his skin had turned a very pale shade of green. In no doubt that something was horribly wrong, Flaxley crouched to Derek's side and spoke in a firm tone.)

FLAXLEY: What's wrong, Derek?

(As he waited in vain for an answer, Derek's silence chilled him to the bone. He'd never seen his diminutive friend look so overwhelmed with anguish.)

FLAXLEY: Derek?

(As everyone watched on in startled horror, Derek screamed out in primal distress then ran like the clappers down to the craft.)

DEREK: Zanne!!!

(Like a little green man possessed, he charged desperately through the bloodied remains of the beasts then disappeared into the spacecraft. The others could only stand in silence looking across at each other uneasily. For Derek to react in such a distressed manner was highly unexpected. He was a placid creature by nature and they knew something must be very wrong. As the wind brushed across their faces, nobody said a word. Hoping against hope that Derek would re-emerge from the spacecraft with Zanne in his arms and tell them that his panic had been a false alarm, they stood in anxious silence, unable to take their eyes off of the spacecraft door. As they waited with wide-eyes, the next thirty seconds seemed to last an eternity. Derek remained out of sight and the wind brushing through the trees provided the only sound. As he watched on, Flaxley observed the bloodied mess around the craft and bit his lip. Made aware by Derek's panic that the flesh and fur strewn all across the dell wasn't the result of an unfortunate landing, he clenched his fist and looked to the heavens. Willing everything to be okay, he then looked towards the spacecraft door once more.

A full minute passed and still there was no sign of Derek. Just moments later, however, a silhouetted figure came into view in the darkness of the doorway. Seconds later, Derek finally emerged looking lost and dejected. Desperate to help him, they all looked at one another then raced down towards to the craft and crowded around him urgently.)

MANDIKA: Are you alright, Derek?

BONSON: Stupid question! Does he *look* alright to you???

(Flaxley knelt before his diminutive green friend.)

FLAXLEY: Derek... I... don't know what to say!

KRITZ: Typical!

(With that, she bundled him out of the way.)

FLAXLEY: Hey!

KRITZ: Derek, what's wrong?

(Derek looked up at her.)

DEREK: Thanks for your concern, Kritz, in fact all of you... Zanne has gone!

(He looked down again.)

LEFIAT: Gone where?

(Mandika nudged him and mouthed for him to shut up.)

LEFIAT: I only asked!

DEREK: Someone must have taken her...

(Daman rubbed his chin and mused outwardly.)

DAMAN: Hmm, interesting...

(Quite clearly going to pieces, Derek yelled at him.)

DEREK: Interesting? Is that all you can say? Zanne was my life, my soul! I thought I'd lost her once before, but to regain her then lose her a second time...

(As Derek hung his head, Bonson sighed emptily.)

BONSON: Maybe you're just not meant to have her!

(Receiving scornful looks from all, he realised what he'd said and whimpered.)

BONSON: Um... sorry, Derek! That was most tactless of me.

(Derek clenched his fist in frustration.)

DEREK: How could I be so careless? How could I let this happen?

BONSON: Don't be angry at yourself, Derek. You hardly *let* this happen!

(Flaxley sighed with frustration at the sight of his friend's anguish then placed a hand on his shoulder.)

FLAXLEY: Derek, I...

(Derek looked to Flaxley with horror in his eyes.)

DEREK: She's gone, Flaxley. She's not there. She must have been taken... or...

(He held his head in his hands and shuddered all over.)

DEREK: Or worse...

(Flaxley clenched an angry fist.)

FLAXLEY: Who would do such a thing, and for what reason?

DEREK: I don't know! Zanne was tough; no human could have done this!

(Bonson shared Flaxley's frustration and placed his hand on Derek's other shoulder. Wearing a sincere smile, he resolved himself to reassuring his diminutive friend with all the kindness he could muster.)

BONSON: So sorry this has happened, Derek, old chap! I just wish there was something I could do.

DEREK: Who would have taken her, Bonson?

(Bonson looked uncertain.)

BONSON: How would *I* know?

DEREK: You're supposed to be wise! You must have some idea who took her?

(Bonson thought desperately for a moment then glanced at the blood.)

BONSON: Well...

(He winced.)

BONSON: This is going to sound awful but... are you certain none of this blood is her?

DEREK: No, we have brown blood; all *that* blood must be the result of Zanne fighting back with her magic against whoever took her!

(Bonson was genuinely amazed.)

BONSON: Really? *She* did this? Wouldn't want to bump into *her* in a dark alley on a Friday night, good grief.

DEREK: What???

BONSON: Nothing! Just saying... tough old bird.

(As Bonson cringed, Derek fumed and asked him again, only this time with extra firmness.)

DEREK: Well, wise arse? What happened here? Who'd take her? Who's strong enough???

(As Bonson struggled for a reply, Daman Siria stepped forward.)

DAMAN: I think *I* know what happened!

(All eyes turned to Daman and Bonson drew a sigh of relief. He couldn't fathom how despite all his wisdom, when he wanted to be kind, everything he said came out just as cruel and callous as when he was trying to be mean. Relieved that Daman was taking up the slack, he mopped sweat from his brow and vowed never to attempt being kind ever again.)

DAMAN: Sit down and I'll explain!

(A few moment's later, Flaxley, Derek, Bonson, Kritz, Mandika and Lefiat all found themselves sitting back at the top of the embankment away from the blooded ground around the spacecraft. Clueing everyone in on his theory to what might have happened, Daman stood before them, being animated in his explanation.)

DAMAN: Many years ago I heard rumour of an army from an island far south of...

DEREK: Rumours? I don't care about rumours!

DAMAN: Please, hear me out. I checked into the rumours and they've since been confirmed.

DEREK: Fine... okay.

DAMAN: Anyway... this island, Skiro they call it, is an inhospitable place if ever there was one...

DEREK: Get to the point!

BONSON: Calm yourself, Derek. Daman knows what he's talking about!

DAMAN: Quite. And I *am* getting to the point!

DEREK: That point being?

DAMAN: Point being... I found out that once every five years the Skiro army offer a sacrifice to their queen, Kajice... the more exotic the better. Now, the Skiro guards are too weak to have kidnapped a Leramite by themselves, but Queen Kajice is more than vain enough to have come and claimed the sacrificial being herself on their behalf. She's more than capable of doing it too.

(He nodded.)

DAMAN: I'd say, judging by the fur and blood, she used beasts to distract Zanne and some kind of spell to subdue her. It's the only explanation. I'm one hundred percent certain this is Kajice's doing. No doubt she used her crystal ball to search the world for a rare species to sacrifice and found a Leramite too good to resist.

(As everyone pondered on his words for a moment, Lefiat leant to Mandika.)

LEFIAT: What the bloody hell's a Leramite?

MANDIKA: Derek's a Leramite, you idiot. Therefore so is his wife.

LEFIAT: I thought Derek was an alien!

(Mandika rolled her eyes.)

MANDIKA: He is. A Leramite alien.

LEFIAT: I'm confused.

MANDIKA: Well, there's a surprise.

LEFIAT: Eh?

(As Lefiat sat there looking perplexed, Derek climbed to his feet and looked to Daman defiantly.)

DEREK: Daman, if you think this is that Kajice's doing then that's good enough for me. I'm going to rescue Zanne, right now!

(Daman looked uneasy.)

DAMAN: Steady on, Derek. You can't just wander over there and take Zanne back. Kajice isn't just the queen of Skiro; she's the queen of all witches! She's got immense magical powers, not to mention the fact...

(Cutting Daman off in mid-sentence, Derek placed his hands angrily to his hips.)

DEREK: I don't care if she's got laser guided missiles, the type of which Tryme 17 could only dream about, Daman. I'm going to save her.

FLAXLEY: Well said, Derek. Let's go, chaps, we have a witch to kill!

(As Flaxley swiftly scrambled to his feet, Bonson held his palm towards him nonchalantly.)

BONSON: Hold your horses Flaxley; do you even know where to go?

FLAXLEY: Yes! Skiro! Daman just said so.

BONSON: And where *is* Skiro exactly?

(Flaxley bit his lip.)

FLAXLEY: Hmm... good point.

MANDIKA: Besides, Flaxley, who's *we*? I've had enough danger for one lifetime and if you think I'm going to take on the queen of all witches, you can...

(Still annoyed at having been cut off mid-sentence, Daman raised his voice.)

DAMAN: Will you just listen to me???

DEREK: No! Tell me how to get to Skiro! I'm gonna go and rescue her right now!!!

(Looking somewhat flustered, Daman threw his palms out to the side.)

DAMAN: That's the problem, you see. Merely trying to get there could cost you your life, let alone trying to rescue her!

DEREK: I don't care. I'm not just going to stand here with my thumb up my nose.

BONSON: Arse, Derek.

DEREK: Whatever!

DAMAN: Look, Derek, I know you're upset but...

DEREK: Daman, Zanne went to great lengths to find me, do you think I'm just going to abandon her?

DAMAN: No, not even for a moment. I'm not suggesting anything of the sort. I just want to explain what you'll need to know before you decide to go charging off!

DEREK: I already know what I need to know. Zanne is in danger and I have to rescue her.

(Just then, Flaxley cut in looking somewhat troubled.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, but we don't know how to go about it, Derek. We don't even know where Skiro is, as Bonson rightly stated.

DEREK: Yes, but...

(Derek looked to him emptily for a moment then sighed.)

DEREK: Damn it!

DAMAN: Look, it's not a problem. *I* can tell you where it is and how to get there. You just have to listen to me for a minute or two, okay?

DEREK: I don't *have* a minute or two. I have to get to Zanne before they decide to sacrifice her.

DAMAN: Actually, Derek, they do the sacrifice upon the autumnal equinox. That gives you seven days which is *plenty* of time. The problem isn't the time frame; the problem is getting to Skiro.

DEREK: Hardly. I'm taking the spacecraft. We're talking about Zanne's life here so fuck regulation 19.

FLAXLEY: But what if she hadn't finished the checks when they took her?

DEREK: Stuff the checks. I'll fly there, save her then once we're safe, she can do the checks again before we fly back to Tryme 17.

(Daman sighed.)

DAMAN: Derek, it's not that easy. You *can't* use the spacecraft to get to her location!

DEREK: What?

(He sighed then looked into Derek's eyes.)

DAMAN: There's a force field in place on Skiro, you see. A magical barrier that Kajice created. You can only fly so far.

(He sighed.)

DAMAN: You can fly as far as north Skiro and that's it! You can't fly to her location. Hell, you can't even *walk* there. There's only one way and, well... it's awkward.

(Derek looked to him in astonishment for a moment then bit his lip.)

DEREK: What are you talking about? How awkward?

(Daman nodded then started to pace up and down.)

DAMAN: Extremely so. I mean this will be no ordinary journey. You're going to have to be well equipped and prepared for anything.

(He puffed out.)

DAMAN: The first problem is, Skiro is a glacier.

(Mandika beamed.)

MANDIKA: Like my magic!

(As everyone gave her a sideways glance, she hung her head and mumbled to herself.)

MANDIKA: Don't look at *me*, Daman's talking.

(At once they all looked back at Daman again.)

DAMAN: Indeed. Anyway, as I was saying, Skiro is an ice covered landmass and all but the northern coastline is surrounded by the most violent, impenetrable storms. Again, Kajice's magic. So, there's just one route onto it. You have to enter from the north. You can fly that far, but that's it.

(He then sighed heavily.)

DAMAN: That's when it becomes a pain. Kajice and her army are based in Desha Village which lies at the far south of Skiro... and the land mass is split in two by a giant crevice!

FLAXLEY: Exactly how giant?

DAMAN: Well, no man could ever cross it!

(Flaxley sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Then how the hell are *we* supposed to get across it?

(Daman stood tall and spoke with much authority in his voice.)

DAMAN: By following my instructions.

(He nodded firmly.)

DAMAN: Fly to the north of Skiro and enter it via the gap in the storms. Then land. I mean it. Don't try flying on to the southern half or you'll crash and die. Anyway, once you're in north Skiro you'll have to alight the spacecraft and search for the entrance to the fabled corridor of time, somewhere close to the crevice!

FLAXLEY: Corridor of time?

DAMAN: Yes.

(He looked thoughtful.)

DAMAN: If memory serves me correctly, there's a test to enter. You'll either die if you fail the test or receive a code if you pass it. The code will allow you to pass through a portal to a time one thousand years from now...

(At this point he noticed several pairs of doubting eyes staring his way.)

DAMAN: I know it sounds ridiculous, but bear with me!

(As he resumed his explanation, they all stared through him as if he was insane.)

DAMAN: Um... anyway, you'll find yourselves in a future Tifaeris, from where you'll have to travel to East Edea, where you will find a second portal. Use your code again and this will lead you to back to our time on the other side of the crevice. From there you can head south to Desha village!

(Having finished his explanation he then grinned at them awkwardly and awaited their reaction. Following a few scornful raised eyebrows, Mandika broke the silence with a disdainful groan.)

MANDIKA: What a complete load of bullshit that was!

BONSON: Quite, ma'am. Daman, I'm ashamed of you!

DAMAN: It's true!

BONSON: How do you know of this 'corridor of time' then?

DAMAN: I'm wise. And besides, how do I know a lot of things, Bonson?

BONSON: Your oracle?

DAMAN: Precisely!

FLAXLEY: Right, so let me get this straight. Skiro is surrounded by storms so we can only get onto it from the north coastline. And the only way to get from north to south is by travelling through time?

DAMAN: Precisely

(Flaxley looked thoughtful.)

FLAXLEY: And you're *positive* that we can't cross to the south unless we use this corridor of time?

DAMAN: I am. It's impossible. The crevice is too wide to cross and anyone attempting to fly through it will hit the force field and... well, you know.

DEREK: Fine. I'll fly to the north and get out and walk then. Whatever it takes. Frankly, I don't care if I have to leap through fire, I'm going to save Zanne no matter what. Just tell me where north Skiro *is*.

(Daman nodded.)

DAMAN: South east of Tifaeris.

DEREK: South east of Tifaeris, gotcha.

DAMAN: It's the only island out that way, should be simple enough to spot from the air.

DEREK: Right. Thanks, Daman.

DAMAN: Just make sure you land in *north* Skiro. Whatever you do, don't try to fly over the crevice. Kajice's force field is impenetrable, so don't get any smart ideas about ramming it.

DEREK: Like I'm *that* stupid.

DAMAN: Rumour has it, the entrance to the corridor of time is somewhere near the crevice, so you can land close to it, but whatever you do, be careful. Don't overshoot it.

DEREK: Relax; I know what I'm doing!

(Bonson looked thoughtful.)

BONSON: So, Kajice can create force fields and giant storms with her magic, can she?

DAMAN: Indeed.

BONSON: Then taking *her* on would be suicidal. Good luck with that, Derek.

DAMAN: She can't just conjure things like that on a whim, Bonson. That kind of magic requires mystic artefacts and years of planning. She's beatable. She does have extremely powerful elemental magic though; you might want to look out for that.

DEREK: Yes, well... I'm no slouch myself, so bring her on.

BONSON: Say, how do you know so much about this Kajice, anyway, Daman?

DAMAN: It's all part of being worldly wise, Bonson. Once you've learned about all this kind of thing...

(Bonson rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: Yeah, yeah, I'll become one of you. So, you keep saying. Can't we just skip the learning though, and accept me on age grounds only?

DAMAN: You know we can't, Bonson.

BONSON: Fine.

(Daman nodded then looked to Derek again.)

DAMAN: Anyway, there you have it. That's the only route. Land on north Skiro; use the corridor of time to cross the crevice to south Skiro, then head for Desha Village. It's a nightmare of a journey.

(Derek scoffed bitterly.)

DEREK: I don't care *how* difficult it is! No fucking witch is going to sacrifice *my* woman!!! I'm going to save her or die trying!

FLAXLEY: And I'm coming with you, Derek! I won't allow a friend to suffer alone!

DEREK: Thanks, Flaxley!

LEFIAT: I'll come too!

(Derek looked highly alarmed.)

DEREK: No!!!

LEFIAT: What?

(As Lefiat pouted sorrowfully, Derek offered him a sympathetic smile.)

DEREK: Um... Mandika needs you here, you see?

LEFIAT: But... I'm a knight... I'm supposed to help people in need...

MANDIKA: No, you're supposed to help *me*. And only me!

LEFIAT: But... that's not what my contract says.

MANDIKA: Chapter 2, Paragraph 6. As the princess' defender it's your duty to put *her* needs first and obey her every word, forsaking all others.

(Flaxley looked baffled.)

FLAXLEY: *My* contract didn't say anything like that! In fact, chapter two of the Guevina knight's contract only has *five* paragraphs!

MANDIKA: Yeah well, I may have edited Lefiat's a little.

LEFIAT: You're not allowed to do that!

MANDIKA: Oh, yeah? Paragraph 7 says I *can*!

LEFIAT: Why, you...

MANDIKA: Never mind that. Bottom line is, it's your duty to serve me and seeing as I'm not stupid enough to go where the queen of all witches can kill me, you'll be staying behind with me.

(As Lefiat sighed in defeat, Flaxley patted him kindly on the back.)

FLAXLEY: Sorry, old chap.

LEFIAT: No, it's fine. I understand. I can't go off with you two and leave Mandika here by herself; she'd get eaten by a cuddyfinkle.

(Mandika looked peeved.)

MANDIKA: Hey! What do you mean by that? Are you implying I'm lame in some way?

LEFIAT: Yeah... I mean... no.

(He whimpered.)

LEFIAT: I was just saying you can't look after yourself.

(Utterly insulted by Lefiat's words, Mandika snarled bitterly.)

MANDIKA: No? Wanna bet? You go on your silly mission, I'll be fine.

(Lefiat beamed.)

LEFIAT: Cool! Thanks, Mandika!

(He looked to Derek and gave him the thumbs up.)

LEFIAT: I'm coming to help you guys, Derek.

(Derek gaped in horror for a moment then gave a defeat sigh.)

DEREK: Fine, but no half-witted tomfoolery.

LEFIAT: I'll try.

DEREK: I mean it, Lefiat. If you slow us down with your dim-wittedness, I'll personal disembowel you!

LEFIAT: I won't, I swear.

(He exhaled happily and smiled at the scowling Mandika.)

LEFIAT: Thanks, Mandika.

MANDIKA: Whatever.

(Flaxley then nodded sternly and looked between Derek and Lefiat.)

FLAXLEY: Okay then, let's go, you two!

KRITZ: You mean us *three*!

FLAXLEY: Are *you* coming, darling?

KRITZ: Naturally!

FLAXLEY: Superb!

BONSON: Well, good luck with that, chaps. While you're off fighting and such, Daman and I will be in the pub.

(Mandika looked mortified.)

MANDIKA: Hey, wait a minute! I don't want to go to a pub, Bonson.

BONSON: Good thing too, you're not invited. You can go where you like, Daman and I will be teleporting to a pub and soon as everyone's gone, I expect.

DAMAN: Possibly sooner!

(In that moment, Mandika's heart sunk and she whimpered in terror.)

MANDIKA: But... who's gonna look after *me*?

BONSON: I'm not. I told you, I'm off to the pub!

DAMAN: And I'll be going with him!

MANDIKA: But... what about *me*?

BONSON: Like I said, you're not invited. You wouldn't want to come anyway, we'll probably end up at Madame Zuzu's boudoir, knowing me. And I know how much you hate the idea of going *there*, even though it *is* just an inn.

(As the realisation that she was on her own hit her, she cringed and the colour drained from her cheeks.)

MANDIKA: I guess I'm going to get killed on that glacier with *you* lot then!

(Despondently, she then walked over towards Lefiat and kicked him in the shins.)

MANDIKA: Pillock!!!

LEFIAT: Ouch!

MANDIKA: This is *your* fault!

LEFIAT: Eh?

FLAXLEY: Never mind fighting you two... if Bonson isn't coming, us five should get going.

MANDIKA: Fine!

DAMAN: Wait. Don't go rushing off!

DEREK: Rushing? You call this rushing?

DAMAN: Yes! You're not even prepared! I told you, you're going to have to be well equipped if you want to travel to south Skiro. The temperatures are so cold on that glacier they can kill a man in a matter of minutes! You'll have to dress in very warm clothing!

DEREK: I see.

DAMAN: Not only that, but to avoid looking conspicuous in the future, you'll need something futuristic to wear!

(Bonson looked somewhat stumped.)

BONSON: And where the hell are they supposed to get such things at such short notice?

DAMAN: From the man who can get you anything!

(With Daman making no effort to hide his self-satisfied grin, Bonson furrowed his brow indignantly then deliberately played dumb.)

BONSON: From Flaxley?

(At once, Daman's grin evaporated and a frown took its place.)

DAMAN: No damn it, me!!!

BONSON: Righto...

DAMAN: I tell you what, you wait here and I'll gather together what you need and teleport back with it! Then when I'm done, you and I have a date with a busty barmaid and several flagons of fine ale, Bonson.

(With that, Daman disappeared back into the thin air from which he'd appeared earlier.)

BONSON: Superb!

(For Derek, waiting for Daman to come back was torturous. Two hours had passed and

darkness had descended but there was still no sign of him. All he wanted was to jump into the spacecraft and head off to rescue Zanne. Unable to do this, he soon found himself running checks on the spacecraft just to give himself something to do. Although he wasn't entirely sure of what he was doing, anything was better than standing around waiting.

As he stood at the side of the ship, checking some valves on its outer shell, Kritz and Lefiat watched him closely, wearing uneasy expressions. Just behind them an extremely nervous Mandika was repeatedly biting her nails and trembling. With Mandika's propensity for biting their heads off at any given moment, Kritz and Lefiat had both turned away from her, hoping she'd somehow manage to calm herself down without causing a scene. Having worried herself sick, however, it wasn't long before the inevitable moment came when she couldn't keep her fears to herself any longer. Looking desperate and terrified, she ceased biting her nails, clasped praying hands before her chest and whimpered at Derek.)

MANDIKA: I can't do it!!!

(She pouted.)

MANDIKA: Sorry, Derek.

(Thrown from what he was doing, Derek looked over his shoulder at her and raised a baffled eyebrow.)

DEREK: Can't do what?

MANDIKA: I can't go with you.

(She then looked to Lefiat.)

MANDIKA: And you can't go either.

(Lefiat pouted at her.)

LEFIAT: But, Mandika...

MANDIKA: Sorry, Lefiat, but I've decided.

(She hung her head.)

MANDIKA: It's dangerous and I don't want to go.

LEFIAT: But you said I *could* go.

MANDIKA: I said *you* could go because I thought Bonson and Daman would look after me. Then when they said they wouldn't I agreed to go along because I already said you could... but I've changed my mind.

(She then looked to Derek sorrowfully again.)

MANDIKA: Sorry, Derek, I love you to bits but... I'm not cut out for doing missions. I'm a princess not a... fighting person. I hate to let you down but you'll have to get by without Lefiat and I.

(Derek nodded to her then smiled warmly.)

DEREK: It's fine, Mandika. Going on a mission without you two will be like going running without lead weights in my shoes. I'll manage.

MANDIKA: Even so, I feel bad about it. I mean I want to help... I just don't want to be in danger. I mean, it's okay for you lot to risk your lives, your lives are rubbish, but mines awesome. I'm rich!

(As everyone gave her disdainful glances, she hung her head and sighed.)

MANDIKA: Though... I feel really bad about changing my mind after I said *you* could go, Lefiat.

(Lefiat sighed.)

LEFIAT: I feel bad about that too.

MANDIKA: I know how you love to do the noble thing and help people, you're a knight, it's what you're bound to want to do... I feel bad standing in the way of that.

(She then sighed and looked at Lefiat.)

MANDIKA: Maybe we should go then.

DEREK: No, no... it's fine, Mandika, really.

MANDIKA: But, Derek...

DEREK: You're a princess, Mandika. It's *not* okay for you to go on dangerous missions.

MANDIKA: I know that, Derek. It's just that, I did tell Lefiat he could go...

DEREK: Yes, but, like you say, you're a princess. It's okay to change your mind.

(Mandika looked thoughtful.)

MANDIKA: I guess.

(She then slumped her shoulders and sighed.)

MANDIKA: I don't know what to do. On one hand, going would be the right thing to do.

I'd be keeping my word to you, Lefiat and helping my friend... on the other hand, it's dangerous and I'm way too magnificent to go endangering myself. I'm torn.

(Kritz looked to her and smiled.)

KRITZ: Why don't you just decide to come for now and if you change your mind later, we'll all agree to understand.

MANDIKA: Better idea... why don't you shut your face?

KRITZ: Excuse me?

DEREK: Mandika's right! Butt out, Kritz. Mandika, why don't you decide *not* to come and if you change your mind later we can talk you out of it.

(Mandika gave him a distrusting glance.)

MANDIKA: Anyone would think you don't *want* Lefiat and I to help.

DEREK: Funny you should say that...

KRITZ: I can't believe you told me to butt out, Derek.

DEREK: Oh, put a sock in it, Kritz. Fact is, Mandika...

(Just then, Mandika stood straight and nodded defiantly.)

MANDIKA: I know what I'll do!

(At once everyone paused and looked to her attentively, Derek crossing his fingers in nervous anticipation.)

MANDIKA: We're coming!

DEREK: Crap!

LEFIAT: Result!!!

MANDIKA: At least for now! But I reserve the right to change my mind at any time.

(Kritz looked most put out and folded her arms in annoyance.)

KRITZ: That's exactly what *I* suggested!

MANDIKA: Yeah, right. Whatever, Kritz. Like you're capable of having good ideas.

KRITZ: Right now, Mandika, the only idea I'm having is to batter *you* into next week.

MANDIKA: See? Another terrible idea.

(She then stepped back and glared at Lefiat.)

MANDIKA: Not so long ago, this wouldn't have even been a dilemma. I wouldn't have cared one iota for whether I said you could go or not. I'd have just gone home and made you escort me.

(She sneered bitterly.)

MANDIKA: Now though, your feelings matter to me. I care about letting you down and going back on my word. I hate you, Lefiat. You suck.

LEFIAT: Eh?

MANDIKA: Anyway, it's settled. For now, we'll prepare to go with you guys, but if I change my mind then, so be it.

(With that, she about turned and paced away towards the embankment, feeling a whole lot happier in herself. Having lifted Derek's hopes then dashed them, insulted Kritz and told Lefiat she hated him, however, she was the only one smiling.)

DEREK: Think I'll go and have a tinker inside the ship before I decide to hit someone.

KRITZ: I'll just stay here and count to one hundred.
(Lefiat whimpered then sat down sheepishly on the ground.)
LEFIAT: I'll just keep out of everyone's way then.

(Just over the ridge, away from the spacecraft, at this time, Flaxley and Bonson were deep in discussion at the side of the carriage. Greatly concerned about his little green friend's state of mind they both looked somewhat uneasy.)

FLAXLEY: I've not only seen it before, Bonson. I've lived it. I went to pieces when the Trepe took Kritz away last year, remember?

BONSON: Then you understand the problem. You wanted to go medieval on those Trepe bitches, remember? If Derek takes the same approach with the queen of all witches...

FLAXLEY: Quite. She'll chop his little green limbs off and eat his testicles for breakfast.
(Bonson winced and looked away.)

BONSON: Please, Flaxley, the imagery.

FLAXLEY: Doesn't bear thinking about, does it.

BONSON: Then don't say it! You say things like that and I get a horribly vivid and graphic image in my head.

(He sighed.)

BONSON: I've only just got over Lefiat telling me he wasn't a virgin. Good grief, man, I tell you, every time I closed my eyes for a week, there he was...

FLAXLEY: Stop it! I don't want to picture that.

BONSON: Then you know.

FLAXLEY: Anyway, this is a real problem, Bonson. Keeping him calm is going to difficult. It's his wife at stake! I'm going to have to find a way though or he could end up being...

BONSON: Killed! Let's just say killed, no more graphic descriptions of how.

FLAXLEY: Fair enough.

(Bonson sucked his teeth then glanced to the sky.)

BONSON: I don't know what to suggest, Flaxley. Last year, I managed to pacify you by simply getting you to be yourself. I just convinced you to start thinking like the knight you are and to believe in yourself. That approach won't work on Derek.

FLAXLEY: Quite, telling him to think like the three foot tall, green alien pilot that he is, isn't going to help.

(He then shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: I think I just need to convince him to focus on saving Zanne rather than taking on Kajice. Last year, after I became focussed on the goal rather than killing the enemy, we actually started to get somewhere.

BONSON: Go with that for now then, Flaxley. It covers the bases. It gets him focussed *and* might just keep him alive.

FLAXLEY: I will.

(Just then, Mandika paced over them looking oddly relaxed. Wearing a warm smile, she stepped aside Flaxley then rested her head against his upper arm.)

MANDIKA: How's my favourite former knight?

(Flaxley gave her a sideways glance.)

FLAXLEY: Fine, you?

MANDIKA: I'm cool. I've decided to leave it a while before I decide whether to come with you. I'm kind of leaning towards going, but at the same time... I don't want to.

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Well, it's your call, Mandika, but if you want my advice, you'll stay here.

MANDIKA: You're worried about me?

FLAXLEY: Always. As my former charge, your safety will always be of the utmost importance to me.

(Turning slightly red, she glanced away and giggled.)

MANDIKA: You love me.

(Bonson rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: No, *you* love you. Flaxley's merely concerned.

MANDIKA: Oh, shut up, you mean, old git.

BONSON: Hey!

(Mandika smiled up at Flaxley.)

MANDIKA: It's awesome that you love me so much still, Flaxley, but I'm with Lefiat now... you missed your chance.

(Flaxley did a double take in her direction then furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: Excuse me?

MANDIKA: Don't feel bad. At least you've got Kritz. Scant consolation, I know, but she's better than nothing.

(As Flaxley and Bonson stared at her in amazement, Mandika sighed then looked to the heavens.)

MANDIKA: Kritz is a crass old boot, but she has some good points, I guess. She doesn't deserve to be lonely, at least. Yeah... I did the right thing by letting her have you.

FLAXLEY: Letting her have me?

(Bonson furrowed his brow.)

BONSON: Mandika, you've completely fabricated your memories to make yourself feel better, haven't you?

MANDIKA: What?

BONSON: You heard me! Flaxley wouldn't touch you with a twelve foot lance, despite your numerous lusty advances. Then as soon as he met Kritz, he was off.

(Mandika scoffed.)

MANDIKA: You must be going senile, Bonson, that's not what happened.

(She then patted Flaxley kindly on the arm.)

MANDIKA: But I'll let you believe what you like if it makes you feel better.

BONSON: Mandika...

(Just then, Daman reappeared before them with a table full of backpacks. Given quite a start, Bonson leapt up in the air and yelped, Flaxley drew his sword and Mandika fainted.)

DAMAN: Alright, calm down, you lot.

(Bonson was livid.)

BONSON: Daman, you could have bloody killed me!!! You know how I'm always having heart attacks.

DAMAN: You had *one*!

BONSON: Yes, which is warning enough not to spring out on me, don't you think???

DAMAN: Well... I suppose. Still, I didn't mean to startle you.

(Having put his sword away, Flaxley bent to help the dazed Mandika to her feet then nodded to the table.)

FLAXLEY: What's all this, Daman?

DAMAN: This?

(He chuckled and tapped the table top.)

DAMAN: I prepared everything on my table then realised I couldn't carry it all. So, I teleported the table.

FLAXLEY: I guessed that, but what is it?

DAMAN: Oh... right... mahogany, I think.

(Flaxley spanned his forehead.)

FLAXLEY: Not the table!

DAMAN: I'm kidding, Flaxley.

(Bonson looked to Flaxley blankly and sighed before speaking in a flat, monotone voice.)

BONSON: He's a wit. A card. A veritable hoot.

FLAXLEY: Apparently so.

DAMAN: Don't be like that, chaps.

FLAXLEY: Never mind that... what have you brought us? I mean specifically.

DAMAN: Well... winter clothes for the glacier and futuristic clothes for when you're in the future, like I said I was going to get. Plus some other stuff you'll probably need.

FLAXLEY: Such as?

DAMAN: Survival stuff. Glaciers can be bloody hostile. A grappling hook for if you encounter a cliff, some rope of course, logs to burn, a torch, a canvas to shelter under, you know... essentials.

FLAXLEY: I see. Well... thank you, Daman.

DAMAN: You're welcome.

(He then looked thoughtful for a moment and rubbed his chin.)

DAMAN: Actually, there was something I was supposed to tell you about before Bonson and I head off, Flaxley... now what was it?

(He looked enlightened.)

DAMAN: That's it! The future! When you get there, don't try to walk from Tifaeris to East Edea.

FLAXLEY: Well, of course not, not all the way, we'll have to cross the sea at some point.

DAMAN: No, I mean don't try to walk there at all. Seek a future form of transportation. It'll take days to walk, hours if you find transport.

FLAXLEY: Hours? To get that far?

DAMAN: Future technology, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: I see. Okay, well... understood, we won't walk.

DAMAN: Excellent.

(He then beamed.)

DAMAN: On which note, my work here is done. The packs are all named tagged, so there's no need for me to be here anymore. Let's go and grab that ale, Bonson.

(Bonson nodded.)

BONSON: Righto.

(Just then Mandika stepped between them urgently.)

MANDIKA: Wait, you two. You can't bugger off yet. I might be going on the mission.

BONSON: Right... and how does that concern us?

MANDIKA: Well... I was kind of hoping that if I went... you'd be a darling and take my carriage and horses back to Tifaeris for me.

BONSON: You were, were you? Well, that was ambitious of you.

(He then rubbed his chin and pretended to think.)

BONSON: Go for an ale or do you a favour... it's a tough one.

MANDIKA: But... we can't just leave the horses here to die... and what if some peasant steals my carriage?

BONSON: Then your precious daddy will buy you another one.

MANDIKA: Yeah, but then there'll be a peasant somewhere riding about in an expensive carriage. That's not right. He might get ideas above his station.

DAMAN: Above his station?

MANDIKA: Yes! This is how revolutions get started. Give a peasant a slice of bread and before you know it they want the whole loaf.

(She nodded firmly.)

MANDIKA: Therefore, as princess of Guevina, I order you to take my carriage to Tifaeris for me.

DAMAN: And as a member of the council of the wise I politely refuse.

BONSON: Whereas I cordially invite you to fuck off. Bloody cheek.

MANDIKA: But, Bonson...

BONSON: But nothing! If you want it taken back, you can do it yourself.

MANDIKA: But the mission...

BONSON: Don't go then. You'll be safer if you stay here and without Lefiat getting in their way, so will the others be. See? It works out quite well for all concerned.

(Looking furious, Mandika then stamped her foot and stormed off.)

MANDIKA: I hate you, Bonson.

BONSON: Of course you do, dear.

(As Mandika disappeared out of sight, Daman rubbed his hands together gleefully.)

DAMAN: Right then. Which pub shall we hit first, Bonson?

BONSON: You're in charge of teleporting, old boy. Surprise me.

DAMAN: Righto.

(Bonson smiled then looked to Flaxley.)

BONSON: I hate to leave you like this, but... you know how it is.

FLAXLEY: We'll be fine, Bonson.

BONSON: Well see to it that you are. Good luck, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: Thanks, old chap.

DAMAN: Come on then! We can teleport while we walk.

(Daman then started to walk away.)

BONSON: I'll be off then.

(With that, he hurried alongside Daman then sighed to himself.)

BONSON: So...

DAMAN: So?

BONSON: Ale.

DAMAN: Indeed, and I can tell you all about weather predicting.

BONSON: Quite... yes.

(Having only made it twenty feet from the carriage, Bonson then paused and looked back.)

DAMAN: You okay, Bonson?

(As Bonson stood rooted to the spot, looking uncertain, Daman rubbed his chin thoughtfully. Bonson was visibly torn between going for an ale and doing the decent thing.)

DAMAN: Something amiss, Bonson?

BONSON: Kind of... I know I don't seem like the sort of bloke to have a conscience, but...

DAMAN: Everyone has a conscience, Bonson.

BONSON: I suppose.

(He sighed.)

BONSON: All of a sudden, leaving my friends to go off into battle while I go down the pub, doesn't seem right to me for some reason.

(He then shook his head and looked ruefully to the sky.)

BONSON: I hate being such a nice bloke!

(With that, he nodded to Daman, then gestured towards where Flaxley was standing over the table scrutinising the packs with his eyes.)

BONSON: Sorry old chap, I'm going on the mission. They need me!

DAMAN: They do?

(Far from impressed by his aged friend's reply, Bonson furrowed his brow angrily.)

BONSON: Yes, they could use my wisdom at a time like this. Not to mention the fact I'm pretty handy with my inferno magic. How dare you doubt me.

DAMAN: Sorry, old chap. I didn't mean to offend you.

BONSON: Well you did! Everyone has their uses, even me.

(He adjusted his collar and nodded.)

BONSON: I think you owe me an apology.

DAMAN: I just gave you one.

BONSON: Very well then. Carry on.

(Daman sighed apologetically.)

DAMAN: No, no, you're quite right to be angry. Your wisdom will be a great asset to everyone. If they're going to take on Kajice, having a wise man in the party will help no end.

(Bonson gave him a knowing smile.)

BONSON: Kajice can kiss my hairy arse. She's going to feel a world of pain. Flaxley is a sword-wielding legend and Kritz has the quickest fists I've ever seen, not to mention H2O magic. Derek is a *master* of magic and thanks to him, I've learnt inferno magic, Mandika has a mastery of glacier magic and Lefiat...

(He bit his lip and glanced to the ground.)

BONSON: Well, there's bound to be a weak link in *any* team.

DAMAN: Lefiat is a swordsman, trained by Flaxley! He has lightning magic too.

BONSON: And yet, he's crap with a sword and can't control his magic either. It beggars belief to be honest.

DAMAN: Okay, I hear what you're saying. Everyone has their attributes.

BONSON: Precisely... except Lefiat.

DAMAN: Even him.

BONSON: Let's just agree to disagree, shall we?

(He then nodded defiantly.)

BONSON: Anyway, I'm off. Sorry about the weather thing, another time perhaps?

(Daman sighed acceptingly.)

DAMAN: Fine.

(With a grateful smile, Bonson then turned and paced towards Flaxley. As he watched him go, Daman allowed himself a grin then chuckled under his breath.)

DAMAN: I knew you'd do the right the thing in the end.

(With that, he disappeared into thin air from whence he came. A brief moment later, Bonson stepped up aside Flaxley and forced a smile. Busy cleaning his sword, Flaxley didn't even notice him approach.)

BONSON: Flaxley... now Kajice will have *six* easy targets to obliterate.

(Somewhat startled, Flaxley looked up from polishing his blade and raised a curious eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: You've decided to join us, have you?

BONSON: Yes, foolishly I have.

(He shrugged.)

BONSON: Who'd have predicted that, eh?

FLAXLEY: Well... Daman did.

(He nodded towards the table.)

FLAXLEY: There's a pack there with your name on it.

BONSON: There is???

(His shoulders then dropped and he chuckled to himself.)

BONSON: He knew I'd do the decent thing all along.

FLAXLEY: Looks that way, Bonson.

BONSON: Oh well, let's get the others over here. Now we've got our equipment together, we can get going.

FLAXLEY: Good idea.

(Having paced over the embankment to the spacecraft to alert everyone that their supplies had arrived, Bonson then paced back with them with a frown on his face. Having not finished cleaning his blade, Flaxley had asked Bonson to collect them and he wasn't happy about it.)

BONSON: I mean, it might not be far, but at my age... with my feet... it's a liberty, I tell you. Just because I still dress like a butler doesn't mean I should have to wait on people hand and foot.

(Mandika, Lefiat, Derek and Kritz all grinned to themselves as he continued to air his bitterness.)

BONSON: It's not like he was doing anything urgent. He can clean his sword *any* time. Hell, he could have done it *while* he was coming to get you.

(As he stomped forth over the embankment then down the other side, towards the table, Flaxley looked up then sheathed his sword. With a smile, he then stepped closer to the table and waited for the others to join him around it. First to arrive, Bonson scowled at him coldly.)

BONSON: Sword nice and clean now, is it?

FLAXLEY: Not exactly, no. But I can clean that *any* time...

(Bonson snarled.)

BONSON: You don't say!!!

FLAXLEY: Right now though, we've got more important things to do.

(At this point, Mandika, Lefiat, Kritz and Derek arrived at the table. Looking extremely nervous, Kritz immediately poked her hand inside the top of the pack with her name on then looked to Mandika uneasily.)

KRITZ: Yeah, they're clothes...

(She trembled with uncertainty then bit her lip.)

KRITZ: This isn't good, Mandika.

(Mandika snarled at her for a moment then offered up a forgiving sigh.)

MANDIKA: No. It's not.

LEFIAT: What isn't?

KRITZ: A man should never choose a woman's clothes for her.

MANDIKA: It never ends well.

FLAXLEY: Well, never mind that. Let's see what he's packed for us.

(As they all reached for their packages, Bonson nodded.)

BONSON: There should be winter clothes for crossing the glacier and futuristic clothing for when we're in the future... obviously.

(He then exhaled in awe.)

BONSON: Daman's great, isn't he? He really can get anything you need in the blink of an eye.

FLAXLEY: Yes, so I see. I wish *I* could teleport.

BONSON: So do I! And some day I will!

(He groaned.)

BONSON: Once I've learned enough pointless crap to be initiated into the wise man ranks.

(As they stood there fumbling with their packages, Derek became somewhat flustered.)

DEREK: Why are you opening them? Let's just take them with us and get going!

FLAXLEY: Calm yourself, Derek. It's not as simple as that. We must go prepared!

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: According to Daman, we're going to be landing on a glacier. He said the temperatures there could freeze a person in no time; therefore, we should put the winter

clothes on now.

(Derek sighed and relented his angry stance.)

DEREK: I know Flaxley, I know. That's just common sense. I can't think straight. I'll leave the decisions to you. I can't concentrate!

FLAXLEY: Don't worry, Derek. I won't let you down.

KRITZ: Right... so, we're wearing the cold weather clothes *now*, are we? And leaving our normal clothes in the packs?

FLAXLEY: I think that's the best idea, my love.

BONSON: And so you should, Flaxley, it was *your* idea. I mean, what sort of buffoon would venture an idea when they've already known a better one?

(As Flaxley gave him a sideways glance, Bonson hunched his shoulders and offered him a cheesy grin.)

BONSON: Just saying.

(Eager to stop Flaxley staring through him, Bonson then coughed and looked away.)

BONSON: So... the future, eh? Sounds interesting!

(Derek looked to him enquiringly.)

DEREK: Bonson? How can Daman possibly know what clothes will be like in the future?

BONSON: Maybe his oracle can see into this corridor of time, I don't know!

FLAXLEY: Come on, chaps. Let's stop wasting time and get changed!

(As he picked up his clothing package, the others swiftly followed suit. Looking apprehensive to say the least, Mandika stepped from the table with hers and pulled a pair of tight ski-pants from it.)

MANDIKA: What's this thing? I can't wear that!!! I'm a princess!

BONSON: Looks ideal considering we're heading to a glacier! Or would you rather wear a summer dress and freeze to death?

(She pouted and hung her head.)

MANDIKA: So unfair! I have standards to maintain. I can't be seen wearing any old trash, you know. I'm not Kritz!

KRITZ: Hey!

FLAXLEY: Never mind squabbling, you two. Get changed.

(With that, they all proceeded to undress and don their winter clothing. Feeling somewhat uncomfortable to be changing outdoors, the men wasted no time whatsoever in hurrying into their winter clothes, taking care to protect their modesty as they did so. Well aware that Bonson might well have a heart attack or do something to make Flaxley kill him if she changed within sight of him, Kritz went behind the carriage. Unsurprisingly, Mandika paced after her then changed inside it.)

A few minutes later, Mandika and Kritz returned from the carriage eager to see what attire the men had been supplied with. Observing them, Kritz bit her lip and mused to herself. Flaxley, Bonson, Derek and Lefiat had been given extra thick trousers whereas herself and Mandika had both received figure hugging ski-pants and wool-lined boots. The attire may not have been fashionable, especially on the warm south continent, but it would indeed be practical in wintry conditions. With the exception of Bonson, everyone had also received thick, beige, half length, animal-skin coats with fur trim. The men's coats were hooded whereas Mandika and Kritz had been supplied with furry hats. Taking Bonson's advanced years into account, Daman had supplied him with a hooded, ankle length coat that wrapped around him like a monastic robe, just to keep him that extra bit warmer.)

BONSON: I look like a bloody monk!!!

DEREK: Look at *me* then!

(At once they all turned towards Derek and highly amused grins appeared on their faces.)

Being only three feet tall, his coat dragged along the ground.)

LEFIAT: You won't need to wear anything else!

(Derek glowered at him sarcastically.)

DEREK: Yes, I'll go naked underneath, shall I? That'd be wise!

(He then sighed miserably.)

DEREK: I'm going to trip over every five minutes, aren't I?

KRITZ: Maybe, but at least you'll look cool doing it!

(At once, her face began to crack as she tried to conceal her amusement.)

DEREK: Grow up, woman!

BONSON: Chin up, Derek. At least you're not alone. I look like a complete bell-end too.

(Mandika just looked to them and scoffed.)

MANDIKA: You two think *your* outfits are bad? Look at *me*! This coat smells, the bottoms are too tight and these boots suck! Unlike you two paupers, however, I'm not accustomed to dressing in poorly designed rags.

(Bonson furrowed his brow at her.)

BONSON: Mandika, there's nothing wrong with your outfit at all! You look fine. Pretty even... well, to someone with no idea what that word actually means.

MANDIKA: I don't look *fine* or pretty, Bonson!!! I look like a peasant!

(With that, she took off her hat and threw it angrily on the grass.)

MANDIKA: That's torn it! Enough of this nonsense. I'm not going!

(She then glared at Lefiat.)

MANDIKA: And therefore nor are you!

LEFIAT: But, Mandika...

MANDIKA: But nothing! I'm not going traipsing around in the freezing cold for hours on end looking like my mother didn't teach me how to dress myself. You might not mind that sort of thing, but I have standards! We're taking the carriage and going home!

LEFIAT: But, Mandika... that outfit actually looks nice on you.

MANDIKA: The hell it does. This coat looks like I killed a cow, gutted it then threw it's carcass over my shoulders! As for these bottoms... they're so tight they look painting on, as if my legs are a set of oak beams!

(Kritz gave her a baffled glance.)

KRITZ: Far from it, Mandika, your arse looks amazing in them.

(Mandika paused from ranting for a moment to give her a sceptical glance.)

MANDIKA: Amazing?

(Before Kritz could reply, she looked deeply disturbed and growled at her.)

MANDIKA: Wait!!! Are you fantasising about me again???

KRITZ: What?

MANDIKA: I told you once already, get over it! It's never gonna happen!

KRITZ: I just said your arse looks nice.

MANDIKA: Well don't. *You* can't be trusted to look at my bits and bobs, you sick woman, you.

(Looking furious, Kritz shook her fist at her.)

KRITZ: I'm not fantasising about you, okay? I never did! I just wondered what it'd be like doing the filthy with someone like you. Someone so in love with themselves that there's little point in anyone else being there. Your lovers must feel like an unwelcome nuisance!

(Absorbing Kritz's words, Lefiat sighed then stared into space.)

LEFIAT: I'd say it feels more like being an insignificant spectator actually.

(Realising what he'd said, he then clammed up and trembled as Mandika jumped up and down in a rage.)

MANDIKA: You can't talk about me like that, Kritz!!!

(Relieved that her anger wasn't aimed at him, Lefiat drew a sigh of relief.)

LEFIAT: You tell her, Mandika.

MANDIKA: You can shut up, an' all.

LEFIAT: Oh.

MANDIKA: Honestly, Kritz, I don't know where you get the audacity to think you can...

KRITZ: What? Speak my own mind?

MANDIKA: Yes! It's time you remembered your place, Kritzeveltia.

KRITZ: My place???

(She snarled.)

KRITZ: I'm not going to argue with you anymore. If you're not coming, fine. Piss off then. It's no loss. Piss off back to Guevina if you can figure out how to drive the carriage. I don't care what you do, but until we've gone you can just shut the fuck up and stop getting on my case, you egotistical, self-righteous, good for nothing bitch!

(Having never been on the end of such an angry rant in all her life, Mandika pouted at her, very much on the verge of bursting into tears.)

MANDIKA: That was mean!!!

KRITZ: That was mild! I'd have punched anyone else.

(Mandika whimpered.)

MANDIKA: All I was saying was, Lefiat and I aren't going on the mission. There was no need to be mean to me.

KRITZ: Yes, there was.

(As Mandika turned away and proceeded to sulk, Lefiat sighed heavily.)

LEFIAT: Thanks, Kritz. Not only am I gonna miss out on the mission, but Mandika's gonna take her anger out on *me* all the way home now.

KRITZ: You choose to go out with her.

LEFIAT: Even so.

(Keen to put and end to any bad feeling, Flaxley shook his head then stood tall.)

FLAXLEY: Anyway, that's enough of that. Seeing as we're all dressed, shall we make a move?

(Kritz looked to him then flinched as if she'd just remembered something.)

KRITZ: Oh, actually no. Wait a sec. I'm not quite ready.

FLAXLEY: You're not?

KRITZ: Nope. I won't be a minute!

(With that, she rushed away and climbed into the carriage. As she did so, Lefiat looked down himself and sighed.)

LEFIAT: Good thing I'm *not* coming really. My coat's miles too small, look at it!

(At once, they turned to see Lefiat wearing the hood of his coat over his tin helmet, causing it to rise up and pull his arms out to the side leaving his midriff exposed. Hardly surprised by the lad's buffoonery, Flaxley slapped his forehead with his palm and sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Only you could have done that!

LEFIAT: Eh?

(Desperate to get going, Derek sighed.)

DEREK: Look, can everyone just get a move on?

FLAXLEY: Relax, Derek. We will be ready just as soon as Kritz comes back from doing whatever she's doing!

(He exhaled.)

FLAXLEY: I'm looking forward to it actually; her arse looks bloody incredible in those tight bottoms.

(He then rubbed his hands together excitedly.)

FLAXLEY: I can't wait to get my hands on...

MANDIKA: Flaxley!!!

(Flaxley looked embarrassed and glanced away.)

FLAXLEY: Quite. Poor form.

(A few minutes later, as everyone stood around the table waiting, some more patiently than others, Kritz re-emerged from the carriage.)

KRITZ: Ready!

(Despite having his back to her, Flaxley immediately sensed that something wonderful had happened and turned around to face her. At once, his jaw dropped and he had to adjust himself down below.)

FLAXLEY: Great cheese devouring clowns of the forgotten citadel!!! You look delicious!

(Kritz beamed. She'd dispensed with the ski-pants and somehow acquired a tight, black, below-the-knee, leather skirt instead. Having completed the look with the high leather boots she'd been wearing earlier, Flaxley could only look on in a daze.)

FLAXLEY: That's... clothes!

BONSON: Well, you're not wrong, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: What?

(Kritz looked to Flaxley and smiled.)

KRITZ: Do you like it?

FLAXLEY: Do I??? You look exceedingly doable.

(Looking utterly bewildered, Bonson scratched his head.)

BONSON: Um... question is, where the hell did you get it from???

(Kritz shrugged modestly.)

KRITZ: This is what I was wearing when we came here.

BONSON: No, you were wearing a miniskirt. I distinctly remember approving most highly.

KRITZ: Yeah, but it never *used* to be a miniskirt. It was *this* length until I folded it under twice and stitched it to *make* it a miniskirt, you see. So, I just unpicked the stitches and ta-da... long skirt again.

(Mandika snarled.)

MANDIKA: It's hardly long.

KRITZ: It is for me!

(She beamed.)

KRITZ: I love it! I think it's sexy *and* practical. Leather's warm and seeing as I'm wearing thigh high boots underneath, I'm completely covered!

MANDIKA: For once.

KRITZ: What did I tell you about getting on my case, Mandika?

MANDIKA: Don't know, I wasn't listening!

(She then looked away and mumbled indignantly under her breath.)

MANDIKA: But whatever it was, I bet you couldn't spell it.

KRITZ: Mandika...

(She then scoffed and waved a dismissive hand at her.)

KRITZ: Just go away, I can be arsed to listen to you anymore.

(She then turned and smiled at her grinning husband.)

KRITZ: So, we ready then?

(Paralysed with lust, Flaxley replied in a bewildered daze.)

FLAXLEY: Thighs and such...

BONSON: Flaxley, put your tongue back in. You're embarrassing yourself!

DEREK: Quite. This is not time for lusting over the wife, Flaxley, we've got to get going.

(Snapping from his daze, Flaxley glanced to Derek then nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Quite, right. I do apologise. Let's stash the clothing we came here in, then we

can be on our way.

(With that, Derek, Bonson, Flaxley and Kritz all proceeded to stuff their packs with their everyday clothing. Bizarrely, Lefiat did the same, in the vain hope that Mandika would change her mind and let him go. As soon as the task was complete, Derek stepped back from the table and nodded firmly. He was desperate to leave as soon as possible, and with this in mind, he started to head for the spacecraft.)

DEREK: Let's go, we've wasted enough time!

(Unfortunately for him, however, Flaxley had other ideas.)

FLAXLEY: Wait; let's just go over the plan once more before we leave. I want to have it right in my head before we set off.

(Lefiat pouted.)

LEFIAT: The plan? That's easy. You're all going off the mission and I'm stuck here with Mandika!

MANDIKA: Stuck here???

LEFIAT: I meant...

MANDIKA: Never mind what you meant. We're not stuck here at all, we're going home.

(Flaxley rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Shut up for a minute, will you?

MANDIKA: How rude!

DEREK: Ignore her, Flaxley.

MANDIKA: Oh that's nice, that is.

(As silence descended, Kritz looked to Flaxley and raised a curious eyebrow.)

KRITZ: So? The plan, darling!

(As Flaxley stared down at her skirt, gaping like a lusty teenager, Kritz furrowed her brow.)

KRITZ: Well?

FLAXLEY: Hmm, is she wearing any... or isn't she... it's not knowing that makes it so irresistible...

KRITZ: Eh?

FLAXLEY: Those thighs...

(He then snapped out of his trance and shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, the plan, quite right, Kritz!

BONSON: Flaxley, it's simple. Fly to north Skiro, freeze our arses off. Search for the corridor of time; go through it to future Tifaeris. Onto future East Edea then find a portal back to this time. That'll send us to south Skiro where we can freeze our arses off again as we head for Desha village. What's to think about? It's simple.

DEREK: Actually, it's even more simple than that. Searching for the corridor time won't even be an issue. Thanks to the technology on my spacecraft, I should be able to locate anything out of the ordinary from the air. So, we won't be in the ice and cold on north Skiro for too long. We can just land near the corridor of time and we can rush in there. We'll be in the future before you know it.

BONSON: Superb! One less long, icy trek to tolerate. Two would have been mortifying.

LEFIAT: Wait? I'm confused. Why are you going through this time corridor thing again?

KRITZ: Because it's only way to cross the crevice.

LEFIAT: What crevice?

(Bonson rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: Did you even listen to a word Daman said?

LEFIAT: Sort of. It was all a bit confusing, to be honest.

FLAXLEY: Lefiat, it's hardly difficult. We're going to an island that's divided in two by a crevice. Trouble is, we can't fly over the crevice and it's too wide to cross.

LEFIAT: Right... why's that then?

MANDIKA: Just ignore him, Flaxley. He wouldn't get it if you explained it to him all night.

FLAXLEY: Probably.

LEFIAT: Hey!

MANDIKA: Well you wouldn't.

LEFIAT: Yeah, okay.

(Flaxley rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Look, never mind that. I just wanted to make sure everyone understood the plan.

KRITZ: Yes we do.

BONSON: Glacier, future, glacier again. Simple.

(Derek rolled his eyes.)

DEREK: Right, now that's established, can we get going finally?

FLAXLEY: Of course.

DEREK: Thank you!

(Desperate to at least get some sympathy before they left, Mandika whimpered.)

MANDIKA: Yeah, go on. Abandon me, I don't care.

KRITZ: Gladly! You've done nothing but bitch and snipe at me since the minute you arrived in Tifaeris. Good riddance, I say.

MANDIKA: Yeah, right, like anyone gives a crap what *you* say, you tattooed freak.

KRITZ: Excuse me?

FLAXLEY: Don't be like that, ladies.

MANDIKA: She started it.

KRITZ: Yeah, and I'll finish it by relocating your teeth!

(As Kritz and Mandika snarled at one another, Flaxley rolled his eyes then sighed to himself.)

FLAXLEY: It's worth the hit, I suppose...

(With that, he psyched himself for a moment then stood tall and projected his voice.)

FLAXLEY: Mandika, Kritz... you both have horrible hair!!!

(As planned, Mandika and Kritz immediately slammed together side by side, as if they were some kind of two headed beast and rounded on him furiously.)

KRITZ: How could you say such a despicable thing???

MANDIKA: We have amazing hair!!!

KRITZ: Yeah, we do!!!

(Flaxley nodded then glanced away.)

FLAXLEY: Friends again, I see.

KRITZ: Damn right.

MANDIKA: Yeah!

(As Flaxley grinned to himself then turned away, they fell silent and looked to one another in embarrassment.)

MANDIKA: I can't believe you fell for that!

KRITZ: So did you!

MANDIKA: Yeah... we're gonna have to watch him, Kritz.

KRITZ: I reckon so, yeah.

DEREK: Look, can we just get going please?

(Just then, Lefiat raised a nervous hand.)

LEFIAT: Actually, before you go... I was kind of hoping one of you would teach me to drive a carriage.

(Derek shook his head.)

DEREK: We don't have time.

LEFIAT: But... how will Mandika and I get home?

MANDIKA: Yeah!

(Derek looked thoughtful.)

DEREK: I'll fly to Tifaeris first and drop you off before we leave.

(He sighed.)

DEREK: If only Zanne had flown me to Tifaeris... we wouldn't be in this mess.

(He then looked to the skies and released an anguished cry.)

DEREK: Damn you, regulation 19!!!

FLAXLEY: It's no good dwelling on what might have been, Derek.

BONSON: Besides, even if she *had* taken you to Tifaeris, it wouldn't have changed anything.

Kajice would just have come to *Tifaeris* to take her, rather than here.

MANDIKA: That would have made all the difference actually.

DEREK: Exactly. If we'd seen them attack her, we could have stopped them.

MANDIKA: Maybe, but more importantly, I wouldn't now be stuck in the middle of nowhere.

DEREK: You're not! I'm going to give you a lift.

(He then looked stunned for a moment and bit his lip.)

DEREK: Actually, no I'm not. When I was tinkering with the auto-pilot settings a moment ago, I set course for Skiro glacier and I have no idea how to cancel it or turn it off. It's a newer model than I'm used to.

FLAXLEY: Set course? Like a ship captain?

DEREK: Not exactly... a ship captain uses charts. This one's programmed in digitally and the ship will only go where the course is set to.

FLAXLEY: Programmed digitally? This is way over my head.

(Bonson looked decidedly stumped.)

BONSON: Derek... how could you set course for it when you don't even know where it is?

DEREK: I don't, but the ship does. I used what Daman told us about its rough location and used the on board mapping system to find the land mass with a crevice, south of Tifaeris...

(Seeing nothing but empty eyes looking his way, Derek sighed.)

DEREK: It's all very complicated, Bonson.

BONSON: Right...

DEREK: Bottom line is, I can't give you a lift, Mandika.

MANDIKA: It doesn't matter anyway. Even if you could give me a lift, what about my carriage? And the horses! We can't leave them out here unprotected.

(Derek looked stumped.)

DEREK: Crap. I never thought of that.

(Bonson looked thoughtful.)

BONSON: Maybe we could ask Daman to drive it back.

FLAXLEY: How? He already left!

BONSON: Yes, I know, but he's a mystic wise man and as my mentor and tutor, he keeps a watchful eye over me. Therefore, there might be a way for me to contact him mentally or something... I don't know. After all, if his eye is *that* watchful, he might be watching us right now.

FLAXLEY: It might be worth a try, I suppose.

LEFIAT: Or like I said, one of you could just teach *me* to drive it.

(Mandika stepped back and trembled.)

MANDIKA: No! I'd rather go and get killed on the glacier by Kajice than be in a carriage driven by you.

LEFIAT: But...

MANDIKA: Lefiat, you know damn well how it'd turn out if *you* tried to drive us home.

(Lefiat sighed and hung his head.)

LEFIAT: I have a fair idea, yeah.

MANDIKA: The horses will end up getting eaten by cuddyfinkles or something. And even if

they didn't, god only knows where we'd end up.

(She sighed.)

MANDIKA: I can picture us sitting among a pile of broken planks and splinters while the horses sprint off to freedom. There's no way you're driving!

(She then nodded defiantly.)

MANDIKA: Bottom line is, one of you will have to stay here and drive the carriage back to Tifaeris for me.

FLAXLEY: Like who? We've got an important mission to undertake.

KRITZ: I can't drive a carriage, not very well anyway.

DEREK: And I can't obviously. I have to fly the spaceship.

(All eyes then turned to Bonson.)

BONSON: Hey! Why should *I* be lumbered with those two? It's bad enough living in the same castle! The last thing I need is to spend my entire week's holiday in Tifaeris babysitting a halfwit. Or Lefiat come to that!

MANDIKA: Hey!!!

BONSON: Look! I said no. I'd rather be brutally murdered by Kajice than suffer a hell like that.

(He nodded sternly.)

BONSON: And unless I can think of something suitably insulting to add, that's my final word on the matter.

DEREK: Well, we'd better think of something, and soon. Zanne isn't going to rescue herself you know.

BONSON: Like I said, I could try to contact Daman.

(Lefiat stood tall and beamed. As if he'd just had the world's greatest idea he then placed his hands confidently on his hips and nodded)

LEFIAT: I've had an idea!

(At once an evil grin enveloped Bonson's brow.)

BONSON: An idea, Lefiat?

(He then rubbed his hands together excitedly.)

BONSON: Let's hear it then. There's nothing like one of your hilarious ideas to set the old chuckle glands in motion.

(As Bonson beamed, greatly looking forward to enjoying a belly laugh at Lefiat's expense, the young lad in question shrugged modestly.)

LEFIAT: Well, see, I was just thinking. If you can get Daman here then we could just ask him to teleport to Desha Village and rescue Zanne himself! That'd save us a lot of bother.

(At once, a stunned silence descended. Everyone, except a smirking Bonson was immediately struck dumb by Lefiat's well thought-out suggestion.)

FLAXLEY: Good thinking, Lefiat!

DEREK: I'm actually amazed *we* didn't think of that.

(As Lefiat beamed merrily, Bonson then stepped forth looking extremely smug.)

BONSON: Impressed by Lefiat's thinking, were you?

FLAXLEY: Well... yes.

BONSON: Well don't be.

(He then exhaled with self satisfaction and stood tall. The one thing he loved more than having knowledge on a subject was rubbing it in the noses of those who didn't.)

BONSON: Daman Siria is a man of heightened intelligence and savvy, if it was possible for him to just teleport there and rescue Zanne, don't you think he'd have been the *first* to think of it?

LEFIAT: Not really, no.

BONSON: Well nobody cares what you think, you're a halfwit and your 'thoughts' are

barely worthy of the name. Fact is, Daman *can't* do that. You see, the council of the wise don't allow interference in matters of life and death. They'll only assist and advise us mere mortals in our endeavours, they won't physically do tasks for us. Especially when a human, or indeed alien life is involved.

FLAXLEY: And why not?

BONSON: Because they can't play god, that's why. If Zanne is meant to be saved, then we'll save her. If she isn't...

(He sighed.)

BONSON: Put it this way. If Daman was to save Zanne himself, the remaining council of the wise members would have her put to death on the grounds that she was destined to die if he hadn't. They'll only interfere in life and death matters if the person involved is destined to be a wise man like myself. Other than that, they strictly refuse to get involved with matters of mortality. Trust me, Daman's done all he can and now it's down to us.

(Speech over, he immediately paced to Lefiat and spoke straight into his face.)

BONSON: See, curly? That's why I'm a destined to be a wise man and you're destined to die a comedic death by accidentally setting fire to yourself.

LEFIAT: Hey!

(Absorbing Bonson's words, Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: That makes sense I suppose. If there is such thing as destiny, a plan to which or lives are meant to follow, messing with it would be foolish.

BONSON: Precisely. That's exactly what they're thinking.

(He frowned.)

BONSON: Though personally I think it's total bullshit. Destiny indeed. Like any loving god would be cruel enough to deliberately *plan* to make me go bald at 25 *and* spend my entire life running around after *that* ungrateful little shit.

(He gestured at Mandika.)

MANDIKA: Hey!!!

(Eager to stave off an argument between the two, Flaxley picked Bonson up on his point.)

FLAXLEY: Who says gods are loving though, Bonson?

BONSON: Every holy man you'll ever bloody meet, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: Hmm, that's true.

DEREK: Yeah, fantastic. Very informative, but that doesn't help us with out current dilemma.

MANDIKA: Exactly.

LEFIAT: Maybe one of you could drive Mandika and I back to Tifaeris then come back here?

DEREK: That'll take too long!

FLAXLEY: And besides, how would the person who drove you get back out here?

LEFIAT: By using the horse and carriage.

FLAXLEY: Then the carriage would be stuck here.

LEFIAT: Oh, yeah.

(As they stood there looking stumped, Bonson sighed and hung his head.)

BONSON: Fine! I won't go on the mission then. I'll drive these two back to Tifaeris instead. In fact, bollocks, might as well drive back to Guevina, my holiday's already ruined. At least I can get a decent ale in Guevina.

(Mandika beamed.)

MANDIKA: Yay. Thanks, Bonson.

BONSON: Yes, you'd *better* be grateful.

(Just then, Daman Siria appeared among them. Once again, everyone jumped back with a start and Flaxley drew his sword.)

FLAXLEY: For the love of god, Daman.

DAMAN: What?

BONSON: What did I tell you about trying to give me a heart attack???

(Daman grimaced.)

DAMAN: Right... yes, sorry.

(He then beamed.)

DAMAN: So you need my help, do you?

KRITZ: How do you know?

DAMAN: Well, as Bonson's mentor and guide, I'm pretty much watching him all the time.

(Bonson looked horrified.)

BONSON: All the time???

DAMAN: Don't panic, old boy. I look away when I ought too.

(As Bonson gaped, Daman started to chuckle.)

DAMAN: I'm joking. We're just on the same psychic wave length, that's all. When you're really stressed and need my help, I can sense it.

BONSON: I see.

(He then furrowed his brow.)

BONSON: So where were you when I messed up that illusion last year and nearly got us all slaughtered by Dim Lee and his army?

DAMAN: I sensed your stress, Bonson, but there was nothing I could do to help at the time. I only come if I can help.

BONSON: I see.

DAMAN: Anyway, you wanted my help...

(Bonson couldn't help but look relieved.)

BONSON: Indeed. We need someone to drive the carriage and horses back for us, Daman. I was going to do it, but...

(Daman nodded.)

DAMAN: No need, I can do that for you.

BONSON: Leaving me free to go on the mission?

DAMAN: Absolutely.

(He then sighed and shook his head.)

DAMAN: As your guide this is going to be a stressful few days for me, actually. Because of Kajice's magic, I won't be able to sense you on Skiro glacier, and of course, when you're in the future you'll be off my radar too.

BONSON: I see.

DAMAN: Still, I have every faith that you'll come back fit and well.

BONSON: I bloody hope so.

DAMAN: Right... so where am I taking this carriage?

(Mandika beamed then paced towards the carriage, dragging the reluctant Lefiat behind her.)

MANDIKA: Tifaeris! I want to enjoy my week in the sunshine.

(Daman nodded.)

DAMAN: Of course, you do. And I'm sure you'll have earned every moment of it.

(He then clapped his hands together.)

DAMAN: Right... on that note. Good luck chaps.

(With that, he paced to the carriage then teleported away with it. Having been just about to open the door and climb inside it, Mandika was flabbergasted.)

MANDIKA: The what now...

(Her bottom lip then dropped and she waved her arms around erratically.)

MANDIKA: Gone! Where did... hey!!!

(Bonson couldn't help but chuckle.)

BONSON: Maybe we should have told him that Mandika and Lefiat we're supposed to be in it.

MANDIKA: I told him I wanted to enjoy my week in the sunshine!!!

FLAXLEY: Hmm... maybe he assumed you meant *after* you got back from Skiro.

MANDIKA: That idiot!!!

(She snarled.)

MANDIKA: Get him back here, Bonson!!!

(Barely able to stop chuckling, Bonson shook his head.)

BONSON: I could try, but he said he only comes when I'm stressed... do I look stressed to you?

MANDIKA: You want stress, do you?

BONSON: Not really, no.

MANDIKA: Get him back here or I'll tell my dad, the king, to stop giving you a paid retirement!!!

(Bonson shrugged.)

BONSON: Well you could do that but after the last time you threatened to do that to me, I got him to sign a legally binding contract. Valid until one of us dies.

MANDIKA: You...

(A wry smile then crossed her face and she stood akimbo, arrogantly tapping her fingers on her leg.)

MANDIKA: Fine, then I'll write a royal decree forbidding all the inns in Guevina to sell you ale.

BONSON: Only the king can write a royal decree.

MANDIKA: But...

BONSON: Face it, Mandika, as a mere princess, you have no real power whatsoever. Your job is just to sit there and look pretty while you wait to become Queen. And you can't even do that right.

(Looking somewhat heartbroken, Mandika then started to cry.)

MANDIKA: Please... just get him back, Bonson.

(Watching her, Bonson's bottom lip protruded then he threw his hands up in defeat.)

BONSON: Fine, I'll try.

(As Bonson closed his eyes and concentrated, Kritz grinned and whispered to Flaxley.)

KRITZ: No power as a princess, maybe, but as a crying woman...

FLAXLEY: Tears are blackmail, Kritz and if you ever decide to take that route...

KRITZ: You'll be powerless and do exactly as I ask.

(Flaxley sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Pretty much, yes.

KRITZ: Well, relax. I won't be crying to get my way any time soon. I always opt for violence when I want something.

FLAXLEY: And that's why I love you. Not to mention that skirt.

(As Flaxley looked to her and started to drool, Bonson relented concentrating and looked to Mandika uneasily.)

BONSON: Anything?

MANDIKA: Does it look like it?

BONSON: Well, no, but...

MANDIKA: Then no. Keep trying.

(Just then, a voice echoed across the skies around them.)

DAMAN: I can't teleport there right now, Bonson. I pretty much exhausted my teleportation magic by transporting the carriage and horses.

BONSON: And how long...

DAMAN: A few days, I expect.

BONSON: A few days?

DAMAN: I must go, Bonson. Projecting my voice is draining what little magic I have left. (With that, silence descended and all eyes turned to Mandika. Looking as if her entire world had fallen apart, she sighed then slunk to her knees.)

MANDIKA: So I can either walk back to Tifaeris and get eaten by a cuddyfinkle or go with you lot and get turned into a newt by Kajice...

LEFIAT: You won't get eaten by a cuddyfinkle with *me* to protect you.

FLAXLEY: Mandika, I resent your assumption that coming with us will get you killed!

MANDIKA: Yeah, but it might.

BONSON: So might walking home with Lefiat.

LEFIAT: Eh? Bonson, you're so mean it's unbelievable.

BONSON: Mean? I wasn't being mean. Have you ever faced a cuddyfinkle alone?

LEFIAT: I won't be alone, I'll be with Mandika.

BONSON: She won't be fighting it!

(Mandika then looked up and pouted.)

MANDIKA: I could! I could attack it with my magic...

(She sighed.)

MANDIKA: That's not the issue though. Even if Lefiat and I could defeat a cuddyfinkle, where would we end up? I don't know where Tifaeris is from here and Lefiat has no sense of direction either.

FLAXLEY: I see... and Tifaeris isn't even on any mile markers until you're almost there.

MANDIKA: Exactly. I didn't know that, but exactly. We could end up anywhere.

(She then burst into tears again.)

MANDIKA: Why??? I'm going off to get killed with you lot again, aren't I?

FLAXLEY: Like you've been killed before.

MANDIKA: You know what I mean!!!

(She then hung her head.)

MANDIKA: Fine.

(Looking broken, she struggled to her feet then glared at Lefiat.)

MANDIKA: You'd better protect me good and proper, mister.

LEFIAT: I always do, Mandika.

MANDIKA: Good. Make sure you do.

(She then ruffled her neck muscles angrily.)

MANDIKA: I'd better prepare my pack then.

(Resigned to her fate, she sighed sorrowfully.)

MANDIKA: My nice dress was in the carriage. One less thing to carry, I guess. Still, let me transfer my handbag into my pack and organise it all.

(As she turned and faced the table, pouting like a bitter catfish, Bonson rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: Trust her to be the last one ready.

FLAXLEY: That's hardly her fault, Bonson.

BONSON: Even so. I bet she takes an age; she'll make a right song and dance of it. All she has to do is stuff everything she owns in her pack, but no, that'd be too easy.

MANDIKA: *She* can hear you, Bonson!

KRITZ: Be fair, Bonson. It pays to organise a pack properly. I mean, a girl needs to have her hairbrush handy at all times.

MANDIKA: Exactly!

KRITZ: I put mine in the side compartment. Organising your pack properly just makes sense.

MANDIKA: Precisely!

DEREK: Yes well, to be honest, I'm starting to get annoyed. I just want to get going and all this time wasting is grating my last nerve.

BONSON: Hear, hear. Just get on with it, Mandika. Who cares if your hairbrush and make-up are easily accessible, we've got an alien to save.

KRITZ: *She* cares!!!

(She then looked away nonchalantly.)

KRITZ: Seriously, you guys love it when a girl looks nice, but you've no appreciation of the effort it takes.

FLAXLEY: Kritz, looking incredible takes *no* effort on your part.

KRITZ: Yeah, but I'm prettier than most.

(Flaxley rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Flattering you is hard work.

BONSON: Of course it is. Telling *her* she's fit is just stating a fact, and you get no kudos points for stating facts. That's why ugly women are so much easier to trick into bed.

FLAXLEY: Bonson, you're a disgrace.

BONSON: Yeah, right. Like you don't know where I'm coming from.

FLAXLEY: Not in front of my wife, I don't.

KRITZ: What?

FLAXLEY: Nothing!

(A full minute later, Mandika finally threw her pack onto her back then stepped from the table wearing a sorrowful pout.)

MANDIKA: I'm ready!

DEREK: Good. Come on guys, let's get going. Finally.

BONSON: Quite, finally. With Mandika dragging her heels all the time, it's a miracle we ever go anywhere.

(With that, everyone scooped up their packs, and they all headed for the spacecraft, Mandika scowling at the back of Bonson's head as she did so.)

MANDIKA: Arsehole, Bonson!

BONSON: No actually, that's your face you can see! It just *looks* like my arse!

(He chuckled to himself as Mandika flapped.)

MANDIKA: That didn't even make sense!!!

BONSON: Well... nor do you, arse-face.

(Turning red with rage, Mandika bellowed at the back of his head.)

MANDIKA: That was a rubbish comeback an' all!

BONSON: Who cares? It was enough to piss *you* off. Job done, I'd say!

(Snarling venomously, Mandika then followed him over the embankment and into the spacecraft gesturing furiously all the way.)

(As a group of people who were about to climb into what looked like a giant, metal soup tureen and take to the skies, Bonson, Mandika, Flaxley, Kritz and Lefiat could have been forgiven for being terrified. The thought of being way up in the air with nothing but the wind standing between *them* and a plunge to certain death would be understandably frightening. Nobody from this planet had ever flown before, after all, and normally it would have seemed like a horribly daunting prospect. At shortly before 9pm that evening, however, when they were strapped into their spacecraft seats, not one of them was showing any fear. Flaxley and Kritz were simply glad to finally be on their way. Wanting no part in any mission but having to come anyway, Mandika was depressed rather than scared. Bonson was just glad to be sitting down and Lefiat didn't quite have the brains to appreciate the enormity of it all.

Sitting up in the cockpit, more relieved than anyone to finally be on his way, Derek flicked a switch to make the door buzz to a close then glanced over his shoulder.)

DEREK: Brace yourselves.

(He then, flicked another switch and the air conditioning hummed to life. Having been wearing glacial attire in the sweltering heat of the summer evening, everyone greeted the cool breeze that whooshed through the spacecraft with a chorus of approval.)

BONSON: Bugger me, that's heavenly.

FLAXLEY: Thank the stars. That's just what the doctor ordered.

(As Kritz pushed her knees together and whimpered with delight, Flaxley allowed the breeze to wash over him then gave her a knowing glance.)

FLAXLEY: If I didn't know better, my love, I'd swear you just had an...

KRITZ: You know, I almost did.

MANDIKA: Me too.

LEFIAT: Yeah, me too.

(As everyone gave Lefiat a troubled glance, Derek pulled at two levers and the spacecraft lifted from the ground.)

DEREK: Hmm, this ship's very different to what I'm used to!

BONSON: You *can* fly it, can't you, Derek?

DEREK: I hope so!

FLAXLEY: You hope so???

(As his comrades all shared troubled glances, the spacecraft continued to rise into the air.)

DEREK: Panic over, chaps. This one's easy to control!

(Trusting his word on the matter, everybody then relaxed as the craft blasted forth at great speed towards the Skiro glacier.

As the spacecraft rocketed away into the night, leaving the East Grange mountains behind, Daman Siria appeared on the ground below and watched it head away with a relieved smile on his face. Nodding proudly as the spacecraft became a tiny speck in the sky, he folded his arms then chuckled to himself.)

DAMAN: Getting all six of them to go was bloody hard work this time.

(He then afforded himself another smile and disappeared again.

Up in the spacecraft at this time, Derek manipulated the controls with a focussed glint in his eye. Then, when he was satisfied with his choice of altitude and speed, he used an automatic function from the cockpit to remove everybody's seat belts. At once, they all exhaled with relief. Being strapped into seats with belts designed for three foot tall aliens had been far from comfortable. Free to leave their seats, Bonson immediately paced over to chat to the pilot Derek, while Mandika and Lefiat secured a placed to peer from a window. Flaxley however, had only one thing on his mind. As soon as Kritz climbed to her feet, he sidled up next to her with an amorous glint in his eye.)

FLAXLEY: You look like a goddess in that skirt, my love.

(At once, Kritz leaned provocatively against the side of the craft and gave him a coy smile.)

KRITZ: What? This old thing?

(He just groaned with pleasure.)

FLAXLEY: It's long... down to your knees and yet... sexy as hell. I can't believe you were harbouring such a gem.

KRITZ: I've had it for ages, actually. I found it at a bazaar in Azagotse last year in fact. I stitched it into a miniskirt though because... well, it was bloody hot that day.

FLAXLEY: If only you hadn't.

(She gave him a sexy glance then proceeded to twirl her hair with her fingers.)

KRITZ: Why? Do you like it?

FLAXLEY: Like it? I love you in it!

KRITZ: And I love that you love me in it!

(Her eyes then bulged and she hopped forward, rubbing her backside.)

KRITZ: Ouch! Don't pinch me!

FLAXLEY: I couldn't resist it!

KRITZ: Well try!

FLAXLEY: Okay...

(With that, he stepped closer to her and whispered into her ear.)

FLAXLEY: Before we get to where we're going, do you fancy... you know? I'm sure there's somewhere in this craft we can slope off to.

(Loving the attention, Kritz giggled and glanced away.)

KRITZ: Don't be silly! You're such a naughty boy.

FLAXLEY: Oh, come on, I'm gagging for it! You look delicious!

KRITZ: We can't!

(In absolutely no doubt that she'd change her mind, Flaxley smiled then pulled her close and spun her back against his chest, before slipping his hands around her waist.)

FLAXLEY: Don't be such a tease, you sexy thing, you.

(He then swept her hair to one side to kiss her neck.)

FLAXLEY: Come on, you know you want to!

(Kritz giggled shyly once again.)

KRITZ: Stop it!

(She wiggled her neck around as he continued to kiss it softly.)

FLAXLEY: I can tell you right now, my love, I won't!

(As her face started to turn red, Kritz pouted and she softly slapped at his giant hands as they cradled her stomach.)

KRITZ: No, stop it. That's enough now. Stop it.

(She then stepped away from him and swung herself towards him wearing an annoyed frown.)

KRITZ: I said stop it, for pity's sake!!!

(Flaxley looked stumped for a second then grinned and stepped closer to her again.)

FLAXLEY: Don't be shy, darling!

(At once, Kritz's shoulders sunk and she spanned her forehead.)

KRITZ: For crying out loud, you're so annoying when you get like this.

FLAXLEY: Well, you know the answer, my love. Let me shag you and I'll stop pestering you for sex.

KRITZ: No! How many times?

(While Kritz continued to endure her husband's lusty advances with little hope of any respite, Derek sat up in the cockpit matching her browbeaten and defeated expression. Subjected to endless questions by a fascinated Bonson he was starting to get more than a little irritated. Watching and quizzing his little green friend's every move with immense interest, he aired his every thought liberally, and it was driving Derek to distraction.)

BONSON: Red button this time. I wonder what that does. That pointy thing is pointing at the number 8000... 8000 what? Blue button now, eh? What do all those green lines mean? Why so many switches and buttons and how can anyone possibly know what they all do? I wonder what that twiddly little round thing does.

(Unable to stomach much more, Derek snarled under his breath.)

DEREK: For pity's sake, Bonson!

(Bonson glared at him.)

BONSON: Excuse me?

DEREK: I'm trying to concentrate.
BONSON: Well don't let *me* stop you.
DEREK: How can I not? You won't stop talking!
(Bonson looked stunned.)
BONSON: I said all that out loud?
DEREK: Yes... you did!
BONSON: Oh! Sorry, old chap. Had no idea.
(He exhaled.)
BONSON: It's just a pleasure to watch you at work.
DEREK: You won't think it's such a pleasure if I lose concentration and fly us into a mountain though, will you?
(Bonson gave him a sideways glance.)
BONSON: Obviously not!
(He then bit his lip and spoke up in a nervous voice.)
BONSON: Is that likely then, is it?
DEREK: Not at all, we're on a set course, but... just try to stop with the incessant talking.
BONSON: Right.
(As Bonson fell quiet, Derek nodded to himself, relieved to have got through to him.)
BONSON: So, just out of curiosity...
(Derek snarled at him.)
DEREK: What, Bonson, what?
(Bonson reeled back and looked to him sheepishly.)
BONSON: Don't be like that, I was just wondering how you know where we're going. From up here, everything looks the same.
(Derek looked at the controls then took a calming breath. He knew Bonson wasn't about to give him any peace and decided it'd be easier on his nerves if he just indulged him a little.)
DEREK: Fine... well... it's quite simple really. This green screen here...
(He gestured to a digital screen on the dashboard.)
DEREK: It's a map.
BONSON: It is? Doesn't look like a map.
DEREK: Well trust me it is. I programmed in the co-ordinates for Skiro, or set course if you like, and the craft is following that horizon marker.
(Bonson scratched his head in confusion.)
BONSON: Right...
DEREK: I basically marked Skiro on the map and now it's heading for the mark.
(Much to Derek's annoyance, Bonson still looked confused.)
DEREK: Oh come off it, Bonson! I can't explain it in more simple terms than that!
BONSON: No, it's not that... it's just, how do you know where Skiro is again? I know you sort of explained it earlier, but you kind of lost me, I'm afraid.
(Derek looked enlightened.)
DEREK: Oh, okay! Well...
(He pressed a button to zoom in on the map.)
DEREK: Look.
BONSON: Okay.
DEREK: Our ships have detailed maps of this planet, taken from space.
BONSON: Right, I see...
DEREK: Well, it also knows where on the planet the craft is. So it was easy to pin point Tifaeris on the map and set a marker.
BONSON: But we're not going to Tifaeris.
DEREK: I know that! Just listen, will you?

BONSON: Yeah alright, no need to have a hissing fit.

(Derek rolled his eyes then continued.)

DEREK: Anyway, Daman said Skiro was south east of Tifaeris, right? So, having found Tifaeris on the map, I scrolled south east and there it was.

(He zoomed the map in on another landmass.)

DEREK: As you can see, it's small, white and has a big black line through the middle. That must be a crevice. Therefore it can only be...

(Bonson nodded.)

BONSON: Skiro glacier.

DEREK: Exactly. It's entirely surrounded by storms except one small opening, as you can see, so I've set course to head for the opening. Piece of cake. And once, we've reached the destination we're pre-programmed to fly to, it'll just be a simple case of spotting the corridor of time from the air.

(He beamed.)

BONSON: That's bloody marvellous.

DEREK: Best part is, it's not even that far away. I'd say seven or eight hours by boat, in this thing... about five minutes. It's not a long trip at all, especially at this speed.

BONSON: Indeed. And there I was worrying we'd get lost.

DEREK: Not a chance, Bonson!

(He smiled.)

DEREK: This thing has the entire planet mapped.

BONSON: Impressive.

DEREK: Oh, that's nothing, Bonson. I can look any place in great detail when I'm several miles above it. I can clearly see an ant running about on the ground from way up in the clouds.

BONSON: Really? Impressive... yet, extremely pointless.

DEREK: It's not pointless; it's designed for conflict, Bonson. This thing has extremely accurate and powerful ranged weapons and I can lock onto a target from miles away and blow it smithereens.

(Bonson looked thoughtful.)

BONSON: Now that *is* impressive.

DEREK: Thank you.

BONSON: So, essentially, you could fly above Guevina castle and spy on Lefiat?

DEREK: Sure, not that I would, but yes. Easily.

BONSON: And you could take him out from mid air without anyone knowing it was you?

(Derek read his thoughts and gave him a cold glance.)

DEREK: I'm not lending you the spacecraft, Bonson.

(Bonson sighed with disappointment.)

BONSON: Spoilsport.

(Just then, Mandika's angry voice rose into the air from behind him.)

MANDIKA: No, I won't stop complaining!

(At once, everyone except Derek, turned to face her. Standing beside an embarrassed looking Lefiat, she looked on the verge of exploding.)

MANDIKA: It's almost bedtime and I'm stuck in this steel flying machine with this dirty smelly, unfashionable coat on. And what's more, these bottoms are itchy and the boots are so déclassé it's frightening! I'm a princess, I should be dressed from head to foot in the finest fashions money can buy not strutting about in this cheap tat! How undignified to have to dress like you lot!!!

(As she paused for breath, she noticed four pairs of eyes glaring at her in disgust.)

MANDIKA: What?

BONSON: Very tactfully put, ma'am!

(Realising she'd angered everyone, she swiftly shrunk and tried to look innocent.)

MANDIKA: Not that I don't like how you lot dress. Bonson, you look lovely...

(Bonson clearly didn't agree and replied with a furrowed brow.)

BONSON: I look like the Abbot from Wendigo monastery!

(Mandika then looked to Kritz and forced a cheesy grin.)

MANDIKA: Um... and these hats... you look lovely in yours, Kritz!

(Having never been complimented by Mandika in regard to fashion before, Kritz looked astonished.)

KRITZ: Huh? What? Really?

MANDIKA: Absolutely! In fact your whole outfit looks lovely. I mean, for once you don't look like an enormous tart!

(Fortunately for Mandika, before Kritz could react, Flaxley grabbed her in an arm lock.)

KRITZ: Get off me, she's for it!!!

(As Kritz kicked and screamed in desperation to get at her, Mandika whimpered and hid behind her hands.)

MANDIKA: I'm sorry, forgive me!!! Please!!!

KRITZ: Let me at her, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: I can't! You'll kill her!

(At this point, Kritz stopped struggling briefly and addressed him in a sultry voice.)

KRITZ: I'll let you shag me!

(Visibly tempted, Flaxley's lips quivered and he said nothing. It didn't help that she was rubbing her backside against the front of his trousers but somehow he managed to resist.)

KRITZ: No? Sod you then.

(With that, she resumed struggling as Mandika hid behind Lefiat.)

KRITZ: Let me go!!!

FLAXLEY: Calm down, Kritz!

(Struggling to hold onto his super agile wife, Flaxley looked to Bonson desperately.)

FLAXLEY: Bonson, *you're* wise... say something!

(Bonson raised a disinterested eyebrow.)

BONSON: Okay. Lefiat, you were supposed to take your helmet off before you put your hood up!

LEFIAT: Eh?

FLAXLEY: Thanks for nothing, Bonson!

(Bonson shrugged.)

BONSON: Well fancy asking *me* for help! Like I can do anything! I'm a wise man, not a miracle worker. When she sees red, I don't get involved!

FLAXLEY: You could have *tried* to find some pacifying words!

BONSON: I could have, yes.

FLAXLEY: Then why didn't you???

(He furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: I won't be asking for your help again.

BONSON: You don't normally ask anyway. Besides, you don't *usually* have *any* trouble restraining her.

FLAXLEY: She's not normally dressed in slippery leather! Most of her is normally naked and much easier to grab hold of.

BONSON: She's *not* dressed in slippery leather *now*! Leather isn't slippery. It's you! You recently polished your metal gauntlets, didn't you?

(Flaxley looked sheepishly from side to side for a moment then furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: Never mind that! Just help me think of something pacifying before she slips

through my fingers and kills Mandika... it's like trying to wrestle a tuna fish!!!

(Just then, Derek yelled out and grabbed everyone's attention.)

DEREK: Skiro Glacier approaching...

BONSON: That was quick!

(With that, Bonson and Lefiat raced to the side of the craft to stare from a window.)

BONSON: Come and look at this, chaps!

FLAXLEY: Actually, I'm rather busy here, Bonson.

(Just then, Kritz relented struggling and growled at Mandika.)

KRITZ: No you're not. Let me go, Flaxley. I'll deal with her later.

FLAXLEY: Promise.

KRITZ: I swear on my hair.

(Satisfied she was serious, Flaxley released her from his grasp then they all raced to the side of the craft to join Bonson and Lefiat. In the darkness they could make out an icy continent ahead with huge storms encircling it, except for a small gap containing a disused sea port.)

LEFIAT: Head for the gap, Derek!

DEREK: Yes, Lefiat, I *had* thought of that! It's pre-programmed to go through the gap, obviously.

(He rolled his eyes.)

DEREK: Bloody back seat driver.

MANDIKA: So we're here then, are we? Gonna land now, are we? Only it looks cold out there and I don't want to go!

DEREK: We're not going to land just yet, Mandika. Daman said the entrance to the corridor of time is near the crevice and that's quite a distance away still. Once we've reach the pre-programmed destination, I'll reassume full control and see if I can spot the corridor of time, before I take us in to land.

BONSON: Sounds like a plan. Just make sure you don't...

DEREK: I'm not going to fly into the force field!!!

BONSON: Good. See to it you don't. My life might be crap but it's the only one I've got. (Derek snarled angrily.)

DEREK: Bonson... and you, Lefiat... just go back to looking out of the window and leave the piloting to me, will you?

LEFIAT: Eh?

BONSON: Fine. But don't come crying to me if...

DEREK: Bonson!!!

BONSON: Fine! Be like that then.

LEFIAT: What's eating him, Bonson?

BONSON: I don't bloody know, some form of primal alien rage, probably. Just ignore him, Lefiat.

LEFIAT: Oh... okay.

(With that, they re-joined the others in gazing out at the white wilderness gleaming in the moonlight with awe. No sooner had they done so, however, the ship jolted violently, throwing them all to the floor.)

BONSON: Steady on, Derek!

DEREK: The controls have gone crazy!!!

(Sure enough, the ship began to shake wildly from side to side quite clearly out of control.

Fearing the worst, the passengers all screamed and panicked as they desperately tried to find an object to cling onto to steady themselves.)

MANDIKA: What are you doing, Derek?

LEFIAT: We're gonna die!!!

FLAXLEY: Derek? What's happening?

(As Derek desperately tried to regain control of the craft, his little body tensed with concentration and he yelled out.)

DEREK: There seems to be some kind of force resisting our approach.

FLAXLEY: Force? As in force field? Did you overshoot the crevice by mistake???

DEREK: We're nowhere near the sodding crevice!!! That's *north* Skiro in front of us!

BONSON: But Daman said we could land on north Skiro.

DEREK: Well clearly he was wrong...

(He snarled.)

DEREK: Fuck! I'm going to have to use the emergency override to shut down the computers. That way I can fly her manually and hopefully take back control!!!

(Bonson gave him a bewildered glance.)

BONSON: Right. Yes, you do that.

DEREK: It's done! Okay, now it's all down to my skill as a pilot.

FLAXLEY: And it wasn't before?

DEREK: We were on a pre-set course before, I was just guided it.

(He snarled to himself.)

DEREK: Why am I telling you lot about it? You don't have a bloody clue what I'm saying.

(He gritted his teeth then called out to his five panicked passengers.)

DEREK: Look, just... bear with me... I'll try to get us down on the edge of the land!

BONSON: Try? Do more than try, Derek!!!

(As everyone clung on for dear life, the spacecraft rocked around in the air as it struggled against the mysterious power forcing it back.)

DEREK: Damn it!!! We've got a serious altitude problem here!

MANDIKA: I never said a bloody word!

BONSON: He said *altitude*, ma'am!

MANDIKA: Oh! What's that then?

FLAXLEY: Never mind that, can we make it, Derek?

DEREK: I'll do my best, Flaxley! Okay, this is it, I'm going in!

LEFIAT: We're all gonna die!!!

(As the others willed him on, Derek gritted his teeth and gave the craft full power in an attempt to clear the sea and come down on land. Struggling to make it, the ship swung like a pendulum against the turbulence, the bright silver craft defying gravity to spare itself the wrath of the ocean. With all the violent swaying of the craft, Mandika, Lefiat, Bonson and Flaxley had been thrown to the floor and we're unable to get up without being knocked straight back off their feet again. As such, they had no idea what was happening outside the craft. Kritz, however, had been thrown against a window seat and had a perfect view of everything. As she clung onto the headrest, she reported what her wide eyes were seeing with terror in her voice.)

KRITZ: We're getting closer!

(Feeling utterly helpless, she watched on in dismay as the ship edged closer to land at the same rate as it got closer to the water.)

KRITZ: Come on, Derek, you can do it!

FLAXLEY: Will we make it?

KRITZ: It's touch and go!

(Very much at the mercy of the gods by now, the ship continued to descend as Derek fought with the controls, while Kritz desperately tried not to panic and scare the others.)

DEREK: This is it!!!

(With a scream, Kritz then leapt to the floor and covered her head as the ship descended rapidly. Still struggling through the air it seemed to be heading for the cliff edge and she could no longer bear to look. Clinging desperately to the hope that he could salvage the

situation, however, Derek, pulled desperately at the controls in a bid to raise the craft, then closed his eyes and braced himself for impact.)

DEREK: Please!!!

(With that, the ship slammed down right on the edge of the land then skidded over a thousand feet in the snow. Everyone inside was being thrown around like rag dolls as the ship spun across the barren white wasteland. Mercifully, it wasn't long before the craft came to a halt against the snowy wall it had created in front of itself. Battered and bruised, everyone struggled to their feet and dusted themselves down, Bonson and Mandika looking more than ready for a long whinge.)

KRITZ: Phew, nice one, Derek!

BONSON: Was it???

(He growled.)

BONSON: Daman's rarely wrong and *he* said it was okay to fly to north Skiro! Are you sure it wasn't just pilot error?

(Flaxley furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: Bonson!!!

BONSON: What?

FLAXLEY: Don't just go throwing blame around! You don't know what went wrong any more than I do!

(He then looked to Derek and nodded.)

FLAXLEY: What do you think it was, Derek?

DEREK: Honestly it felt like these lands are protected by a force field! I just couldn't keep it airborne!

FLAXLEY: So, Daman was wrong then?

DEREK: Extremely so.

(He then looked at the controls and his shoulders sunk.)

DEREK: Aw, crap. Now all the warning lights are on... both engines are gone and hydraulics are done for.

FLAXLEY: Meaning?

DEREK: It's buggered, Flaxley. Not a hope in hell of shifting it. It's done for.

(He sighed.)

DEREK: At least I'm consistent.

(Lefiat sighed.)

LEFIAT: Are we gonna have to walk now then?

DEREK: Well, yeah. This thing's broken. We'll *have* to walk!

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Even if it wasn't broken, Derek, who's to say that force field was only around the edge of the land? Even in perfect working order, it might not have been able to fly here.

DEREK: Well that's an irrelevance now anyway, Flaxley. Fact is, force field or not, the ship's done for.

KRITZ: Walking it is then.

DEREK: Quite.

(He then nodded and looked to the door.)

DEREK: Speaking of which, time's wasting. Come on, let's go!

MANDIKA: But, it's really late! Like, getting on for 10pm!

DEREK: Correct, I see the royal education served you well, now let's go!

BONSON: All the way? On foot? In the snow?

FLAXLEY: Sorry old chap, but what choice do we have? The spacecraft is done for so we've no option *but* to continue on foot!

(As Flaxley's words echoed around in his head, Bonson's brow furrowed and his nostrils

started to twitch. At once the world seemed to slow down and he could only mumble in a catatonic daze.)

BONSON: Walking... miles and miles across and icy tundra... with *my* feet... at my age... no pubs to be seen...

(He snapped out of the trance then spun around to snarl furiously at Lefiat.)

BONSON: What is it with you?

(Lefiat looked most confused.)

LEFIAT: Me?

BONSON: Yes, you. You pointless waste of a bad haircut.

LEFIAT: What are you getting angry at me for, Bonson? I didn't do anything!

BONSON: No, you never do, do you?

MANDIKA: Bonson, leave him alone!

BONSON: No, I won't!

FLAXLEY: Stop it, Bonson!

(Shocked that they were defending the young lad, Bonson glanced around at everyone in astonishment.)

BONSON: Aren't you lot a little fed up with this?

KRITZ: With what?

BONSON: The amount of shit we keep landing ourselves in every time we meet up!

DEREK: Well, yes, but it's hardly Lefiat's fault, is it?

BONSON: You reckon?

(He shook his fist then began.)

BONSON: I had a simple life, being a butler was easy. Mandika may have been spoilt but I could live with that...

MANDIKA: I'm not spoilt!

(She received five astonished looks.)

MANDIKA: Leave me alone!

BONSON: Anyway, living with that was easy, but then along came Lefiat. I'd escorted the princess on countless journeys and as Flaxley will testify they all went without a hitch. First time *he* comes, he loses a mystical artefact and endangers the world and as a result *we* have to risk our lives to get it back!!!

LEFIAT: I've apologised for that a hundred times!

BONSON: Let me finish! I stay in Guevina for a whole year, it's peaceful, tranquil even, then guess what... I go for a trip with him and low and behold, I end up in battle, first against the Trepe, then against Dim Lee and that huge army!

LEFIAT: You can't blame *me* for that one!

BONSON: Now, a further year on, third trip out with Lefiat, third trip up shit creek with out a bloody paddle!!!

(Lefiat was dumbfounded.)

LEFIAT: This aint my fault either!

BONSON: Yes it is! You're a bloody jinx, every time you're around something awful happens!!!

KRITZ: Bonson, this is also your third trip out with *me*! How do you know *I'm* not the jinx?

DEREK: Or me?

BONSON: 'Cause, this pillock had *already* dropped us in the shit *before* we met you two!!!

KRITZ: Oh, yeah. Good point!

LEFIAT: Eh?

KRITZ: Just saying!

BONSON: I'm never going anywhere with *you* again, Lefiat!

LEFIAT: Suits me fine, I hate escorting you to brothels anyway!

BONSON: That was an inn and we didn't even go in!!! Escorting me, indeed!!!

(Rolling her eyes, Kritz turned to her husband.)

KRITZ: Darling, you're up!

FLAXLEY: I guess so, my love!

(With that, Flaxley stepped forward and placed his hands on his hips authoritatively.)

FLAXLEY: Okay chaps, let's all calm down shall we?

DEREK: Taking control of the situation, Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: Someone has to!

(He then cleared his throat and raised his voice.)

FLAXLEY: Listen!!!

(As everyone turned his way, Flaxley stood confidently and addressed their waiting ears.)

FLAXLEY: We always knew we were going to have cross this glacier on foot...

BONSON: No, we were going to land near the corridor time then head straight off to the future. The cold and horrible bit wasn't supposed to happen until we reached south Skiro.

FLAXLEY: Fine! Agreed. It would have been nice to land near the entrance to the corridor of time then rush inside and head off to the future, but that's not going to happen now. And no amount of squabbling is going to change that fact. We're going to have to trek through the snow to find it instead and you're going to have to accept that reality. Stop thinking what could have been and accept what *is*.

(He nodded and firmed his stance.)

FLAXLEY: I know it's annoying but that's the way it is. Now we have to focus our efforts on the task ahead. We're going to have to rescue Zanne the hard way, simple as that. Sure, it'll require a lot more leg work but there's no point getting stressed about it. What's done is done and now we just have to get on with it.

MANDIKA: This is so unfair!!! I wasn't even going to come until Daman buggered off with my carriage, now I have to walk miles in the freezing cold.

FLAXLEY: Well, I know it sucks, Mandika, but now you're here, ask yourself this. What's the quickest way to get home? Carry on and complete the mission or stand there complaining about it?

(Mandika sighed.)

MANDIKA: I guess.

BONSON: I'll take the middle way! I'll carry on and complete the mission, but by golly I'm going to complain about it!

FLAXLEY: Then your complaints will fall on deaf ears.

(Bonson growled and mumbled under his breath.)

BONSON: We'll see about that.

(Hoping he'd said enough to pacify everyone, Flaxley then looked to Derek.)

FLAXLEY: Now, as for the route we'll be taking...

(Taking his cue from Flaxley, Derek nodded.)

DEREK: Well, I could see the giant crevice in the middle of this continent on my spacecraft's map but I didn't see anything that looked like an entrance to anything. I wasn't going to look for the corridor of time until we got a bit closer. It's here on north Skiro somewhere sure, but it could be anywhere. All I know is, we'll have to walk to the crevice and look for it. Daman said it was near the crevice, after all.

FLAXLEY: Right. Now let's focus on that and stop all this arguing.

(Bonson rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: Fine. But, I still say this wouldn't have happened if we'd left Lefiat behind. He's cursed I tell you.

LEFIAT: Unbelievable! I can't believe you're blaming *me*! Nothing's ever *your* fault is it Bonson?

(Much to everyone's amazement, Bonson looked sheepish and hung his head.)

BONSON: Yes, yes, I know, I admit it, you're right!

(He then grinned the world's most conceited grin.)

BONSON: Nothing *is* ever my fault!

(As everyone shook their heads at him in disgust, he then picked up his bag and nodded towards the door of the spacecraft.)

BONSON: Anyway, shall we get going?

DEREK: Yes, we shall! At last, someone talking sense!

BONSON: No surprise it was me, eh?

(Flaxley gave Bonson an exasperated glance then shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: Look, it's ten o'clock at night and we've had one hell of a day. I say we should grab a night's sleep before we go! Then we'll be ready to face the elements tomorrow!

DEREK: But, Flaxley? What about Zanne?

(Flaxley looked to his alien friend and offered up a sympathetic smile.)

FLAXLEY: We're human, Derek, we need to sleep, we'll be useless to you if we don't!

(Realising was he right, Derek sighed.)

DEREK: Yes, Flaxley, I know you're right. You chaps get some sleep, I'll wake you at seven!

MANDIKA: Ten!

DEREK: Seven!!!

(Mandika grinned at him innocently.)

MANDIKA: Eight?

DEREK: Seven!

MANDIKA: Fine! You smell!!!

FLAXLEY: Never mind arguing. Let's just space out and lay ourselves down for the night. We're going to need all the rest we can get if we're going to cross a glacier tomorrow.

MANDIKA: That's why I said ten!

FLAXLEY: Mandika!!!

MANDIKA: Fine. I hate you.

FLAXLEY: Good for you. Now let's just get some sleep, damn it.

(Very much in agreement with Flaxley's idea, everyone immediately spread out and set their bags down to use as pillows, including the grumpy Mandika. Greatly aware of Derek's inner turmoil, they did so with heavy hearts and offered him sympathetic smiles in support.)

KRITZ: It'll all work out, Derek.

FLAXLEY: Indeed. Hang in there, old chap.

DEREK: Thanks, everyone.

(As everyone settled down, Lefiat pouted then spoke towards the ceiling.)

LEFIAT: I still can't believe you're trying to blame *me* for all this, Bonson!

BONSON: Go to sleep, mistake boy!

LEFIAT: Stop calling me that!!!

(As Lefiat rolled over and pouted bitterly at the wall, Flaxley leant over and whispered to Bonson.)

FLAXLEY: What's up old friend? This isn't like you!

BONSON: What isn't?

FLAXLEY: All this anger.

BONSON: Yes it is. It's exactly like me. When stressed I take out my frustrations liberally on everyone using cutting wit and dry sarcasm. It's what I *always* do, you know that!

FLAXLEY: Yes, but you're not normally *this* nasty.

(Bonson sighed then shook his head sorrowfully.)

BONSON: Maybe...

FLAXLEY: Look, just try to control it, will you? We're gonna need all our confidence for this mission, and you're not helping!

(Bonson offered him a nod of concession.)

BONSON: Yes, I know... and you're right. I'll try to be more tolerant!

FLAXLEY: So you'll apologise tomorrow?

(Horried by the very thought of it, Bonson growled then rolled over.)

BONSON: No!!! Now go to sleep!

FLAXLEY: Good plan. Derek, you're up.

DEREK: Righto, Flaxley.

(With that, Derek cast sleep magic on them all, then went and sat in the cockpit to turn the heating on. Finding little solace in the fact that it still worked, his mind immediately wandered. All he could think of was Zanne and how he felt he'd let her down. For him, it would be a long night.)

North Skiro, 7am...

(As seven o'clock came, Bonson opened his eyes to find Derek standing over him. Still half asleep, he rubbed his eyes and groaned in defeat.)

BONSON: Morning already?

DEREK: Afraid so, Bonson!

(As Bonson sat up and sighed miserably, Derek walked over to Flaxley and gently shook him. Stirring, Flaxley opened one eye then forced a tired smile.)

FLAXLEY: Morning, Derek!

DEREK: Morning. Um... Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: Yes, my friend?

DEREK: Would you like to take your hand off of Kritz's breast before I wake her?

(Furrowing his brow, Flaxley replied in no uncertain terms.)

FLAXLEY: Not a chance! She put it there and it's more than my life's worth to remove it.

DEREK: What?

FLAXLEY: This is how we sleep, Derek. She likes it this way and frankly I can think of far worse ways to wake up.

(Derek couldn't help but grin.)

DEREK: All to their own, I suppose! Zanne would kill me if she woke up with my hand on her...

FLAXLEY: Yes, well, Kritz is different and it'll be a cold day in hell before you hear *me* complaining.

(Over the next minute or so, Derek proceeded to wake his entire party with careful shakes and soft words. The sleep had served them well and they all immediately set about trying to freshen themselves up. This was, however, not an easy task without hot water. Blessed with only cold water supplied by Kritz's H2O magic, they all coped as best they could without complaint. Except Mandika, of course. For Mandika, never the cheeriest person first thing in the morning, this lack of sanitation was one indignity too many. Looking furious, she folded her arms and pouted.)

MANDIKA: Oh, for crying out loud.

LEFIAT: What's up?

MANDIKA: It's "what's up, *ma'am*?"

LEFIAT: But... I'm your boyfriend!

FLAXLEY: And her knight, so "*ma'am*" it is, Lefiat!

MANDIKA: See?

LEFIAT: Whatever!

MANDIKA: Whatever, "*ma'am*"!

FLAXLEY: Calm down princess, what's upsetting you?

MANDIKA: Isn't it obvious?

BONSON: No, ma'am, with you it could be anything!

MANDIKA: I can't believe I've had to sleep in my clothes and I can't even have a wash! If this keeps up I'll end up smelling like one of you lot!

KRITZ: I *am* gonna hit her one day, you know that?

FLAXLEY: I'd be shocked if you didn't, my love.

(Derek sighed and held his palms out to his side.)

DEREK: Look, I know this is far from ideal but we have to make the most of a bad situation.

FLAXLEY: Indeed. Getting irritated isn't going to help. We're all in the same mess so let's work together and get through it.

MANDIKA: That's easy for you to say, you're a knight, you do this kind of thing a lot. I'm better than that!

(Choosing to let her use of the word "better" slide, Flaxley looked to her and offered her a positive smile.)

FLAXLEY: I know this isn't easy for you, Mandika, but there's no need to get upset. You're among friends, remember? We won't judge you even if you *do* pong a bit.

MANDIKA: Which I don't!!!

(She then sighed and folded her arms indignantly.)

MANDIKA: Whatever. I want to go home. I'm hungry and I smell like Kritz's armpits.

(Kritz looked to Flaxley and sneered.)

KRITZ: I think that day has come!

(Under no illusions about just how furious Kritz was with Mandika's constant baiting, Flaxley swiftly threw his arms around her upper torso to restrain her.)

FLAXLEY: If you bite every time she bitches, I'll *never* be able to restore morale.

(Desperate to thump Mandika as *soon* as she could *and* as *hard* as she could, Kritz growled back at him.)

KRITZ: Actually, I think killing her would lift our spirits no end. It certainly would mine!!!

(Knowing all too well that Kritz would never escape Flaxley's grasp, Mandika scoffed and turned her nose up at her.)

MANDIKA: So uncivilised.

(Barely able to believe what he was seeing, Derek puffed out in frustration and shook his head.)

DEREK: I'm going to go on alone if this is how things are going to be.

(Much to his amazement, some words of encouragement then came from the most unlikely source.)

BONSON: Don't worry, Derek. I know just the thing to calm everyone down and lift morale no end.

DEREK: You do?

(He read Bonson's mind and looked enlightened.)

DEREK: Breakfast! Right.

BONSON: Actually, that's plan B.

(With that, he looked to the irate Kritz and raised his voice.)

BONSON: What say you stop trying to kill everyone and entertain the troops instead, Kritz?

(Kritz immediately stopped struggling to escape Flaxley's grasp and glared at him.)

KRITZ: What?

BONSON: You know, morale's a bit low, so what say you leap up on a table and give us all an exotic dance?

(Flaxley snarled at him.)

FLAXLEY: She's not going to be leaping on any tables to entertain *you*, you filthy old git.

BONSON: Doesn't have to be a table, Flaxley, I'll gladly accept a lap dance.

(As Flaxley snarled, Kritz forgot all about her anger and chuckled.)

KRITZ: Yeah, right, Bonson. Silly old sod.

(She then smiled at Flaxley.)

KRITZ: Let me go, my love. I'm cool.

(As Kritz gently wriggled free of her husband's lax grasp and sat down, Bonson pouted at her miserably.)

BONSON: I wasn't joking, Kritz.

(He then noticed Flaxley seething at him from a mere few feet away and grinned innocently.)

BONSON: Though come to think of it, yes I was.

(He then looked away and hid his face. Watching him in dismay, Derek rolled his eyes.)

DEREK: I'll fetch breakfast.

BONSON: Good idea, I always was a fan of plan B.

(As Derek scuttled off to the back of the craft, Bonson scratched behind his head and mumbled nervously.)

BONSON: Still glaring at me, Flaxley?

(Flaxley shook his head and sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Morale doesn't stand a chance with you around, Bonson.

(Bonson looked to him and protested.)

BONSON: I cheered Kritz up, didn't I?

FLAXLEY: Yeah, and made *me* livid instead!

BONSON: Well... you're easier to calm down than she is.

(Mandika rolled her eyes and folded her arms.)

MANDIKA: Maybe we *should* have stopped off at Madame's Zuzu's boudoir so you could get this exotic dancing obsession of yours out of your system.

BONSON: Excuse me?

MANDIKA: You heard me.

BONSON: I don't know why *you're* getting so upset about it. I didn't ask *you* to dance.

(He looked away and folded his arms indignantly.)

BONSON: I asked the good looking one to do it.

(He then glanced straight back at her.)

BONSON: That's Kritz by the way!

(He turned away and grinned to himself.)

MANDIKA: I wouldn't do it anyway, and besides, I *am* good looking...

(Lefiat who'd watched on agape the whole time, grinned happily.)

LEFIAT: Yes, you are.

(Bonson scoffed at him.)

BONSON: Then why is she dating *you*?

LEFIAT: I have absolutely no idea, Bonson. It beggars belief, quite frankly.

(Bonson just looked at him coldly for a minute then laughed out loud.)

BONSON: You're not even going to pretend are you?

LEFIAT: Nope, I know how lucky I am.

(Mandika couldn't help but smile, cheered by his words.)

MANDIKA: So sweet.

(A minute or so later, Derek rushed back with some sandwiches and fruit from the spacecraft's pantry. Expecting to have to use the food to calm everyone down, he was quite stunned to see Flaxley and Kritz chatting softly to one another, Bonson minding his own business and Lefiat and Mandika hugging.)

DEREK: Nobody's arguing or acting up!

(Bonson scoffed.)

BONSON: Of course not, what do you think we are? Animals?

(Figuring it was best not to answer that question, Derek just smiled and proceeded to hand out the food. It seemed that their arguments had aired a lot of their frustrations and helped everyone clear their minds. At last there was peace and harmony. How long it would last, however, was anyone's guess.)

(After having their way through several sandwiches and some delicious fruit, the party finally felt ready to face the difficult journey ahead. Nobody was under any illusions about how difficult it'd be to cross a glacier, but at last they were ready to make a start.

Having stood impatiently by the door for several minutes, ready to go at a moment's notice, Derek watched everyone slip their packs onto their backs then nodded to himself. Thinking only of Zanne, he was itching to get going and waiting had been torture. Very much relieved that the wait was now over, he couldn't help but smile as everyone assembled at his side.)

DEREK: Thank heavens.

FLAXLEY: Okay, let's do this.

LEFIAT: Yup!

(Despite his desperation to get going, before opening the door release, Derek glanced around at his five assembled colleagues.)

DEREK: Everyone's remembered their packs, right?

BONSON: Of course we have!

MANDIKA: Wait, I just need to do something with mine!

(As Derek groaned, Mandika smiled lovingly at Lefiat.)

MANDIKA: Lefiat, darling?

LEFIAT: Yeah?

MANDIKA: Carry my pack for me, please?

LEFIAT: But...

MANDIKA: Go on, you know I love you!

LEFIAT: But, I'm already carrying one!

(Caring very little for his reasoning, Mandika snarled and raised her voice.)

MANDIKA: Carry it!!! That's an order!

LEFIAT: Hey! You can't order me around; who do you think you are?

MANDIKA: A princess! *Your* charge, Sir Lefiat!

(Lefiat went to stand his ground, but as he opened his mouth no words came out.)

BONSON: No answer to that one is there, Lefiat? Checkmate, in fact!

LEFIAT: Fine!

(With that, he took her bag from her and pouted like an angry schoolboy.)

LEFIAT: So unfair.

(Kritz looked Lefiat up and down then sighed despairingly.)

KRITZ: Someone tell him to take that helmet from under his hood, that coat's so tight he can barely move his arms!

BONSON: I already told him, but you can't teach a thick bloke new tricks!

FLAXLEY: He's gonna freeze if he stays like that, his midriff isn't covered!

LEFIAT: I can look after myself thanks!

(Angry at the attention, he then stomped right up to the door and raised his voice.)

LEFIAT: Let's go, shall we?

DEREK: Okay, but you were warned!

(With that, Derek pushed a button on the wall and the door slid open. Outside, the snow

blew violently in a crosswind and the cold temperature hit them like a thunderbolt.)

BONSON: Bugger that! Derek, you're on your own! I'll just stay here in the warm and starve to death!

FLAXLEY: Don't be ridiculous, man. Come on, let's go!

(Reluctantly, everyone then took their first tentative steps out into the blizzard to survey the white expanse before them with their eyes.)

KRITZ: When Daman said it'd be cold, he wasn't exaggerating.

BONSON: Indeed!

DEREK: Yes well, the faster we go, the warmer we'll feel!

FLAXLEY: I agree. Come on people, let's get moving!

(Just then, the air was filled with a girly scream. Reacting instinctively, Flaxley raced up to Mandika wearing a troubled expression)

FLAXLEY: What's wrong, princess?

(Mandika just gave him a blank look then pointed to Lefiat.)

MANDIKA: That was him!

(Sure enough, Lefiat was standing next to her with a tortured look on his face.)

LEFIAT: My belly's freezing!

(Flaxley sighed and threw his hands in the air before stepping right up to Lefiat and pulling his hood down.)

FLAXLEY: Idiot!

(With that, he yanked the helmet from Lefiat's head and pulled the hood back up as he stood there looking like a toddler in trouble with his mummy.)

FLAXLEY: Here!

(He then thrust Lefiat's helmet into his midriff and about turned.)

FLAXLEY: Now, let's go, shall we?

(As Flaxley paced away, everyone looked to one another uneasily then shared a determined nod and followed on. Their trek across the glacier had begun. With conditions extremely hostile, progress was not going to be easy and they knew it. The bitterly cold wind was unforgiving and the falling snow made visibility poor. Determined to overcome these difficulties however, they all made their way doggedly forth, talking about anything that came into their heads in an attempt to take their minds off of the conditions.)

BONSON: So Derek, tell us about Zanne!

DEREK: What do you want to know?

BONSON: I dunno, um... what does she look like?

(Derek sighed.)

DEREK: She's beautiful, she has this pale green skin, and her horns are a sultry tone of stunning brown. Her hair...

BONSON: Actually Derek, forget I asked!

(Unfortunately for Bonson, Derek didn't hear him. He was picturing his beloved Zanne and was lost in the moment.)

DEREK: Ah, her hair, so long, so oily, and her fine breasts...

BONSON: You can stop right there, Derek!!!

DEREK: Uh?

BONSON: I get the picture old chap!

DEREK: I miss her, Bonson!

BONSON: I'm sure you do!

DEREK: You know, when we make love, it's like we're the only two in the world...

BONSON: Derek, please?

DEREK: The way she holds my horns and slots herself onto my...

(Before Derek could say another word, Bonson put his hands over his ears and started to sing

erratically.)

DEREK: How rude!

(Just ahead of them, Lefiat was struggling along under the weight of both his and Mandika's packs. Very much weighed down and he was having difficulty keeping apace with her.

Suffice to say, he wasn't a happy man.)

LEFIAT: Wait! Slow down a bit, Mandika, these are heavy!

MANDIKA: Don't be such a poof!

LEFIAT: I'm not, these *are* heavy!

MANDIKA: No, you're just weak. A real man wouldn't complain!

LEFIAT: What have you got in 'ere anyway?

MANDIKA: Just the stuff out of my handbag. You know... my essentials!

LEFIAT: Knowing you that could mean anything!

MANDIKA: And what exactly do you mean by that?

LEFIAT: You probably class clean underwear as an essential!

MANDIKA: Like I had a chance to pack clean underwear! Like everyone else, I'm stuck in the ones I'm wearing until we get home!!!

(She then looked utterly stumped.)

MANDIKA: Hang on. What do you mean, "you probably class clean underwear as an essential"? Don't *you*???

(He thought about what he'd said then grinned at her uneasily.)

LEFIAT: Um... yeah, course I do!

(She gave him a sideways glance then raised a distrusting eyebrow.)

MANDIKA: Yeah, you'd better!

LEFIAT: Anyway, we're not talking about *me*, what have you got in here?

MANDIKA: Like I said, just clothes and whatever was in my bag, make up, hairbrush, some apples, a whistle...

(She then mumbled under her breath.)

MANDIKA: ... an iron dildo...

(Lefiat stopped walking and raised a suspicious eyebrow as she resumed her normal volume.)

MANDIKA: And some perfume!

LEFIAT: Wait! What was that thing you mumbled?

(Pausing her stride, Mandika shrugged.)

MANDIKA: Enough standing around, let's go!

(She then resumed walking and Lefiat raced alongside her.)

LEFIAT: What was it?

MANDIKA: What was what?

LEFIAT: That thing you mumbled!

MANDIKA: I forget!

LEFIAT: Do you want me to empty your bag and look?

MANDIKA: No, and if you do, I'll have you beheaded!

LEFIAT: Yeah, right! As if you'd do *that* to me.

(Making sure Lefiat knew exactly where he stood, Mandika looked him dead in the eye and held a firm stare for several seconds.)

LEFIAT: You wouldn't?

MANDIKA: Try me!

(With that, she strutted on ahead leaving Lefiat slowly trudging in her wake, feeling wholly unappreciated. Looking almost tearful, he then came to a halt and mumbled to himself sorrowfully.)

LEFIAT: Nobody cares about me. Mandika treats me like a donkey and the others seem to think I'm here just to be laughed at and ordered about. I'm a man, with feelings, I'm not

made of wood! Why can't they see that? Why is it always me they have to pick on? I may not be the smartest guy in the world but...

(He stopped and yelled to the heavens.)

LEFIAT: Why can't they just take me for what I am?

(At which point Bonson strolled by.)

BONSON: We do, Lefiat, we take you for a fool!

(As Bonson chuckled, Lefiat shook his head then walked on, cursing under his breath.)

LEFIAT: I hate you, Bonson.

(Way up at the front of the group at this time, Flaxley was desperately trying to arouse Kritz. Very much taken with the way her leather skirt was clinging to her backside, he was having trouble focussing on anything other than getting his hands on her body. His advances, however, were not subtle. Nor were they successful. On the contrary, he was starting to get on her nerves.)

FLAXLEY: We're miles ahead, my love, fancy taking a detour?

(He winked at her knowingly.)

FLAXLEY: We can tell that lot to wait where they are and go and make an obscene pattern in the snow, if you catch my drift.

(Kritz sighed and gave him a peeved glance.)

KRITZ: Will you stop that, Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: Stop what, my little sex dragon?

KRITZ: That!!!

(She shook her head.)

KRITZ: Look, if you persist, I aint gonna wear this ever again!

FLAXLEY: Are you threatening me?

KRITZ: No, I'm making you a promise! Your smutty comments are getting really annoying! (Flaxley shrugged and gave her a loving smile.)

FLAXLEY: You don't normally mind. And anyway, I can't help myself, darling! You look simply divine in that skirt. And besides, you're my wife; I'm supposed to find you sexy, aren't I?

KRITZ: Yes, but you're not supposed to bang on and on relentlessly about wanting to *do* me, to the point where I want to strangle you!

FLAXLEY: But I do want to do you! And I think you'll find it's every husband's right to exercise his love muscle and that's where you, the wife, comes in!

(Kritz scowled at him in disbelief.)

KRITZ: Just... look... exercise it yourself!

(Finding her comment ridiculous, Flaxley scoffed.)

FLAXLEY: Yeah, right. Why buy a dog then bark yourself?

KRITZ: What did you call me? A dog?

FLAXLEY: No, you missed my point...

KRITZ: No, I didn't. You called me a dog!

FLAXLEY: Great seas of Wendigo, I never said anything of the sort!

KRITZ: Yes you did! Fine! If you're gonna treat me like a dog, I'll act like one!

FLAXLEY: Good, bend over and I'll do you like one then!

(Next thing he knew, Kritz's open hand thundered across his cheek, the slapping sound echoing off into the distance.)

FLAXLEY: Hey, what was that for?

(Not about to stop and discuss it with him, Kritz then stormed off ahead at a lightning pace with her arms angrily folded across her chest. Watching her go, Flaxley spammed his forehead.)

FLAXLEY: Subtly done Flaxley, what a gigolo you are!

(He then shook his head and ran to catch her up.)

FLAXLEY: I apologise, my love, I don't know what came over me! I was over the top and thoughtless.

KRITZ: Go away!

FLAXLEY: Forgive me? Please? I love you. Please???

(Looking peeved, she turned her head and glanced into his puppy dog eyes then allowed herself a smile.)

KRITZ: Stop it; you know I can't resist those eyes!

FLAXLEY: Well?

(She smiled and took his arm.)

KRITZ: Fine, just stop making crude comments at me all the time. They're making me feel cheap.

(She smiled.)

KRITZ: You're above that sort of thing and I deserve better from you.

FLAXLEY: Absolutely. Agreed! I have to say though, I wasn't lying, you do look fine in that outfit.

(Kritz beamed.)

KRITZ: See? Compliments, I like. Suggestive, perverted comments... so not in the mood.

FLAXLEY: Fair enough, my love. You normally enjoy the filthy comments, but if it's bothering you today then compliments it is.

KRITZ: Thank you.

FLAXLEY: Just don't be surprised if I drown you in niceties.

KRITZ: You won't hear any complaints from me if you do.

(With that, they shared a loving smile then paced onwards together.)

(As the hours passed, the six allies continued to struggle forth into the bleak wintry afternoon. It was now the warmest time of day on Skiro glacier and the snowfall seemed to lift a little, but the wind remained relentless. Despite aching feet and the rapid onset of tiredness, however, everyone somehow managed to soldier on at a reasonable pace. Nevertheless, it was never far from Flaxley's mind that in such unforgiving conditions it would only be a matter of time before nerves became frayed again. With this in mind, he tried his best to keep everyone's spirit's up, a task he'd have been a whole lot more successful at had he not been so horribly distracted.)

BONSON: Flaxley? How far do you think we've walked so far? Only, Skiro looked like a tiny place from the air, so it can't be much further, can it?

FLAXLEY: Yes she is! And we'll definitely succeed in our mission, no fears on that score.

BONSON: What?

FLAXLEY: Who?

DEREK: What's with you, Flaxley? Pay attention, man.

(Feeling somewhat foolish, Flaxley shook his head and sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Sorry, chaps. Kritz looks so ravishing today; she's throwing me off my game! (Bonson gave him a baffled glance.)

BONSON: Why? She's looked a *lot* more ravishing than *that* and you don't normally turn into a drooling buffoon!

FLAXLEY: More ravishing than *that*? Are you insane? That skirt is extremely sexy!

(Now that he'd stopped pestering her for sex, Kritz was loving the attention her husband was giving her and proceeded to subtly fish for further compliments.)

KRITZ: Please, this skirt isn't *that* sexy, is it?

(Before Flaxley could reply, however, Bonson cut in swiftly.)

BONSON: You're damn right it's not. It looks like you've dismantled a tent and wrapped it around your waist!

(Luckily for Bonson he was an agile 60 year old and he managed to duck Kritz's fist just in time.)

FLAXLEY: Ignore him, darling!

(As Kritz scowled at Bonson bitterly, the old man ruffled his neck and furrowed his brow.)

BONSON: What? I'm entitled to my opinion, Kritz!

(He nodded firmly.)

BONSON: And my opinion *is* that your arse looked bloody lovely in those tight bottoms.

Changing out of them was a crime, I tell you. You should be ashamed.

KRITZ: Ashamed?

BONSON: You heard me! You've let the side down horribly.

KRITZ: Whatever, Bonson. Not that it's any of your business but I don't like wearing things like trousers and shorts.

BONSON: This isn't about what *you* like wearing, it's about what *I* like leering at.

(Taking his words far too seriously, Kritz scowled at him angrily.)

KRITZ: Bonson, what I wear has bugger all to do with *you*.

(She then ruffled her neck indignantly.)

KRITZ: I like wearing skirts and Flaxley likes me wearing skirts. If *you* don't like it, you can piss off and leer at Mandika instead.

(Bonson reeled back in disgust.)

BONSON: I'd rather leer at a naked Lefiat.

MANDIKA: Hey!

BONSON: No offence.

(He rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: Anyway, fact is, you wantonly changed your clothes and ruined my viewing pleasure. Unforgivable. I mean, what was wrong with them bottoms anyway?

(Kritz furrowed her brow at him.)

KRITZ: I just didn't like them, okay? I hate having something between my legs, I always have!

BONSON: Then clearly Flaxley's doing it wrong!

FLAXLEY: Hey!

BONSON: Just saying, Flaxley. Maybe *I* should have a go and show you how it's done!

FLAXLEY: You cheeky bloody...

(Determined to have her say, Kritz cut over him angrily.)

KRITZ: You know damn well what I mean, Bonson. I don't like *material* between my legs!

That's why I don't wear underwear, it's uncomfortable. Not that it's any of your business, but I kind of *have* to wear leather shorts for three days a month during my... you know... and I absolutely hate it.

(Bonson stared at her in horror.)

BONSON: You're damn right it's none of my business!!! How dare you???

KRITZ: What?

BONSON: I don't want to know about your menstrual cycle. I just want to stare at your butt. How dare you try to embroil me in a conversation about such a ghastly topic??? Stupid woman! Now I'm going to have all kinds of horrible thoughts stuck in my head all day.

KRITZ: Good!!!

BONSON: Good? What kind of monster are you?

KRITZ: Just leave me alone, Bonson. You've really pissed me off now.

BONSON: And you've...

FLAXLEY: Enough, Bonson. You upset my wife again and I'll upset your next of kin, got

it?

(Bonson looked to him in horror for a moment then glanced away indignantly.)

BONSON: How rude.

(As a cold silence descended, Flaxley looked to Kritz and bit his lip. Normally she found Bonson's over the top, dirty old man routine quite amusing, and for her to get so angry over it simply wasn't like her. Having contemplated the matter in his head briefly, he then reached a conclusion and nodded to himself. Convinced that she was just frustrated from not having had sex the night before, he allowed himself a conceited grin then glanced around at his allies. His face then dropped. All around him were ashen faces and there wasn't a smile in sight. Seeing that the atmosphere had sunk to a new low, he then decided it was time to use his people skills to lift the mood, once more. As he so often did, he started by changing the subject.)

FLAXLEY: So, Kajice, eh?

DEREK: What about her?

FLAXLEY: Precisely! What do you think she's like?

BONSON: How the hell should we know?

FLAXLEY: Look, cheer up you lot!

(As silence descended once more, Flaxley sighed then tried again.)

FLAXLEY: Well? What do you think?

LEFIAT: Kajice?

FLAXLEY: Yeah, the witch.

LEFIAT: Well... Jacquit and Suzbit were witches and if they're anything to go by, I bet she's well ugly!

MANDIKA: You'd better find her ugly!!!

LEFIAT: I will!!!

MANDIKA: Good, because if you think I'm gonna tolerate you leering at...

(Not about to tolerate another argument, Flaxley growled to himself then raised his voice.)

FLAXLEY: For the love of leather, will you lot stop looking for excuses to bicker!!!

KRITZ: The love of leather?

FLAXLEY: Yes, you look lovely...

KRITZ: Right.

FLAXLEY: We're all in the same boat here, chaps, no-one likes it, but what sort of a team are we gonna make if we face Kajice divided?

(Derek nodded sternly.)

DEREK: Well said!

FLAXLEY: Thank you, Derek. I can't believe the way we've been behaving, we're all friends aren't we?

BONSON: I suppose, but look what happens when we all get together, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: I know, Bonson, but that's not the point. We ought to know by now, together we can achieve anything!

(He left them to ponder his words for a moment then spoke up in an authoritative tone.)

FLAXLEY: Well?

BONSON: You're right, Flaxley. Sorry I've been a grouch, chaps! And... I didn't mean to upset you, Kritz, I was joking but I went too far it seems. I apologise.

KRITZ: It's fine... I probably over-reacted anyway.

BONSON: I'll say you did. I thought you were gonna take a swing at me for a minute, you bloody lunatic.

KRITZ: Well... I won't pretend I wasn't tempted.

(She then chuckled and took Flaxley's arm.)

KRITZ: I think I over-reacted with *you* earlier, as well, my love.

FLAXLEY: It's quite alright, darling. I get cranky and emotional when I haven't had any too.

KRITZ: Eh?

FLAXLEY: Just saying... I should have been more considerate of your feelings.

KRITZ: It's forgotten about.

(Taken in by the air of concession, Mandika sighed.)

MANDIKA: I'm sorry too, guys. Especially to you, Kritz.

(Kritz glanced at her emptily for a moment then smiled.)

KRITZ: Don't worry about it, babe.

(Mandika then smiled at Lefiat.)

MANDIKA: And you, darling! Sorry for being such a grump.

(Lefiat smiled back at her warmly.)

LEFIAT: So will you carry your own bag?

MANDIKA: Yeah, right. I aint *that* bloody sorry!

(Allowing himself a smile, Flaxley then swiftly returned to the subject he'd been trying to discuss.)

FLAXLEY: Anyway, how about Kajice?

LEFIAT: Will she have a staff, like other witches?

FLAXLEY: Good question!

DEREK: Knowing our luck, she's probably got a catalogue of magic as long as the Ridixie river!

FLAXLEY: Maybe... it's not gonna be easy, that's one thing we *do* know!

KRITZ: Nonsense, she might be a master of magic, but so are you, Derek. And with my fighting skills, Bonson's wisdom and your sword expertise Flaxley, we'll be fine, I reckon!

LEFIAT: Hey! What about me?

BONSON: You'll be fine too!

LEFIAT: That's not what I meant and you know it!

FLAXLEY: Lefiat, relax, you'll do your bit no doubt, after all, you're not unaccustomed to slaying witches, are you?

BONSON: Right... and that's all we know about Kajice, is it? She's a witch and she probably has a lot of magic?

(There was an unhelpful silence.)

BONSON: Well, that's encouraging!

FLAXLEY: Well, how *could* we know anything? We'd never even heard of her until Daman mentioned her. It's difficult to know what to expect!

DEREK: Not really. Zanne is a master of magic too, yet *she* was overcome! So we can at least expect her to be one formidable opponent.

FLAXLEY: True!

MANDIKA: I'm scared!

LEFIAT: Don't be, Mandika. I'll protect you!

(As Mandika took Lefiat's arm and smiled, Bonson gave them a belittling glance then looked stumped.)

BONSON: Wow, I never said anything sarcastic!

KRITZ: Good for you, Bonson!

BONSON: Not really, I *thought* all kinds of nasty things, I just forgot to say them.

(He then shrugged.)

BONSON: Still, if it helps with morale then superb. I won't be making a habit of it though.

(Flaxley gave him a sideways glance then held his head high.)

FLAXLEY: Look, the main thing to remember is, yes, we're in for a rough ride, but we have one thing our favour. Teamwork. Teamwork born out of our friendship and respect for each

other!

BONSON: I see! And what's that the thing we have in our *favour*, Flaxley?

(As Flaxley glared at him, Bonson started to laugh.)

BONSON: I'm joking. You're right, Flaxley. We've worked well as a team before and we can do it again. I'm sure Kajice won't know what hit her.

LEFIAT: Well said, Bonson.

BONSON: Not that I care much for compliments from you, but yes, it was rather well said wasn't it?

(As everyone paced on, slightly buoyed by such words of encouragement, Bonson glanced away and mumbled under his breath.)

BONSON: It was *so* well said, it almost sounded convincing.

(As an air of calmness washed over everyone in the party, the trek across the snow suddenly felt that little bit easier and they managed to pick up the pace a bit. As a result, it wasn't long before they could see the crevice on the horizon. As horizon which, in such poor visibility was only a matter of forty feet or so in front of them. It had quite literally appeared before them from out of the snow.

Delighted by its sudden appearance from out of the white gloom, they all swiftly hurried forth to the edge then stood staring down into the rocky, seemingly bottomless chasm before them.)

KRITZ: Bloody hell, I wouldn't fancy falling down there.

BONSON: Well, obviously.

MANDIKA: I can't even see the bottom.

(She then glared at Bonson.)

MANDIKA: And that's not an excuse for you to make some cruel pun about my backside.

BONSON: I wouldn't dream of it. For one, *everyone* can see your bottom, it's huge.

(Mandika was livid.)

MANDIKA: What did I just tell you???

BONSON: Something irrelevant, I expect. I wasn't listening.

MANDIKA: Right... Lefiat?

LEFIAT: Yeah?

MANDIKA: Throw him over the edge!

BONSON: What???

LEFIAT: But...

FLAXLEY: Mandika, nobody's throwing anybody over the edge!

(He then glared at Bonson.)

FLAXLEY: Tempting though it may be.

BONSON: Why, that's an awful thing to say!

(Flaxley snarled then stood tall.)

FLAXLEY: Look, enough of this squabbling. You lot should be overjoyed. We've found the crevice at last.

BONSON: Yes, but we weren't looking for the crevice, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: Excuse me?

BONSON: We're supposed to be looking for the corridor of time.

FLAXLEY: Yes, I know that! The entrance to the corridor of time is near the crevice, you silly sod.

BONSON: Yes, but I won't be overjoyed, in fact, I won't be *any* kind of joyed until we find it.

DEREK: Then let's start looking, shall we?

(With that, they all stood tall and glanced around at their surroundings. Unable to see anything but the blizzard behind them and the crevice in front, they all seemed to sigh in unison, wondering where in the world they had to go next.)

DEREK: Oh... poo!

BONSON: My sentiments entirely!

DEREK: Left? Right? What?

LEFIAT: Definitely one of the two. We can't go forwards or we'll fall down this hole.

BONSON: Astute bugger, isn't he?

(Mandika looked into the crevice again and sighed.)

MANDIKA: It's so deep you can't see the bottom and so wide, you can't see the other side!

BONSON: Bit like your...

MANDIKA: Fuck off, Bonson. I'll push you off myself in a minute.

FLAXLEY: Don't start that again!!!

MANDIKA: But he's mean, Flaxley. Too mean!

FLAXLEY: Even so!

(He growled under his breath then looked from left to right.)

FLAXLEY: Can't see shit for snow.

DEREK: So, what do you suggest we do, Flaxley?

(Flaxley shrugged uneasily and took a step back away from the edge of the crevice.)

FLAXLEY: Well, we know the corridor of time is near this crevice somewhere right?

DEREK: Question is, where? Which way?

FLAXLEY: That's anybody's guess, Derek! I have no idea. We'll just have to search for it, I suppose.

(With a sigh, he then looked to his feet and immediately performed a double take.)

FLAXLEY: Is that...

(Looking extremely urgent, he crouched to feel the snow before him and raised a suspicious eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: Hmm, interesting... there's a footprint here!

(At once, everyone looked very much alive, set on edge by Flaxley's discovery.)

MANDIKA: A footprint? You mean...

LEFIAT: Someone's been here recently???

(At once, Mandika and Lefiat clung onto one another for dear life.)

LEFIAT: Someone like Kajice you mean?

MANDIKA: And she might still be nearby!

(Failing to share their sense of foreboding, Bonson rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: It isn't *your* footprint is it, Flaxley? Only you *were* standing there only a few seconds ago.

(Flaxley glared at him defiantly for a moment before slowly starting to turn red with embarrassment.)

FLAXLEY: Never mind that, we need to find this corridor of time.

(As he looked left and right along the crevice, Lefiat raised a nervous hand.)

LEFIAT: What about the footprint, Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: Look, forget the footprint...

LEFIAT: But...

BONSON: It was his own footprint, Lefiat.

MANDIKA: You don't know that for certain!

BONSON: Mandika, it's snowing like there's no tomorrow. Footprints don't last five minutes in this kind of weather, trust me.

MANDIKA: They don't?

(She glanced back to see their trail of footprints rapidly disappearing in the snow then growled at Flaxley.)

MANDIKA: You scared the crap out of me then, Flaxley!

(Desperate to put the embarrassing episode behind him Flaxley snarled then raised his voice.)

FLAXLEY: Look, we've two options here. Left or right, pick one! We need to get going.

(Derek nodded.)

DEREK: Well according to the aerial map of this place there's a lot of mountains on the east side. The west side looked flat. So, as an educated guess, I'd say we go east towards the mountains.

(Failing to grasp Derek's logic, they all looked at one another in bewilderment.)

FLAXLEY: How is that an educated guess?

BONSON: Quite!

DEREK: Well, if you ask me, the entrance to this so-called corridor of time is likely to be in a cliff face or a cave. And you're far more likely to find one of them in the mountains.

(Flaxley mused to himself then nodded in agreement.)

FLAXLEY: That makes sense, I suppose.

KRITZ: Fine, let's go east then. If it's not that way then we'll just have to come back again.

DEREK: Works for me, let's go!

(As he started to head off, the others all groaned then started to follow on.)

MANDIKA: I hate walking.

KRITZ: It's gotta be better than just standing here and freezing to death!

MANDIKA: Shut it, I'm not talking to you!

LEFIAT: Yes, you are. You made peace with her just before you apologised to me.

(Mandika looked enlightened then smiled.)

MANDIKA: Oh, yeah. Sorry, Kritz. We fall out so often, it's hard to keep track.

KRITZ: Whatever, let's just get a move on.

(As fortune would have it, Derek's suggestion had been spot on. They'd only walked for a minute or so, when through the raging blizzard, Lefiat spotted what looked like a cave opening in a rocky cliff face before them. Pointing into the thick snowy haze in front of him, he bounced excitedly.)

LEFIAT: Look, look, a cliff with a cave in it!

DEREK: It *is* a cave! I see it too.

(Lefiat scoffed arrogantly.)

LEFIAT: Yeah, but *I* saw it first! And you're nearer than me.

DEREK: It's not a contest, Lefiat!

(Bonson squinted ahead and furrowed his brow.)

BONSON: Where? I can't shit for snow.

LEFIAT: Just up ahead, you blind old...

BONSON: Less of that, you! My eyesight isn't what it used to be.

(Removing his gaze from Kritz's thighs, Flaxley then squinted through the driving snow and beamed.)

FLAXLEY: By golly, he's right!

DEREK: With any luck that's the entrance to the corridor of time!

FLAXLEY: Indeed.

KRITZ: Nice spot, Lefiat.

LEFIAT: Thanks.

(He glanced down and scoffed at Derek.)

LEFIAT: In your face, Derek.

(Derek rolled his eyes.)

DEREK: Yes, Lefiat. In my face.

FLAXLEY: Never mind that, let's hurry over there.

(Buoyed by the discovery, they then raced to the cave entrance with hearts full of hope.

Mandika was especially joyous. Even if the corridor of time wasn't inside, at least in a cave she'd be out of the reach of the freezing wind.

At the head of the group, as soon as he reached the cave entrance, Flaxley slowed to a halt and waited for his comrades to assemble around him. As soon as they were all gathered on either side of him, he then glanced across at them briefly before scrutinising the rocky opening with his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: This *has* to be it surely!

BONSON: Doesn't *have* to be. It could just be some random cave.

DEREK: I hope not. I'd hate to have to search for another. In all this snow, we could be so blind that we walk straight past it.

FLAXLEY: Which is why I said this has to be it. I was speaking out of hope rather than expectation.

BONSON: In which case, I concur.

MANDIKA: Question is, who's going in first?

FLAXLEY: I think we already know the answer to that, Mandika!

BONSON: Indeed. Off you go, Lefiat. If you see a bear, punch it in the face.

LEFIAT: Eh, but... it'll eat me!

FLAXLEY: Relax, Lefiat. *I'm* going in first anyway.

LEFIAT: You are? Thank heavens for that.

(He then scowled at Bonson.)

LEFIAT: Why did you tell me *I* was going in there first?

BONSON: Well... Flaxley's not the only one who can speak out of hope rather than expectation.

LEFIAT: You're mean, Bonson.

MANDIKA: Yeah, you are. I don't wanna picture Lefiat being eaten by a bear.

BONSON: Well, that's where you and I differ, you see.

(Annoyed at their procrastinating, Derek puffed out angrily.)

DEREK: Are we going in or not?

FLAXLEY: Of course, we are.

DEREK: What are we waiting for then?

BONSON: Fine, just remember, be careful!

KRITZ: Yeah, go slowly, Flaxley, my love. Who knows what might be waiting around the corner?

BONSON: Nobody does. And we're not likely to find out standing here, either!

FLAXLEY: Well, you're not wrong there!

BONSON: I seldom am, Flaxley.

(With that, Flaxley drew his sword then slowly advanced through the entrance, followed closely by the others. Looking extremely urgent, he then turned and held his finger to his lips before whispering quietly.)

FLAXLEY: Remember; keep the noise to a minimum!

(Looking somewhat on edge, he then paced slowly forth scouring the cave's passageway with his eyes. It was a good ten feet wide and illuminated by natural crystals of light which reflected brightly off of its icy floor and walls. Trying not to make any noise whatsoever, just in case they'd entered a beast's lair, he crept softly onwards when there was a loud thudding sound behind him. In a blind panic, he spun around only to find Lefiat laying in a

heap on the floor with everyone standing over him scowling.)

LEFIAT: Sorry! These bags are heavy and the floor's all icy... I fell over!

(Flaxley swiftly rushed his finger to his lips to remind him to keep the noise down then glared at Mandika and spoke in a hushed tone.)

FLAXLEY: Mandika?

(Making no attempt to soften her voice, Mandika scowled at him.)

MANDIKA: Yes?

FLAXLEY: Keep your voice down.

(He rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Why can't you carry your own bag?

(Making even less of an effort to speak quietly, Mandika threw her hands to her hips and growled.)

MANDIKA: Flaxley!!!

(She then folded her arms then looked away.)

MANDIKA: I'm above performing such menial tasks, you *know* that!

(Flaxley was gob-smacked.)

FLAXLEY: I don't believe you sometimes!

(Just then, Bonson furrowed his brow and also spoke in a raised voice.)

BONSON: Hey? Where's Derek?

(At once, they all looked at Bonson then turned about to spot Derek. Much to their horror, he was nowhere to be seen.)

LEFIAT: A bear must have got him!!!

FLAXLEY: Don't be an idiot!!!

BONSON: How can *he* not be an idiot? That's like telling Kritz not to be female.

FLAXLEY: Look... just... shut up and follow *me*.

(With that, Flaxley raced forth, deeper into the cavern followed closely by the others, Lefiat slipping and sliding all the way, barely managing to keep himself upright. Fearing for his little green friend, Flaxley raced around the first corner he came to and much to his relief, there was Derek, standing before a large metal door that blocked the way ahead. Trying to decipher the writing on the door, Derek ran his fingers across it and mumbled, completely oblivious to the fact that Flaxley was behind him.)

FLAXLEY: Derek! There you are!

(Upon hearing Flaxley's voice, Derek about turned and watched as the others raced up behind him, Lefiat failing to stop and slamming straight into the metal door.)

LEFIAT: My nose!!!

(As Lefiat staggered backwards and managed to right himself, Derek gestured to the door and nodded.)

DEREK: This must be it, Flaxley! The corridor of time.

FLAXLEY: Indeed.

(Lefiat rubbed his nose and pouted.)

LEFIAT: How can you be so sure?

KRITZ: Because it's a man made door in the middle of a cave in the middle of nowhere!

LEFIAT: Yeah, but that doesn't mean...

MANDIKA: Lefiat, it just obviously *is*, okay?

LEFIAT: Well... obvious to *you*, maybe.

FLAXLEY: Lefiat, wind your neck in, will you? Trust me, this is it. We were looking for a doorway through time and the odds of this not being it are simply ridiculous.

LEFIAT: Fine!

(With that, Flaxley stepped forward and tried to read the protruding inscription upon the door.)

FLAXLEY: What language is this?

BONSON: Allow *me*, Flaxley!

(Looking somewhat smug, Bonson stepped beside Flaxley and scrutinized the lettering.)

BONSON: Hmm, this is...

(Awaiting his words of wisdom, they all watched him closely.)

BONSON: Yes, I'm certain!

(He then stood there nodding repeatedly.)

FLAXLEY: What?

BONSON: This makes no sense to me, whatsoever!

MANDIKA: Pillock!

(With that, she stormed over to the door and took a look at it herself.)

MANDIKA: This is Kazooian!

BONSON: Really?

MANDIKA: Yes, I had to learn it at school. As a princess you have to know these things!

FLAXLEY: Well? What does it say?

MANDIKA: Oh, right. May the one who carries the burden have brain to match thy brawn.

BONSON: What does that mean?

FLAXLEY: Some wise man you are! Obviously it means, may the one carries the burden be as strong as they are intelligent!

BONSON: I know that, but what burden?

MANDIKA: The test, even *I* know that!

BONSON: There's a test?

(He looked enlightened.)

BONSON: Oh, the test! That's right. Daman did mention a test. I forgot about that!

DEREK: I'll do the test! You came all this way for me, it's the least I can do!

FLAXLEY: No, Derek, I'll do it...

DEREK: I was hoping you'd say that!

(Flaxley looked thoughtful and rubbed his chin.)

FLAXLEY: I'm assuming you lot will have to wait *here* until I've done it.

MANDIKA: Makes sense, Flaxley. It says on the door, "May the *one* who does the test." Not the group, the one.

DEREK: Right. So, I imagine once you've done the test a portal will open up. Then you can come and get us.

FLAXLEY: That sounds most likely, doesn't it?

(He then nodded firmly.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, chaps. I'm going in.

(Wearing a nervous smile, Kritz looked to Flaxley and nodded firmly.)

KRITZ: Good luck, my love! I believe in you.

FLAXLEY: Thanks, darling!

(He then turned to face the door.)

FLAXLEY: Right... no door handle.

KRITZ: Try pushing it.

(Flaxley glanced over his shoulder at her sarcastically.)

FLAXLEY: It's a good thing you came, my love! That would have had me flummoxed for weeks.

KRITZ: I was only saying.

(Flaxley then faced the door again and nodded to himself.)

FLAXLEY: Right, here goes. I'll see you all shortly.

(With that, he pushed the door open and slowly stepped through it with his sword at the ready. On the other side, was a large, empty dome-shaped room with thousands of crystals

glowing on its walls. Wearing a curious expression, he paused to look all around the room then slowly advanced to the centre.)

FLAXLEY: How do I start this test I wonder...

(Just then, the door slammed shut, the thud echoing all around the room.)

FLAXLEY: What the?

(As he stood there, primed for a fight, a booming voice then filled the air.)

VOICE: How many of you seek passage?

(With absolutely no idea where the voice was coming from, Flaxley turned about sharply and replied in an aggressive tone.)

FLAXLEY: Six! Now show yourself!

(As he continued to hunt for the source of the voice with his eyes, the door re-opened and the voice rose up once again.)

VOICE: Enter all those who seek passage through millennia!

(As the others nervously paced into the room, Flaxley watched them and bit his lip. He knew this was all part of the process but he couldn't help feeling uneasy about it. Matching his unease, the ever-nervous Lefiat scratched his head and looked across the ceiling in bewilderment.)

LEFIAT: Millennia?

BONSON: A thousand years!

LEFIAT: Oh!

(Just then, the door slammed shut again and everyone except Flaxley was sucked up against a wall and held firm by a mystical force, barely able to move.)

KRITZ: Hey!

DEREK: What's going on???

VOICE: Do not interfere!!!

(Utterly enraged, Flaxley yelled out from the centre of the room.)

FLAXLEY: Those are my friends!!!

VOICE: Let the test begin!

FLAXLEY: Wait!!! You can't just...

(Before he could continue his protest, however, there was bright yellow flash behind him. Immediately, he spun around, sword aloft, to see the maniacal warlord, Dim Lee, standing before him. At once, his jaw dropped and his eyes filled with terror.)

FLAXLEY: Dim Lee???

DIM LEE: We meet again, Flaxley!

(Flaxley could barely believe what his eyes were showing him. Dim Lee had the strength of fifty men and sword skills beyond belief. He'd come within a whisker of killing Flaxley only a year beforehand and he'd only been thwarted by his own mistake.)

DIM LEE: This time, Flaxley, it's *your* turn to die!

(Stunned to the core of his being, Flaxley just stared at him with a horrified look on his face.)

FLAXLEY: What sort of a test *is* this???

DIM LEE: Come, Flaxley. We must fight. I have a score to settle!

(As Dim Lee drew his long, curved sword, the others looked on, sharing Flaxley's horror.)

LEFIAT: Him again? But he's dead!

KRITZ: Shit! This is bad.

BONSON: You're not kidding! Flaxley barely got away with his life last time.

(As everyone watched on in dismay, a clearly rattled Flaxley took up his battle stance.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, Dim Dum, if we *have* to do this, let's just get on and do it!

(Immediately, a ferocious snarl appeared on Dim Lee's face and he bellowed furiously.)

DIM LEE: Insolence!!!

(Like a man possessed, he then came out swinging his blade like a maniac, shouting angrily

with every swing of his sword.)

DIM LEE: You... will never again... insult the... Lee... dynasty name!!!

(Despite Dim Lee's huge weight advantage, Flaxley managed to parry Dim Lee's blade with his own, just about managing to retain his balance as his giant foe forced him backwards.

Quick to realise it'd only be a matter of time before he was knocked down if he continued this way, however, Flaxley hurried to steady himself and opted to fight fire with fire.

Matching Dim Lee's aggression, he advanced rapidly towards Dim Lee, also shouting with every swing of his sword.)

FLAXLEY: You... will...

(Unfortunately for Flaxley, the heavyweight Dim Lee simply stood his ground and allowed Flaxley to run into him. With a tremendous thud, his helmet clanged into Dim Lee's chest and he staggered backwards then fell on his backside.)

DIM LEE: Ha! Fool! You are weak and pointless!

FLAXLEY: Am I now?

(With that, Flaxley leapt to his feet and immediately charged at Dim Lee again, only to receive a swift punch to the chin which sent him sprawling back to the floor.)

DIM LEE: Yes. Yes, you are.

(Sat upon the ground, Flaxley snarled up at him and shook a despairing head.)

FLAXLEY: Why? We already killed you once!

DIM LEE: Wrong! You did nothing! The key of peace killed me. You got lucky! This time, however, things will be different. I won't be declaring war on you this time, and you will die screaming!

(Flaxley slowly climbed to his feet and scoffed.)

FLAXLEY: Oh, yeah? You'll have to catch me first!

(With that, he turned and sprinted for the door with all the power his legs could muster. Having never expected to see such a thing from the normally fearless knight, the others couldn't believe their eyes.)

MANDIKA: That's not like Flaxley!

DEREK: Damn it!!! If he fails now, Zanne is as good as dead!

KRITZ: More importantly, if he fails now, *he's* dead!!!

(Lefiat was dumbfounded.)

LEFIAT: Why's he running away? That's the sort of thing *I'd* do!

(Kritz anxiously bit her lip as she watched Flaxley reach the door then proceed to bash on it violently.)

KRITZ: Dim Lee returning has *always* been his greatest fear!

(Bonson looked thoughtful.)

BONSON: Really? I wonder...

KRITZ: You wonder?

BONSON: I'm just thinking...

MANDIKA: I'm thinking too. We're doomed.

(She then burst into tears.)

MANDIKA: Why me???

BONSON: It's not *just* you, Mandika!

MANDIKA: Yeah, but *you* don't matter.

(Having glared at Mandika angrily for a few moments, Bonson rolled his eyes then looked to where Flaxley continued to try and batter his way through the door. Much to the good knight's frustration, the door refused to budge.)

FLAXLEY: Open, damn it!!!

(Whimpering desperately, Flaxley then glanced over his shoulder urgently and shrieked in distress. Dim Lee was bearing down on him rapidly with his sword aloft.)

FLAXLEY: Shit!!!

(With that, he sprinted off as fast as he could. Determined to run him through with his blade, Dim Lee swiftly gave chase swinging his sword at him like a crazy man.)

FLAXLEY: Desist, you lunatic!

DIM LEE: Come back and fight, you coward!

FLAXLEY: I'll never defeat you, you're not even human!

(Upon hearing these words, Bonson's face bore an enlightened expression and he yelled out from where he was pinned to the wall.)

BONSON: Flaxley?

(Flaxley threw a nervous glance towards him as he raced around in terror.)

FLAXLEY: What???

BONSON: Brains *and* brawn, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: I'm using my brain!!!

BONSON: How?

FLAXLEY: By not standing there so he can kill me!

(As Flaxley continued to sprint away and try everything in his power to avoid his mighty foe, Bonson took a deep breath then yelled to him again.)

BONSON: What I mean is, the clue said use your brain! He's dead, Flaxley! That *can't* be Dim Lee!!!

FLAXLEY: You try telling *him* that!

BONSON: The clue is to face your fear, Flaxley! Stand up to him! Don't believe in him!

(As he continued to run, Flaxley looked thoughtful and bit his lip.)

FLAXLEY: Hmm, that would explain the brain part!

(Distracted by his thoughts, Flaxley unintentionally slowed down much to the delight of the pursuing Dim Lee. Not about to waste such an opportunity, he leapt forward and pushed Flaxley with all his might. Staggering forth, he was powerless to right himself and thudded to the ground with an alarmed look on his face.)

FLAXLEY: Damn it!!!

DIM LEE: Ha! Looks like your running days are over, Flaxley!

(With that, he lifted his sword aloft to strike him down.)

DIM LEE: Good riddance to bad haircut!

(Before he could bring his blade down, however, Flaxley swiftly contorted his body then swung his legs around, sweeping Dim Lee's legs away. As his sizeable frame thudded to the ground, a look of utter bewilderment swept across his brow.)

DIM LEE: How can such a puny man do such a thing to the mighty Dim Lee?

(Having already leapt back to his feet, Flaxley stood defiantly over the snarling giant, his confidence back in full force.)

FLAXLEY: You're not Dim Lee, Dim Lee is dead!

(As soon as Flaxley finished his sentence, there was another dazzling yellow flash and Dim Lee disappeared. Delighted with his victory, Flaxley placed one hand on his hip and raised his chin with pride as the others cheered him from the wall.)

FLAXLEY: Mess with me, will you, you foolish dead warlord?

(He then looked down and screamed like a girl before proceeding to stamp hard on the ground in front of him in a panic.)

FLAXLEY: Earwig! Earwig!

(As the others stared at him in disbelief they were then released by the mystical force and managed to step away from the wall.)

KRITZ: At last, that was uncomfortable!

MANDIKA: Yeah, that sucked.

DEREK: Indeed, but it's over now. Let's go and join, Flaxley.

(As everyone paced towards him, the pale looking Flaxley desperately scraped the sole of his shoe on the ground and shuddered.)

FLAXLEY: It was horrible!

MANDIKA: What was?

(Having had no idea the others were in earshot, he gathered himself and spoke calmly.)

FLAXLEY: Nothing!

(He then grinned innocently and looked to Derek.)

FLAXLEY: Right, now what?

DEREK: Well, first, nice one Flaxley, well done!

BONSON: Indeed. Thanks to me, you were superb!

(Flaxley offered up an amused smile.)

FLAXLEY: Quite, thank you, Bonson! I wouldn't have thought of facing my fear, all I could think about was not getting killed.

LEFIAT: So, Dim Lee coming back is your greatest fear then?

FLAXLEY: So it would seem, yes!

KRITZ: And earwigs are your second biggest fear?

FLAXLEY: Earwigs?

(At once he turned red and glanced away.)

FLAXLEY: Oh, you saw that, did you?

(Wearing a highly amused expression, Kritz looked him in the eyes and shrugged.)

KRITZ: Don't be embarrassed, my love. Earwigs can be ferocious!

FLAXLEY: And that's funny, is it?

KRITZ: I'm not trying to be funny. If you're not careful, they'll have your leg off!

(Looking somewhat peeved, Flaxley shook his head then glanced at Derek.)

FLAXLEY: Let's go!

DEREK: Go where? According to Daman Siria, we should have a received a code once you passed the test... and a portal should have opened up!

BONSON: Indeed, he did say that, didn't he?

FLAXLEY: Yes, he did.

BONSON: Then where the hell is it?

(Just then, a silver metallic square rose up through the floor beside them. Utterly astonished by the sight, they all stood and watched agape as it slowly levitated out of the ground then softly floated towards them, before sinking down and settling by their feet.)

BONSON: I think it's safe to assume that has something to do with it!

LEFIAT: That was freaky.

KRITZ: Looked kinda cool though.

MANDIKA: What is it?

BONSON: Some kind of teleportation device, I should imagine.

(Looking curious, he then took a step closer to it and scrutinised it with his eyes.)

BONSON: Mandika, there's Kazooian writing here too!

(Rolling her eyes arrogantly, Mandika scoffed then swaggered over to his side.)

MANDIKA: Where would you lot be without me?

BONSON: I'm not sure exactly but it sounds like a magical place, wherever it is.

(Never one to take any insult lightly, especially one of Bonson's, Mandika growled.)

MANDIKA: Just for that I'm not translating it now, so there!

FLAXLEY: Come off it. What does it say, Mandika?

(Wearing her most indignant expression, Mandika folded her arms and glanced away.)

MANDIKA: I'm not telling you until Bonson says sorry!

(Knowing the chances of Mandika backing down were extraordinarily slim, they all breathed inward sighs then looked at Bonson.)

BONSON: What? Oh, very well, I'm sorry...

MANDIKA: Good! So you should be.

(With that, she turned and promptly read the inscription on the metallic square.)

MANDIKA: It says "Unto the coven we cross"!

BONSON: And when I say I'm sorry, I mean I'm sorry I met you!

MANDIKA: Hey, that's cheating!

BONSON: Rubbish! I didn't cheat! I merely outsmarted you, which is hardly a challenge, I must admit.

(Mandika snarled.)

MANDIKA: You think you're so smart, don't you, Bonson? Well, the joke's on you, baldy. I haven't read it all yet, there's also instructions on how to use it.

(As Mandika sneered at him victoriously, Bonson grimaced uncomfortably then glanced away sheepishly.)

BONSON: And what do these instructions say, exactly?

MANDIKA: Nice try, Bonson.

DEREK: Look, Mandika, will you please just read the instructions?

MANDIKA: Nope. Not until Bonson's sorry.

BONSON: Fine, if you want another apology, you can have one...

MANDIKA: No! I want you to *be* sorry. I don't want you to *say* sorry.

FLAXLEY: Mandika, we don't have time to bugger about.

BONSON: Quite! Now read the bloody inscription.

MANDIKA: No, not until you've learned your lesson.

(Bonson glared at her for a moment then looked enlightened.)

BONSON: Unto the coven we cross, you say?

MANDIKA: What?

(Bonson shrugged then stepped up on to the metal square.)

BONSON: Well, it seems pretty obvious to me that if *that's* the code and *this* is the vehicle, we just have to stand on this thing and recite the code until something happens.

(Looking bitterly disappointed, Mandika pouted.)

MANDIKA: But... how did you...

(She then glanced away defiantly.)

MANDIKA: No, actually. Wrong.

FLAXLEY: Actually Mandika, your disappointed expression when Bonson explained it pretty much confirmed he was right.

MANDIKA: Oh, fine then... lucky guess.

BONSON: Actually, it was common sense. How else would it work?

MANDIKA: Oh... get lost, Bonson. I don't like you.

BONSON: I don't like you either, which makes my victory all the sweeter.

DEREK: Look, never mind who dislikes who. Now we know what to do, let's get going.

FLAXLEY: Indeed! Tifaeris of the future, he we come!

(With that, he stepped up onto the metal plate and offered his hand to Kritz. With a smile, Kritz took his hand then stepped up beside him.)

KRITZ: Thank you, my love.

FLAXLEY: You're welcome, darling.

(Rolling his eyes, Derek then jumped up onto the plate, followed by a baffled looking Lefiat.)

LEFIAT: I'm so confused, what are we standing on this thing for?

BONSON: Do you *ever* pay attention?

FLAXLEY: Never mind that. Up you come, Mandika.

(Standing with her arms folded, glaring at Bonson, Mandika pouted then glanced away.)

MANDIKA: Fine, but I'm not happy about it.

(With that, she too, stepped up onto the metal square.)

FLAXLEY: Excellent.

KRITZ: Right. Now what?

BONSON: Now we recite the words “Unto the coven we cross” until something happens, I suppose.

LEFIAT: But we’re already in a cavern... kind of.

BONSON: Coven, you gibbon! As in a witch’s coven, Kajice being the witch.

LEFIAT: Right... what? Why are we saying that?

FLAXLEY: Just go along with it, Lefiat. We don’t have time to explain... not to you, anyway. Just say the phrase, okay?

LEFIAT: Fine.

FLAXLEY: Okay then. After three, chaps. One, two, three...

(At once they all pulled nervous grimaces then proceeded to recite the incantation.)

ALL: Unto the coven we cross! Unto the coven we cross! Unto the coven we cross!

(As soon as they’d finished reciting the words for a third time, the plate disappeared and all their surroundings disintegrated, leaving them floating in an empty limbo.)

BONSON: Not happy!!!

LEFIAT: We’re all gonna die!!!

(Just then, a solid world appeared all around them as if from nowhere. They’d arrived in future Tifaeris. Shocked by the sudden arrival they all looked around themselves wearing confused expressions. Everything felt wrong. They were bricked in on three sides and the ground beneath their feet was manufactured. To make matters worse, the scorching afternoon sun was amplified by the closeness of the high buildings around them and the air felt thick and unclean. This most definitely wasn’t the Tifaeris *they* knew.

Having spent a good minute gazing in awe at what was essentially an alleyway, Bonson looked to his bewildered travelling companions and spoke out in wonderment of it all.)

BONSON: The whole thing is man made!

(More than used to ugly modern cities, Derek looked across at his friends and spoke up firmly.)

DEREK: Yes, well, never mind that. We have to get to going.

(Trying to come to terms with what he was seeing, Flaxley slowly turned to look at Derek and nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, yes, you’re right!

(He then glanced across at the bricks and mortar all around him and shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: So this is the future, is it? An ugly world made of stone and cement.

BONSON: That’s one way of looking at it. *I* see a world manufactured by man’s own hands.

LEFIAT: I can’t see anything but bricks. It’s horrible.

FLAXLEY: I just hope it’s not *all* like this.

DEREK: Yes well, even if it is, that’s not our concern. We need to head for future East Edea.

BONSON: Or as they call it here, East Edea.

FLAXLEY: Indeed. And to get there, Daman said we’d have to seek a form of future transportation.

KRITZ: Like what?

FLAXLEY: I don’t know.

DEREK: You don’t know?

BONSON: He didn’t mention anything specific.

FLAXLEY: Exactly. He just said to seek a form of futuristic transportation.

KRITZ: That could mean anything. I say we walk.

FLAXLEY: No. Walking would take days and according to Daman, the trip will only take a matter of hours if we use future transport.

DEREK: Then we'll do as Daman says. The sooner we get there the better.

FLAXLEY: Indeed.

(He then glanced down the alley and nodded firmly.)

FLAXLEY: What are we waiting for then? Let's get going.

MANDIKA: Wait! Can't we rest for a minute? I'm a bit dizzy from teleporting still and...

(She fanned her face then puffed out,)

MANDIKA: It's too bloody hot to go wandering about willy-nilly!

LEFIAT: Yeah, I'm burning up.

KRITZ: Gotta say, this heat is bloody stifling.

(Flaxley looked annoyed at himself and sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Well, of course we're hot. We're still wearing our thick winter gear!

(He rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Let's get changed quickly, then we can get going.

DEREK: Damn right. I think I'll die if I don't get out of this warm, winter coat.

BONSON: I couldn't have put it better myself, Derek.

(With that, they all set about removing their packs to change into the futuristic clothes that Daman had supplied them with.)

BONSON: Even if it wasn't so stifling, any excuse to get out of this ridiculous robe. I just hope Daman packed me something sensible to wear this time!

FLAXLEY: That's the hope, Bonson.

(He then glanced at Kritz and a heartbroken expression washed across his face. As she placed her hands on her hips in readiness to remove her skirt, he looked to her and pouted sorrowfully.)

FLAXLEY: Not the skirt, my love!

KRITZ: Sorry, darling. It's too bloody hot to wear this!

FLAXLEY: Damn it! I hate this place already.

(As her five comrades set about changing their attire, Mandika stood behind them pouting miserably.)

MANDIKA: Surely, I don't have to change in front of you lot?

DEREK: You don't have to, no. You can stay in your sweaty, winter clothes if you'd rather.

FLAXLEY: No, she can't. We have to blend in. Just get changed, Mandika. Nobody's going to peek at you.

BONSON: Damn right.

(Mandika pouted then looked to the ground.)

MANDIKA: But... changing in public? Aren't I allowed *any* degree of dignity?

BONSON: Oh, just shut up and change, will you, woman?

MANDIKA: I guess not!

(Feeling horribly dejected, she then hid behind Lefiat and proceeded to remove her coat. For her, this was a nightmare unbefitting of one as magnificent as herself. For the others, it was simply a welcome relief to finally be getting out of their stuffy winter attire. Losing Kritz's long leather skirt would, however, be quite the wrench for Flaxley.)

(Determined to make sure nobody could peek at them as they got undressed, Flaxley stood on guard, facing down the alley as he removed his winter coat and slipped a plain white T-shirt on. Like Derek, his transformation was simple. Derek had merely removed his coat and donned a vest then, like Flaxley, he was ready to go. The others however, had a fair bit to do.

As Flaxley stood there staring down the dull, empty, brick alleyway, Derek stepped to his side and puffed out sorrowfully. Sensing his friend's frustration, Flaxley looked down at him and forced a smile.)

FLAXLEY: Don't worry, old chap. I'm sure Zanne will be fine.

(Derek shook his head.)

DEREK: Well if she is, it'll be no thanks to us, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: What do you mean?

DEREK: By the time Bonson's ready, the equinox will have come and went.

(Unsure as to what Derek was getting at; Flaxley glanced over his shoulder then furrowed his brow angrily. Standing in his vest and underpants, Bonson was staring at Kritz wearing an expression of unbridled joy. Having no inhibitions whatsoever, Kritz had stripped naked and was now bending over with her backside towards him as she delved into her bag for her futuristic clothing. To the lusty former butler, all his birthdays had come at once and he was paralysed with delight.)

DEREK: I'll keep guard, Flaxley. You do what you have to do.

FLAXLEY: Damn right.

(With that, Flaxley paced to where Kritz was fiddling with her bag, merrily humming to herself as if being stark naked in full view of everyone was an everyday occurrence.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz!

(Kritz looked up at him and smiled.)

KRITZ: Hi, darling.

FLAXLEY: Don't 'darling' me, get dressed.

(Kritz furrowed her brow at him.)

KRITZ: What do you *think* I'm doing?

(With that, she pulled a long boot from her pack and scratched her head.)

KRITZ: These aren't much different to the ones I was wearing.

FLAXLEY: Never mind that! You're naked and Bonson's staring!

KRITZ: So is Lefiat probably.

FLAXLEY: That's not the point!!! Look... nobody wants to see your beaver!

KRITZ: I bet they do.

(Realising he was getting nowhere fast with this approach, Flaxley then stamped his way over to Bonson.)

FLAXLEY: Bonson!

(Looking peeved, Bonson leant around him and adjusted himself down below.)

BONSON: Move! You're ruining it!

FLAXLEY: Get dressed!

BONSON: Piss off! Now go away, you're spoiling the show.

(As Kritz sat down and proceeded to put her boots on first, Flaxley growled then raised his fist angrily.)

FLAXLEY: Now look here, you...

(He then drew his sword.)

FLAXLEY: Move it or lose it.

(At once, Bonson turned pale and he glanced to Flaxley nervously.)

BONSON: It?

FLAXLEY: Yes. It!

(Unsurprisingly, Flaxley didn't have to tell him again. Defying his age, Bonson managed to don the rest of his futuristic attire in record time. He was then frogmarched to Derek's side and Flaxley stood behind him where he couldn't take any sneaky glances back at Kritz. Naturally, he wasn't happy about it. He may have done as he was told, but he certainly

didn't do it without protest.)

BONSON: I tell you, it's coming to something when a man can't get changed in peace. All I was doing was taking a slight breather before I put my trousers on.

FLAXLEY: A breather? You were drooling down your vest!

BONSON: Well... I really like taking breathers!

(He then sighed.)

BONSON: Anyway, I don't know why you're so angry at *me*. It's not like I told her to bend over and show me her happy place, is it?

(He ruffled his neck muscles.)

BONSON: Seems to me that *she's* the one you should but mad at, but fine. I get it. You can't control your woman, so you take it out on poor old innocent me.

FLAXLEY: And it seems to me that you should be quiet for the next five minutes or so, because my sword is very sharp and I'm getting very annoyed.

BONSON: In which case, I'll be quiet.

FLAXLEY: See to it that you are.

BONSON: I would answer that, but I'm being quiet.

FLAXLEY: Glad to hear it.

(A couple of minutes later as Bonson and Flaxley stared angrily down the alley next to the uncomfortable looking Derek, Kritz stepped behind them and spoke in a bewildered voice.)

KRITZ: Um... Flaxley... I seem to have got taller!

(Baffled by her words, Flaxley glanced around at her and his tongue immediately fell out of his head.)

FLAXLEY: Merciful heaven, that get up's even sexier than the last one!!!

(Kritz beamed.)

KRITZ: I know, right? It's awesome! Best thing is, these boots... the heels are all long and pointy, so I'm like... tall now.

(She exhaled.)

KRITZ: I come up to your chin now!

(She then looked to Bonson.)

KRITZ: Check out these boots, Bonson.

BONSON: Do I have permission to look, Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: Just make sure you don't...

KRITZ: You don't need *his* permission!

(Looking extremely nervous, Bonson glanced up at Flaxley then turned to look at Kritz.)

BONSON: Good grief. You're a filthy fantasy come true in that outfit!!!

FLAXLEY: She's a what?

BONSON: A pretty little thing, I said.

FLAXLEY: I'm really am going to kill you one of these days, Bonson.

KRITZ: Oh, leave him alone, Flaxley.

BONSON: Agreed!

FLAXLEY: But, he's a peeping pervert!

KRITZ: Who cares? If people want to look at me, let them. I'm proud of my body.

BONSON: And so you should be.

KRITZ: So just... be nice.

(Flaxley sighed heavily then shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: Fine.

(Kritz then beamed excitedly and started to pace up and down.)

KRITZ: It feels kinda weird walking in these, but they're so cool. I love being this tall.

Daman's a genius!

(Wearing a bitter snarl, Bonson interjected, clearly disagreeing.)

BONSON: Hardly! I look a complete tit in this get up!

(Standing there in trainers, an “I love Guevina” T-shirt, a pair of ill-fitting jeans and a bomber jacket, he couldn’t have looked more despondent.)

BONSON: I can’t believe for a moment that *anyone* would actually walk about looking like this! And that’s not the worst part.

(He then threw a red baseball cap on his head and groaned.)

BONSON: What’s this sticky out bit at the front? It looks like a duck bill!

FLAXLEY: Maybe it’s supposed to be at the back, you know, to protect your neck from the sun.

(Bonson mused to himself for a moment then smiled.)

BONSON: Makes sense.

(He then turned the cap backwards and nodded.)

BONSON: Thanks, Flaxley. Now I don’t look half as silly.

(Just then, Mandika approached them with Lefiat at her side. Wearing a nervous expression, she looked to Kritz and whimpered.)

MANDIKA: I look silly, don’t I?

(Kritz looked her up and down then smiled.)

KRITZ: No, you look pretty much like you. Only in a tighter dress than normal.

MANDIKA: Well... that’s fine then.

(Standing there in a long, white, figure hugging dress, white shoes and a veil, Mandika beamed then gestured to Lefiat.)

MANDIKA: And look, Lefiat looks smart for once.

(Standing there in a black top hat and tails ensemble, Lefiat pouted.)

LEFIAT: It’s uncomfortable.

MANDIKA: Who cares? You look cool for once.

LEFIAT: I do?

DEREK: Not that looks matter. The point is to blend in by wearing what people in the future wear.

MANDIKA: Exactly. So quit moaning, Lefiat.

(She then looked Kritz up and down and shook her head despairingly.)

MANDIKA: For heaven sake, Kritz. You’re even more scantily clad than normal.

(Kritz beamed.)

KRITZ: I know, right?

(Delighted with her short black bra-top, leather mini-skirt and long high heeled boots, Kritz couldn’t stop smiling.)

KRITZ: And look how tall I am!

(Mandika looked down at Kritz’s boots and sneered.)

MANDIKA: Weird heels, that’s all. You’re still not taller than me.

KRITZ: I am now!

MANDIKA: No, you’re not. You’re just wearing silly shoes.

KRITZ: They’re not silly!

(Fearing they’d fall out with one another again, Derek raised his voice.)

DEREK: Stop it, will you?

(He rolled his eyes.)

DEREK: Now seeing as we’re all changed, let’s get going.

(As if Derek had just made the world’s silliest comment, Kritz and Mandika immediately scoffed in perfect harmony.)

KRITZ: He’s a silly alien.

MANDIKA: He really is.

(With that, Kritz seemed to pluck a hairbrush out of thin air.)

KRITZ: Let's fix that hair of yours and sort your veil out, Mandika.

(Mandika beamed.)

MANDIKA: And I didn't even have to ask. You're a true friend, Kritz.

KRITZ: It's nothing, babe. I know you'd do the same for me.

MANDIKA: In a heartbeat.

(A good twenty minutes later, once Mandika and Kritz had finished perfecting their hair, the party we're finally ready to make a move. Having spent the entire time pacing up and down and groaning, anxious to get going, Derek was especially relieved. Flaxley, on the other hand, had spent the time drooling over Kritz and the time had flown by. He was so taken with her new look, in fact, he was *still* drooling as Derek led them off down the alley to begin their journey.)

FLAXLEY: You look so, so ooh, I can hardly contain myself!

KRITZ: I *feel* good too! I'm so tall! I'm taller than Bonson, in fact!

BONSON: Fuck you!!!

(Bonson snarled at her bitterly for a moment then released his anger and stooped to whisper to Derek.)

BONSON: She was already sex on legs, but now... what can I say? I'm aroused!

DEREK: I admit, even *I'm* finding her new look appealing!

(Bonson couldn't believe his ears.)

BONSON: That's obscene! You're an alien!

DEREK: And you're old and frail, at least I *could*!

(Bonson grimaced.)

BONSON: Whatever, weirdo. I'm keeping away from you!

(Upon reaching the end of the alley, they emerged onto a path beside a busy road and stopped to gaze in awe at the sights before them. There were horseless carriages whizzing to and fro and some of the buildings were as high as hills, some were even made of mirrors. The roads were filled with traffic and the noises were ungodly.)

LEFIAT: It's...

MANDIKA: Hideous!

KRITZ: It is!

(Flaxley glanced all around and shook his head. He then took a peek at Kritz and allowed himself a satisfied smile. Remembering to focus on the mission, he then shook his head vehemently and assumed the lead of his party.)

FLAXLEY: Right. Remember... we're ordinary modern folk. So, act normal!

(He then looked up and down the path and nodded sternly.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, let's go.

(With that, he stepped across the path towards the road, totally overawed by his surroundings. Just as he stepped close to the curb, however, a car whizzed past sounding its hooter, almost giving him a heart attack.)

FLAXLEY: Holy crap!!!

(As Flaxley jumped back then stooped to catch his breath, Mandika glanced up and down the road and whimpered nervously)

MANDIKA: We're going to have to be really careful here, guys!

KRITZ: Yeah, we are!

BONSON: I agree. It seems those self-propelled carriages move at quite the speed and they don't like anyone getting too close to them.

(He then looked to Flaxley and nodded.)

BONSON: Right, where to, Flaxley?

LEFIAT: East Edea, you said!

BONSON: I know that, you plank. How?

(Stumped by Bonson's question, they all looked blankly at one another when Mandika spotted something and gushed excitedly.)

MANDIKA: Look, there's a library!

KRITZ: So?

MANDIKA: My castle has a library!

KRITZ: And that helps us how exactly?

BONSON: It helps us a lot actually!

MANDIKA: It does? I mean... yes, it does!

KRITZ: Like how?

BONSON: Well, what do libraries have?

LEFIAT: Dunno, the king won't let me go in!

BONSON: Well, do you blame him?

MANDIKA: Libraries have books, Lefiat!

BONSON: Quite!

FLAXLEY: Excellent! So, what's your point?

(Bonson sighed.)

BONSON: A library, you intellectually impaired buffoons, is a fountain of information!

They're bound to have all the information we need on futuristic transportation!

(Flaxley mused to himself for a moment then shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: Sounds like a plan, let's try that!

DEREK: Well, we could, only there's one minor problem... the library's on the other side of this road!

FLAXLEY: Damn it!

BONSON: How annoying!

(With that, they all turned to face the busy road, scratching their heads as they tried to think of a way to cross it. With cars whizzing up and down at great speeds, it was a problem of epic proportions.)

FLAXLEY: So near, yet so far! The library is right there and yet it might as well be a million miles away.

(Derek then looked up and down the road and sighed heavily.)

DEREK: We have such speedy carriages on Tryme 17 too, only we have bridges for crossing the roads every fifty feet or so. There doesn't seem to be anything like that here.

(Just then, a car drove slowly past and the driver yelled at Kritz from the window.)

DRIVER: Ay up, sexy legs... show us your tits.

(As the car sped away with much laughter emanating from it, Kritz looked to Flaxley uneasily.)

KRITZ: He told me to...

FLAXLEY: That doesn't mean you have to!

KRITZ: Right... if you're sure.

BONSON: He's sure. As much as I'd like another peek myself, you don't have to indulge the whims of a bunch of randy louts, Kritzeveltia.

KRITZ: Fair enough.

(Bonson then looked down the road and shook his head.)

BONSON: Yelling that sort of thing to a lady in a busy public place, whatever next?

Obviously education is a forgotten art in this day and age! Society has quite clearly gone to hell. You only shout that kind of thing in the bedroom or at a certain type of inn.

LEFIAT: Like Madame Zuzu's...

BONSON: Exactly!

(Bonson looked flustered and tensed up.)

BONSON: I mean, no!

MANDIKA: I knew it!

(Realising he'd been busted, Bonson's brow furrowed and he looked away.)

BONSON: Oh, shut up.

(Just then, Flaxley stood tall and tipped his head back.)

FLAXLEY: All this standing around is getting us nowhere. I'm gonna go for it!

KRITZ: Go for what?

(Flaxley gave her a heroic glance and raised a manly eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: I'm going to cross the road! I'll use my skill and speed to dodge the carriages and with any luck I'll emerge unscathed on the other side.

KRITZ: No, darling! It's too dangerous. You don't have to be a hero!

FLAXLEY: No? If I don't do it then who will?

(He then nodded firmly and gave Kritz a loving smile.)

FLAXLEY: If I don't make it, know this. I loved you with all my heart and soul, my love. Don't mourn me, celebrate me.

(With that, he stepped powerfully to the very edge of the road and was immediately thrown by a bleeping sound emanating from all around him.)

FLAXLEY: What the?

(Set on edge by the noise, he glanced urgently from left to right and his jaw dropped. As if by magic, all the traffic had stopped moving.)

FLAXLEY: Quick, now's our chance! Run, people!!!

(With that, Kritz grabbed Mandika's hand and they all raced across both carriages and onto the path on the other side of the road. Mandika screamed for dear life all the way. As soon as they were all safely on the other side, Flaxley clenched a triumphant fist and exhaled with joy.)

FLAXLEY: Success!!! Good job, everyone.

MANDIKA: Kritz, you could of got us all killed! More importantly, me!

(Trembling all over, she then looked back to where they'd crossed the road only to see dozens of other people doing the same.)

MANDIKA: Wow... look.

BONSON: Hmm... it appears to be some kind of road crossing point!

(He grinned then looked to Flaxley.)

BONSON: All we had to do was wait for the bleeps, from the looks of things.

FLAXLEY: So it would seem.

BONSON: I bet after all that heroic posturing you feel like a complete tit now, don't you?

FLAXLEY: Bonson...

KRITZ: Ignore him, darling. You're still a hero to me!

FLAXLEY: Thank you, my love! A damn good patronising is exactly what I need, right now.

KRITZ: Then you came to the right girl.

FLAXLEY: Apparently so. Anyway, never mind that. Let's head for the library, shall we?

(With that, he about turned and made his way towards the nearby library building. Watching him, the others all shrugged then proceeded to follow him, Bonson chuckling to himself about Flaxley's embarrassment.)

BONSON: Bloody priceless.

(As they stepped up to the library doors, Flaxley glanced over his shoulder and grimaced uneasily.)

FLAXLEY: I just hope whoever owns this place doesn't mind us taking a looking around.

MANDIKA: They might, but then again they might not. I know *I* wouldn't let just anyone

stroll into *my* library!

BONSON: Well the sign says, “*public* library”, so hopefully we’ll be fine!

(As the six cautious travellers ventured through the library doors, half expecting to be asked to leave, Mandika’s jaw immediately dropped. Just like Bonson, she was delighted and amazed by the vast array of books on show.)

BONSON: Is this the promised land?

LEFIAT: No, it’s a library, apparently.

BONSON: And you’re a knob.

LEFIAT: Eh?

MANDIKA: Seriously, Lefiat, have you no soul?

LEFIAT: What’s that supposed to mean.

MANDIKA: So many wonderful books.

BONSON: Indeed, and so much information and knowledge to be tapped.

KRITZ: Wow, it’s not like you two to agree on something.

BONSON: Indeed. *She’s* wrong about most other things.

MANDIKA: Hey!

(Before they could begin arguing, Flaxley swiftly turned to them and spoke in a soft but firm tone.)

FLAXLEY: That’s enough of that. Look, nobody stopped us coming in, so clearly it’s a public place. Therefore, having come this far, causing a scene and getting ourselves kicked out would be plain stupid.

MANDIKA: I wasn’t *going* to cause a scene.

BONSON: Oh you were!

FLAXLEY: Stop it, I said! Look, let’s just find the information we need, shall we? Then once we’re outside you can argue to your heart’s content.

BONSON: Fair enough.

LEFIAT: And what information is that, exactly?

MANDIKA: How to get to East Edea, you pillock.

(She rolled her eyes.)

MANDIKA: You’re even thicker than normal today.

LEFIAT: Hey!

BONSON: Buffoon.

(He rolled his eyes then glanced across at all the many book shelves.)

BONSON: Hmm... with so many books, it might take a while to find what we’re looking for.

DEREK: Then we should all spread out; we can cover the place quicker that way!

FLAXLEY: Good idea.

(He then turned to face the numerous book shelves and bit his lip uneasily. The first shelf on the ground floor was labelled ‘beauty and hair care’. Fearing Mandika and Kritz would get as far as that first shelf and never move on to another one, he mused to himself for a moment then stood tall.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, let’s get started. What say you ladies check the balcony, and *we’ll* do downstairs?

KRITZ: Works for me!

MANDIKA: Righto!

(As Kritz and Mandika headed for the stairs, Flaxley drew a sigh of relief then looked to the shelves again.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, chaps, spread out, and remember Lefiat...

LEFIAT: Yeah?

FLAXLEY: Don't touch anything!

LEFIAT: Like I was going to!

FLAXLEY: Excellent. Let's go.

(With that, Flaxley, Derek, Bonson and Lefiat all headed into the shelves on the ground floor, determined to check every shelf and every aisle in the entire library. Upon reaching the first shelf, Derek stooped to check the lower shelves and Flaxley's took it upon himself to scan the higher ones. Casually browsing the more central shelves, Bonson looked very much at ease. Lefiat on the other hand, sidled sideways wearing a nervous grimace.

Five minutes later, as they continued to scour the shelves, Flaxley came across a book in the history section that interested him greatly and he came to a complete stand still. Raising a curious eyebrow, he glanced all around himself to see if anyone was watching then plucked the book from the shelf. Staring at the cover, he then mumbled to himself uneasily.)

FLAXLEY: The real truth about Sir Lefiat and Sir Flaxley by Godfrey Winchester.

(He then scratched his head in bewilderment.)

FLAXLEY: Who the hell is Godfrey Winchester? How can *he* know the truth about me when I've never even met him?

(Curious to know what the book said about him, he then checked nobody was looking again and slipped it in his bag.)

FLAXLEY: I'm sure they won't mind.

(With that, he nodded to himself then paced over towards Derek, Lefiat and Bonson.)

FLAXLEY: Anything?

BONSON: No.

(Lefiat sighed.)

LEFIAT: I thought I'd found one called "How to get to East Edea", but Bonson said it was called "Make the most of each idea"!

(Flaxley frowned.)

FLAXLEY: What do you mean, "Bonson said"?

(He looked enlightened and gave Lefiat a pitying glance.)

FLAXLEY: Sorry, Lefiat, I forgot. You can't read very well, can you?

BONSON: He can't do *anything* well.

(As Bonson grinned to himself and continued down the aisle, Flaxley glared at him angrily then looked to Lefiat.)

FLAXLEY: Ignore him, Lefiat.

LEFIAT: I wish I could, but he's right. I suck at a lot of things. Reading is just one of many.

FLAXLEY: Well... maybe... but it's never too late to learn, you know?

(Lefiat shrugged.)

LEFIAT: Maybe. I tried to learn as a kid, but I wasn't very good at it and nobody had the patience to keep trying to teach me.

FLAXLEY: Not even at school?

LEFIAT: Especially not at school. They realised I was slow and pretty much gave up on me straight away. Like I told you before, I only went for one day.

(He sighed.)

LEFIAT: I just hope when Mandika becomes queen of Guevina, she does something about the free schools. They only bother teaching the kids who already know stuff, the rest get left behind!

(Flaxley looked thoughtful and sighed.)

FLAXLEY: That's awful, but still... it's better than nothing. In Tifaeris there *are* no free schools yet! We've only got one school and they charge.

LEFIAT: Really? That's terrible, whoever's running that place should be ashamed!

(Flaxley gave him a long hard stare and growled.)

LEFIAT: What? Oh, that's you isn't it?

(Flaxley continued to stare hard into his eyes and his reply was extremely blunt.)

FLAXLEY: Yes!

(Lefiat hung his head.)

LEFIAT: Sorry.

(Flaxley sighed then pushed away his anger.)

FLAXLEY: No, don't worry, you weren't to know. Free education for all is on our to-do list but establishing these things take time. We'll get there though.

LEFIAT: Good for you, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: Thank you!

LEFIAT: So you reckon it's not too late for me to improve my reading?

FLAXLEY: Of course it isn't. Kritz is older than you and it wasn't too late for her! She couldn't read a word a few years ago, but now she's coming on nicely.

LEFIAT: Kritz couldn't read?

FLAXLEY: Not a word. The Trepe tribe didn't raise her to read books; they raised her to hit things with clubs, so she never got to learn.

LEFIAT: Oh, right... but she's learnt to now?

FLAXLEY: She's learning, Lefiat. She's got some way to go yet, but she's much better than she was.

LEFIAT: Cool. So there's hope for me yet then?

FLAXLEY: Well... anything's possible, Lefiat.

LEFIAT: Awesome.

(A full hour later, having carefully checked shelves for what felt like an eternity, Mandika and Kritz solemnly made their way down the stairs from the balcony. Stepping onto the ground floor they shrugged at one another in defeat then headed for the lower shelves, just in time to see the rest of their party emerge looking equally as frustrated. Upon spotting them, Derek smiled and raised a hopeful eyebrow.)

DEREK: Anything, Ladies?

MANDIKA: Not a bloody thing!

(Her entire demeanour then changed and she started to chuckle. Highly amused by something she pointed at Kritz then spoke up through a series of giggles.)

MANDIKA: Though, madam here found a novel called "The night and day man".

(Having paused to giggle some more, she then laughed out the rest of her words.)

MANDIKA: And she thought it was a history book about Flaxley and Daman Siria, called...

(Through tears of laughter she then spat out the punch line.)

MANDIKA: The knight and Daman!

(As Mandika stood there helpless with laughter, Kritz growled at her bitterly.)

KRITZ: You bitch; you said you wouldn't tell 'em!

MANDIKA: But it was funny. Besides, you're a grown woman, Kritz. Any adult who hasn't even learned to read yet deserves to be laughed at really.

(As Kritz stood there fuming, Bonson shook his head then stepped up to the laughing Mandika wearing a disdainful expression.)

BONSON: See, this is exactly my point!

(Mandika looked back at him with tears of laughter rolling from her eyes.)

MANDIKA: What is?

BONSON: This is why I so often call you a spoilt bitch...

(At once, her laughter ceased and she scolded him with her eyes. Undeterred by her fiery glance, however, Bonson elaborated coldly.)

BONSON: It's okay for you with your royal education, private library and cosy lifestyle. You don't seem to appreciate for one moment what life is like for the rest of us!

MANDIKA: So?

BONSON: So? You're a disgrace to all things decent! I mean, how dare you mock poor Kritz? You have no right. She's twice the person you are, and I don't just mean in the looks department. *She* grew up learning to stand on her *own* two feet, she didn't have butlers and maids running around after her like you! She had to learn everything the hard way, like the rest of us!

(As Mandika's bottom lip started to droop, Bonson glanced away from her nonchalantly then hammered home his point.)

BONSON: As a result, Kritz has become a responsible and capable adult, whereas you... you wouldn't last five minutes in the real world on your own. It's not that you're too magnificent to do the things you refuse to do, fact is, you can't. You're utterly dependant on others. A pathetic human being if ever there was one. Now seeing as Kritz has earned everything she's got, including what little reading skill she has, whereas you've leeches everything from your father like some bottom feeding parasite, I'd say that makes her your better, therefore you should apologise immediately.

(Made to feel two inches tall, Mandika pouted and looked to Lefiat.)

MANDIKA: That was mean... Lefiat, you're my knight, don't just stand there, say something!

(Feeling brave, Lefiat folded his arms and pouted.)

LEFIAT: Okay. I agree with Bonson. After all, I can't read very well either and when you mocked Kritz for it, you were pretty much insulting me too!

(Well aware that she'd been insensitive but not about to admit it, even for a moment, Mandika went red with rage and flapped her arms up and down angrily.)

MANDIKA: Fine. If that's how you're going to be... you're fired!

(At once, Lefiat started to gape and a panicked expression crossed his brow.)

LEFIAT: But...

FLAXLEY: Relax Lefiat, when I was her knight she used to sack me at least twice a week!

MANDIKA: Shut up! No I didn't!

(With that, she folded her arms angrily and stared at the floor in a rage. Watching her sulk, Bonson rolled his eyes then looked to Flaxley.)

BONSON: Sorry about that. I just felt it needed saying!

(Eager to get everyone's thoughts back to the mission, Derek gestured towards the bookshelves.)

DEREK: Right, well, whatever, so nobody found out how we're supposed to get to East Edea?

KRITZ: We found a couple of books about transportation but they made no sense.

BONSON: Yes, but with all due respect, that's because you can't read.

KRITZ: I can... a bit.

(She shrugged.)

KRITZ: Mandika said they made no sense.

BONSON: I see.

FLAXLEY: So, coming here was a complete waste of time then.

DEREK: So it would seem.

LEFIAT: Then, now what?

(As everyone stood there looking stumped, a wry smile washed onto Kritz's lips.)

KRITZ: Hmm...

(She then gave Mandika dagger looks.)

KRITZ: I'll show her!

(With that, she paced towards a counter where an ageing, bespectacled female librarian sat reading. As the others watched her curiously, she smiled and addressed the lady in her most polite voice.)

KRITZ: Excuse me, fair maiden, my friends and I seek passage to East Edea. Therefore, I'd be much obliged if you'd please inform us as to how we'd go about undertaking such a journey?

(Looking far from impressed the librarian peered up at her over her glasses and spoke in a condescending tone.)

LADY: Fair maiden? Seek passage? Who talks like that? Have you been drinking, young lady?

KRITZ: What? No.

LADY: You're lying. I'm afraid I must ask you to leave!

KRITZ: But... I haven't been drinking... and I only asked how you get to East Edea! Why are you being so hostile?

LADY: Because we have zero tolerance policy towards drunks in our library. Now, if you want to go to East Edea, get a train.

(She then pointed to the exit.)

LADY: Now please leave. And take those friends of yours with you!

(Kritz glanced at her waiting allies then looked back at the old lady again.)

KRITZ: Wait... train, you say? And where do we get this... train?

LADY: From the station obviously!

KRITZ: Station?

(Looking somewhat peeved, the lady stood up and snarled.)

LADY: Security!

KRITZ: Oh, don't be like that. Just tell me about this station thing and I'll leave!

LADY: Tell you about it?

KRITZ: Yeah... like what is it... and where is it?

(The old lady seemed to calm down a little and sighed.)

LADY: Fine!

KRITZ: Thank you!

LADY: The station is where you get the trains from. As for where it is... it's not far, you come out of here and turn left, keep going until you reach the traffic lights, then turn left again, it's down there!

KRITZ: Traffic lights?

LADY: Security!!!

KRITZ: Okay, I'm going, I'm going!

(As the librarian scowled at her, Kritz swiftly headed for the door, signalling to the others to join her.)

KRITZ: Follow me, guys!

(With that, she paced from the building then paused to allow the sunlight to wash over her face as the others caught her up.)

DEREK: Well? What did she say?

KRITZ: Like I said, Derek, follow me.

(With that, she turned left and paced off down the road with an arrogant spring in her step. Swaying her hips and strutting like a model on a catwalk, she then took a swift glance back at Mandika. Adopting a belittling glance, she allowed herself a sneer then mumbled to herself.)

KRITZ: It's time you learned a valuable lesson, missy.

(Bewildering by her uncharacteristic posturing, the others shared a baffled glance then followed on.)

BONSON: She's so fine. You know, given half a chance I'd be up her like...

FLAXLEY: Wanna stop there, Bonson?

BONSON: You know, I really think I should!

FLAXLEY: See? You *are* a wise man after all.

(As Kritz paced sexily forth along the pavement, naturally she started to turn a few heads. Almost all the men on the path turned and stared, many whistled and shouted lustfully. A tad startled by the attention, she glanced from side to side then allowed herself a smile. She wasn't looking to be noticed by anyone other than Mandika but having her hotness confirmed by so many drooling men was quite the boost to her self-esteem. Her husband, however, failed to share her delight at the townsfolk's reactions to her and swiftly started to turn red with rage. Infuriated by the sight of so many men ogling his wife, he growled under his breath and started to draw his sword.)

FLAXLEY: How dare they look at my wife like that???

BONSON: Flaxley!!! Put it away!!!

(Despite being absolutely furious, he somehow managed to restrain himself and let his sword slip back into its scabbard.)

FLAXLEY: Fine, but it's okay if I *hit* some of them, isn't it?

(In the meantime, at the back of the group, Lefiat, Mandika and Bonson we're also starting to attract a fair amount of attention. Unlike Kritz, however, they were far from being showered with admiration. Receiving many a sideways glance, they very quickly became the subject of much uncomfortable mumbling. Pacing along, looking somewhat nervous, they couldn't help hearing some of the troubled comments being made by the pedestrians they passed.)

WOMAN 1: That poor girl, walking back from her wedding.

WOMAN 2: I bet the groom left her at the alter and drove off in the wedding car or something.

WOMAN 1: No, that funny looking fellow in the suit is the groom, isn't he?

WOMAN 2: Don't be silly, she's a pretty girl.

WOMAN 1: Maybe he's rich.

WOMAN 2: If he was rich they'd have a car.

WOMAN 1: You're right. The groom must have left her at the alter and taken their wedding car with him.

WOMAN 2: How awful.

WOMAN 1: Oh, I know. Dumped at the alter then having to walk back home in her wedding dress, how humiliating.

WOMAN 2: And with only a weirdly dressed old man and a funny looking relative for company. Poor thing.

(As Mandika and Lefiat shared a troubled glance, two grinning sixteen year old lads stepped aside them and gestured to Bonson.)

LAD 1: Hey, newlyweds. Is this old man your son?

LEFIAT: Eh?

BONSON: Excuse me?

(Mandika scowled at them.)

MANDIKA: Of course he isn't!

LAD 2: Don't be like that, love, I just wondered why he isn't at school!

(Looking somewhat peeved, Bonson stared the young lad in the eyes.)

BONSON: Do you have a problem, young man?

LAD 2: No mate, if you wanna raid your grandson's wardrobe, that's your affair!

(Bonson looked down at himself then gave the lad an enquiring glance.)

BONSON: I take it you mean these are youthful clothes!

LAD 1: Not when *you're* in 'em, they're not!

(With that, Bonson frowned then hurriedly walked forth to get away from them.)

BONSON: I'll kill Daman, you see if I don't!

MANDIKA: You're not the only one. This is a bloody modern day wedding dress! How embarrassing!

(As Mandika, Lefiat and Bonson paced onwards, trying desperately to block out the pitying or mocking sounds of the public around them, Kritz continued to lead the way. Getting too much attention for Flaxley's liking, she reached the top of the road then pointed to some sticks with coloured lights attached to the top.)

KRITZ: I'm guessing, but they must be traffic lights!

(With that, she skipped around the corner and continued to strut in a sexy manner.)

KRITZ: This way.

(Just then, a smug looking man stepped in her path. As she stopped and looked to him enquiringly, the man gave her a knowing smile and spoke up in a deep, manly voice.)

MAN: Hey, beautiful, they said it was hot outside and now I know why...

(As she looked blankly into the man's lusting eyes, Flaxley's fist appeared in her eye-line and thudded into his jaw, knocking him unconscious. Flinching, she watched him hit the ground then looked to Flaxley in astonishment.)

KRITZ: Why did you...

(Cutting her off before she could finish, Flaxley furrowed his brow and growled.)

FLAXLEY: Will you stop that?

KRITZ: Stop what?

FLAXLEY: Strutting about like a randy sex poodle.

(Looking most put out; Kritz threw her hands to her hips and growled at him.)

KRITZ: I'm not strutting about like anything of the sort!

FLAXLEY: Yes, you are!

KRITZ: Look, I can't help having a sexy walk.

(She then folded her arms indignantly and glanced away.)

KRITZ: If people are looking at me, fine. Who cares? I'm trying to prove a point here, so either back me or leave me alone.

(With that, she gave Mandika a belittling scowl then set off again. Having always been looked down on by Mandika and treated very much like a worthless nobody, she was determined to prove herself. Even her angry husband's objections weren't going to stop her having her moment.)

(As they continued on down the street, following Kritz's lead, Flaxley didn't know whether to drool or start punching random strangers. Kritz was indeed beautiful and watching her was a pleasure, yet at the same time, knowing others were enjoying the same view was infuriating. Fully understanding the message she was sending to Mandika, however, he knew he couldn't stand in her way. And so, he paced just behind her, content to let her strut provocatively forth, but ready to step in should anyone dare overstep the mark.

Bringing up the rear at this time, Mandika, Lefiat and Bonson continued to suffer a torrent of pitying or snide comments from the public. Their outfits were causing quite a stir. And yet, bizarrely, the three foot tall green alien in their party hadn't even raised an eyebrow.

Grimacing to himself as they made their way further down the street it wasn't long before a sign caught Flaxley's eye. On the other side of the road there was a turn off named Kritzeveltia Avenue. Taking great satisfaction in the thought that they'd named a street after his beloved wife, he looked to Derek and beamed.)

FLAXLEY: Look over the other side of the road, Derek. Kritzeveltia Avenue.

(Ignoring his request, Derek stared straight ahead towards Kritz and raised a baffled eyebrow.)

DEREK: Humans are weird. If Zanne decided to strut around like that on Tryme 17, she'd get arrested rather than applauded.

(Flaxley gave him a bitter glance.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, quite, exactly the point I was making.

(He rolled his eyes then glanced down the road and performed a double take.)

FLAXLEY: Look.

(With that, he raced forth and grabbed Kritz's arm. As she stopped pacing and gave him a baffled glance, he nodded a little further down the road and beamed.)

FLAXLEY: It's the Monument!

KRITZ: What?

(She glanced to where he was nodding then grinned from ear to ear.)

KRITZ: Oh my.

(With that, they both hurried forth and paced up to a stone statue at the side of the pathway. It was the monument they'd erected as a tribute to the people who died defending Tifaeris from the Trepe and Dim Lee's army a year earlier.)

KRITZ: It's still here after a thousand years!

(Catching them up, the others all looked the monument up and down then smiled to Flaxley.)

BONSON: I guess your friends never *will* be forgotten Flaxley!

DEREK: Absolutely.

FLAXLEY: Fantastic, isn't it? It still stands after a thousand years.

(Bonson nodded then gave Flaxley a sideways glance.)

BONSON: Though I still find it lame that as a tribute to the dead, you built a statue of yourself and Kritz!

FLAXLEY: I didn't do it; it was all Thin's doing!

BONSON: Thin?

LEFIAT: The fat bloke!

BONSON: Oh, I remember him. In that case, Flaxley, I take that back!

(Flaxley couldn't believe his ears.)

FLAXLEY: You do?

BONSON: Well don't sound so surprised, I'm not above admitting my mistakes!

KRITZ: Excuse me?

DEREK: Just humour him, Kritz; we've got to get going!

KRITZ: Ah yes, of course.

(She then gave Mandika a very deliberate smile.)

KRITZ: Follow me, people!

(With that, she minced away down the street, swaying her hips and flicking her hair. As Flaxley paced off after her, the other four all shared a shrug then followed on, Mandika glaring at Kritz and mouthing the word 'tart', a word that might one day earn her a beating.)

MANDIKA: I hate her!

BONSON: I hate all this walking. It's too bloody hot to be wandering about.

(Luckily for Bonson, they'd only walked a mere fifty metres further, when Kritz stopped again and pointed at the big building on their left.)

KRITZ: I bring you, the station!

(As Flaxley glanced towards the building in question, Kritz bowed and stuck her tongue out at Mandika.)

KRITZ: At least that's what the sign says. Not bad for a useless illiterate, I'd say.

(As the others caught them up, Bonson looked to Kritz and raised a baffled eyebrow.)

BONSON: The station, did you say?

KRITZ: Yup. The station!

BONSON: And what the bloody hell *is* a station?

KRITZ: From here we can get a train to East Edea!

LEFIAT: A train?

DEREK: And what *is* a train?

KRITZ: How the hell should I know?

FLAXLEY: Right, so we go in there, do we?

KRITZ: Apparently!

(With that, she strutted through the station entrance, glancing back to offer Mandika a knowing smirk as she went.)

MANDIKA: What's she being so cocky about?

BONSON: I think the point she's making is quite clear, ma'am!

MANDIKA: Not to me it isn't!

LEFIAT: Her point is, she isn't the useless, illiterate tart you make her out to be!

(Mandika swiftly glared at him and shook her fist.)

MANDIKA: I know what her bloody point is!!!

(She then furrowed her brow bitterly.)

MANDIKA: Stupid bint.

BONSON: Actually, Mandika, I think her point is a far greater one than that.

(Mandika glared at him coldly.)

MANDIKA: Oh, do you now?

BONSON: I do. She was actually making the point that, even with a backpack on, she's hot and you're not.

(Mandika was livid.)

MANDIKA: Yes, I am!!!

BONSON: No, after several ales you might be mildly good looking, but Kritz is bloody fit.

MANDIKA: I... that wasn't the point she was making at all, Bonson.

BONSON: Actually, I think you'll find it was *exactly* her point!

MANDIKA: Then she really needs to get over herself! So what if she *is* slightly better looking than me? Not that she is. But if she was... that wouldn't make her *better* than me, I'm a princess!

BONSON: Actually it would and it does. You see, being tasty makes her popular *wherever* she goes. As a mere aesthetically challenged princess, however, *you're* only popular in Guevina... and even then it's only because people are *paid* to spend time with you.

MANDIKA: Hey!!!

BONSON: What? Truth hurts, does it, Mandika?

MANDIKA: You're horrible.

(Derek looked to them in astonishment then shook his head.)

DEREK: You lot are just... look, forget it. Let's just go after her, shall we?

MANDIKA: Fine.

(She then glared at Lefiat.)

MANDIKA: Come on, mistake boy.

LEFIAT: Eh? But... why are you angry at *me*?

MANDIKA: Just, come on!

(As Mandika stormed into the station followed by a troubled looking Lefiat, Bonson stood chuckling to himself, much to the disgust of the despairing Derek.)

DEREK: Being prettier than Mandika wasn't the point Kritz was making at all.

BONSON: I know, but it's always fun to bring Mandika down a peg or two.

DEREK: I don't believe you sometimes, Bonson.

(He shook his head.)

DEREK: I agree that she needs to learn a little humility, but you're having way too much fun going about it.

BONSON: Yes, well, I'm old, Derek, and I don't have much time left, probably. Once I'm gone, who's going to see to it that she doesn't end up getting killed by her own subjects in a revolution? Because the way she looks down on people right now, that's what'll happen within a week of her becoming queen.

DEREK: I think you exaggerate, to be honest.

BONSON: Maybe, but I love that little shit and if I can make her become a better person, then whatever it takes, I'll bloody well do it. And if I happen to enjoy myself doing it, then so be it.

(With that, he paced off into the station. Puffing out, Derek shook his head then followed on.

As he arrived in the entrance hall, Derek glanced around then spotted Kritz, standing at a counter, talking to a man behind a desk. At her side, Flaxley stood there smiling joyously, totally unable to remove his eyes from her legs. In the centre of the hall, Bonson and Mandika stood glaring at one other, with a worried looking Lefiat standing in between them. Deciding to join Flaxley, he paced forwards when Kritz turned away from the desk and headed towards a set of doors at the back of the station.)

KRITZ: This way, guys.

(Entranced by her legs Flaxley swiftly paced after her, his tongue almost dragging on the floor. Watching him, Derek allowed himself a grin then joined Lefiat, Mandika and Bonson in heading after them.

As they emerged through the doors at the back of the station, they found themselves standing on a raised concrete platform. Just beneath the platform, some long, parallel, metal bars stretched along the ground and off into the distance. Having never seen train tracks before, Derek stared down at them then looked to Kritz.)

DEREK: So... what's this all about?

KRITZ: This is the station, there's gonna be a train along in a minute!

BONSON: A train?

KRITZ: Yeah. The woman in the library said, the train is how people get to East Edea! So it must be the future transportation Daman was talking about.

BONSON: I see.

FLAXLEY: So people get in this train, do they? And it goes to East Edea?

KRITZ: So it seems, yeah.

MANDIKA: What... and can anyone get on it? Even peasants?

BONSON: For heaven's sake, Mandika.

MANDIKA: I was just asking.

KRITZ: Well, the man I spoke to just now said it'll be along in a few minutes! He never said *we* couldn't get on it! That's all I know.

DEREK: Right. And it'll take us to East Edea?

BONSON: East Edea is across the sea from here though. How could *that* work?

(Kritz shrugged.)

KRITZ: I dunno. He said the train to East Edea will be along in a few minutes though, so it must go there!

BONSON: I'm dying to see how *that* works! It'll be quite the education!

KRITZ: He also said there was a conductor operating on the train, but I have no idea what that means.

FLAXLEY: I see. Well... nice work, Kritz! Superb.

(Kritz nodded then gave Mandika a very deliberate smile.)

KRITZ: I know!

(As Kritz stood there smiling victoriously, Mandika rolled her eyes and adopted a cocky stance.)

MANDIKA: Whatever, Kritz. You may *think* you're wonderful and all but you're forgetting one minor detail. *I'm* better than you!

KRITZ: Is that so?

MANDIKA: Yes. I'm a princess. When I die there'll be a period of national mourning. Thousands will pack the roadside to throw roses onto my hearse. Flags will fly at half mast and schools will be closed for the day. When *you* pop your clogs, probably from some poverty related disease, your body will just be lobbed in a ditch where bored children will poke at it with sticks. Sure, the two people who remember you might say you were reasonably nice to look at when you were young, but then you'll be forgotten for evermore. I, however, will be noted in history.

(She scoffed then looked away.)

MANDIKA: So go ahead, waft your massive tits in the public's faces and make a slut of yourself, I don't care. Whatever makes you happy in your pathetic peasant life. Personally, I don't have to make an exhibition of myself to feel important because, unlike you, you common lowlife nobody, I already am.

(As Flaxley prepared to restrain Kritz, fully expecting her to launch into Mandika with a full out violent assault, Bonson stepped back and bit his lip.)

BONSON: I think it's gonna take a while to calm her down this time, chaps.

(Also expecting Kritz to explode, Derek and Lefiat nodded in full agreement, when much to their astonishment, Kritz's bottom lip drooped and she burst into tears.)

KRITZ: That was *too* mean, Mandika!

(As Kritz stood there sobbing, Mandika looked to her and bit her lip uneasily.)

MANDIKA: Are you crying? You are, you're...

(Interrupting her, Kritz spoke up with tears streaming down her cheeks.)

KRITZ: Of course I am! All I wanted was a little respect... hell, I didn't even want that. I just wanted you to stop belittling me all time. Why do you always say such hurtful things?

(As Kritz sobbed harder and grabbed Flaxley's tunic, he quickly became emasculated and shook his fist angrily at Mandika.)

FLAXLEY: Punch her, Kritz. Punch her in the face.

(Mandika whimpered and leant away.)

KRITZ: I don't want to.

FLAXLEY: If *you* don't, I *will*!

MANDIKA: You wouldn't!!!

FLAXLEY: No, but Bonson should.

BONSON: Don't tempt me.

(With everyone around her quite visibly furious at her, Mandika pouted then looked to the floor sorrowfully. And then, she too burst into tears. With that, a conversation between herself and Kritz in horribly high-pitched, crying voices commenced.)

MANDIKA: I'm sorry, Kritz. I said too much.

KRITZ: Yes, you did.

MANDIKA: I didn't mean some of it.

KRITZ: You meant all of it!!!

MANDIKA: No. You do get remembered after you die. I saw a street called Kritzeveltia Avenue... and that monument is there still.

KRITZ: Even so, why would you be so mean?

MANDIKA: I don't know. I just got annoyed because you tried to make a point of being better looking than me.

KRITZ: No, I didn't! The point I made was that I'm not worthless.
(Mandika glared at the grinning Bonson for a moment then looked back at Kritz.)
MANDIKA: I'm sorry. I know you're not worthless.
KRITZ: No, you really believe I *am* worthless.
MANDIKA: I don't.
(She pouted.)
MANDIKA: You do my hair better than anyone I know.
(Kritz stopped wailing and looked to her through teary eyes.)
KRITZ: Do you mean that?
MANDIKA: I do. You're like... amazing with hair.
(A smile started to appear on Kritz's face.)
KRITZ: You don't know how much that means to me.
MANDIKA: Please don't stop doing my hair for me; I'll try to be nicer from now on.
(Letting go of her pain, Kritz stepped closer to Mandika and smiled.)
FLAXLEY: Go on, hit her.
KRITZ: No. Mandika, *you* do *my* hair really nicely too.
MANDIKA: I do?
KRITZ: You're great at it.
MANDIKA: That's so nice...
(She then started to cry harder.)
MANDIKA: You're so nice to me even after I was so mean.
(As the men in the party watched on in bewilderment, Mandika and Kritz then shared a warm hug and reaffirmed their alleged friendship.)
KRITZ: I forgive you. I think I might have overreacted again anyway. I've been doing that a lot.
MANDIKA: You didn't overreact, I was really, really mean.
KRITZ: It's okay.
MANDIKA: No it isn't. I shouldn't keep being mean to you; you're like my only female friend. No, you're more than that, you're like family.
KRITZ: I am?
MANDIKA: Yes. You're like the half sister I'll never accept.
KRITZ: Oh, that's so sweet. And you're like my husband's former charge whom I only tolerate for *his* sake.
MANDIKA: That's...
(She stepped back from the hug and raised a suspicious eyebrow.)
MANDIKA: That's exactly what I am.
KRITZ: See? I've learned to accept you for what you are. Now you need to accept *me* for what *I* am.
MANDIKA: An undressed, overly violent peasant?
KRITZ: No... well, yes... but... hey!
MANDIKA: What?
KRITZ: Stop seeing me as a peasant and see me as an ordinary person.
(Mandika looked uncertain.)
MANDIKA: Sure... okay... not sure what the difference is, but yeah.
KRITZ: Friends?
(Mandika beamed.)
MANDIKA: Yes. And this time we'll never fall out ever again!
(As all the men fell about laughing, Kritz and Mandika shared another warm hug.)
KRITZ: They're laughing at us.
MANDIKA: Well of course they are, I can't believe I said that. As soon as the mood takes

me I'm going to turn on you like a hungry, shipwrecked cannibal.

KRITZ: And I wouldn't expect anything less.

(Just then, a loud hooting noise rose up into the air, scattering all the birds from the nearby treetops. At once, Kritz and Mandika jumped out of their hug and Flaxley drew his sword.)

FLAXLEY: Damn cuddyfinkles get everywhere!

(With extreme urgency etched upon his brow, he looked around for the vile creature but all he saw was a bright yellow vehicle, heading towards them along the rail tracks. As he watched it with much suspicion, the hooting noise rose again, quite clearly coming from the vehicle.)

FLAXLEY: Oh, my mistake!

MANDIKA: Is that yellow thing a train?

BONSON: Well it's not a bloody cuddyfinkle. Honestly, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: Silence, Bonson. Concentrate. If that thing is a train, we need to figure out how to mount it.

BONSON: Fine.

(With that, silence descended and they all stood there apprehensively watching as the train slowly pulled up alongside the platform and stopped.)

DEREK: Well... now what?

(At that very moment, there was a hissing sound and a door opened before them.)

BONSON: Does that answer your question?

DEREK: Yes, quite comprehensively in fact!

FLAXLEY: Okay, let's get on!

(With that, they all cautiously stepped up into the train carriage, Mandika and Kritz nervously clinging to one another as they hopped over the gap. Once they were all safely on board, Flaxley led them to a row of seats and everyone except Bonson sat down. Standing beside them, he looked the metal carriage over with his eyes then exhaled with fascination.)

BONSON: What a feat of engineering... and I thought metal buckets were a breakthrough!

FLAXLEY: Did you?

BONSON: Yes, they're extremely handy, but this... this is technology at its best!

DEREK: You know, Bonson, for a man who's been in a spacecraft... twice, you're very easily pleased!

BONSON: No, you don't understand... man made this... this is what *we'll* learn to do as time goes by...

(He muttered to himself as he continued to glance around the carriage.)

BONSON: Fascinating!

(Just then, the doors hissed to a close and a deep male voice echoed through the carriage.

Flaxley immediately leapt to his feet and drew his sword once again.)

VOICE: The train now departing from platform 3 is the 3pm service from Trep Village to East Edea, calling at Azagotse...

(Snarling, Flaxley span around and clenched his free fist.)

FLAXLEY: Show yourself!!!

VOICE: Thank you!

(As the train slowly began to move, Flaxley realised his misjudgement and sheepishly sat down again.)

FLAXLEY: My mistake. It seems the train can talk.

BONSON: See? Fascinating place, the future.

LEFIAT: We should ask the train questions.

DEREK: You can't ask it questions, Lefiat. That was probably just the captain speaking through his communication system. All mass transit systems have them on Tryme 17.

BONSON: Yes, but we're not on Tryme 17.

DEREK: Look, trust me, okay. That's what it was.

(As the train jolted and sped up, Bonson realised that standing was a bad idea and threw himself down on a seat. He then joined the others in looking out of the window in awe at the modern city of Tifaeris rolling past the window.)

BONSON: Incredible.

MANDIKA: It's so big... and ugly.

BONSON: Just...

MANDIKA: Mention my butt and I'll kill you.

BONSON: Yeah, okay.

(As Bonson resumed looking from the window, Flaxley shook his head at him then looked to where Kritz was sitting cross-legged in awe of the scenery. At once, a troubled expression crossed his brow. He'd never seen her cry before and he couldn't understand why she had. Normally, she'd simply have opted to throw her fists at Mandika and for her to act in such a way, just wasn't like her. Remembering how she'd overreacted to Bonson's japey earlier in the day, he then nodded to himself knowingly. More convinced than ever that her sexual frustration was beginning to get the better of her, he resolved himself to giving her a damn good seeing to that evening and putting her mind at rest. Having pondered her strange behaviour and found the solution for it, he then looked to Bonson and groaned inwardly. He was another example of someone acting strangely only this time he had no idea how to fix it. Bonson had always been quick to make jokes and lob cutting insults around but since they'd set out on this mission he'd been remorseless and overly cruel even by his own poor standards. Wondering what could be causing Bonson to act so strangely, he then glanced out of the window and decided to concentrate on the problem he knew how to fix instead. With this in mind, he stole a stealthy glance at Kritz's cleavage then sat back comfortably in his seat to relax for the rest of the journey.)

(The train journey was, to say the least, a fascinating one. For its entire five hour duration, the six allies barely spoke a word to one another as they stared out of the windows in astonishment. It all seemed incredibly surreal. Towns and cities passed by their window at considerable speed, and none of them had any control over the situation. To be zooming across the land with no idea who was at the helm, simply wasn't something they'd ever imagined possible.

In such an unfamiliar situation, everyone was understandably tense for the first hour or so, and the last thing they'd needed was for a man calling himself 'the conductor' to come up to them and demand obscene amounts of lig to pay for their trip. Thankfully, however, a scene was avoided when Derek used his sleep magic on him. Having stashed him on some seats at the other end of the carriage, they were then free to continue the rest of their journey in peace. Relaxing, however, remained difficult. Watching what used to be meadows, built up into ugly concrete jungles was stupefying. As was trying to fathom how daytime darkness had led them across the sea, the concept of tunnels being completely beyond their medieval comprehension. As the journey neared its end, however, they all settled down and managed to relax a bit. Then, at 10pm, a full hour after darkness had descended; the train arrived at its destination.

A minute or so later, having alighted the train then made their way through the station foyer, the six travellers emerged from East Edea station and stepped out beneath the orange lights of the sleepless city. Finding the concept of street lighting somewhat bewildering, they all glanced around at the illuminated buildings then looked to one another in dismay.

Everything in the future was different and Bonson aside, they all found it somewhat discomfoting.)

BONSON: Well, this is... superb. And that train journey was just incredible!

LEFIAT: Not really. It got boring after a while!

BONSON: Yes, that's what I'd expect someone of your diminished capacity to say! You had no appreciation of the incredible things you were seeing whatsoever, did you?

LEFIAT: Nope!

BONSON: Bloody philistine.

LEFIAT: I'm not a philistine! I'm from Guevina and I'm proud of it!

BONSON: Right... good for you. Halfwit.

DEREK: Look, never mind arguing. Let's get on and find that portal!

MANDIKA: What? Now? It's night time!

DEREK: And?

FLAXLEY: She's right, Derek! If we found the portal and went to south Skiro now, we'd have to sleep on the glacier. I say we find a place to rest and look for it in the morning.

BONSON: Quite, well said, Flaxley!

DEREK: Yes, okay, you're right!

(He sighed.)

DEREK: As much as I hate these delays, you're absolutely right!

FLAXLEY: Hmm, trouble is, it probably won't be easy to get a hotel room at this late hour.

KRITZ: I wouldn't bet our house on us getting one at all, to be honest!

BONSON: It doesn't help that we've got no money either.

LEFIAT: I've got 52 lig actually.

BONSON: Yes well, I doubt very much your one thousand year old currency is still legal tender.

LEFIAT: It might be.

BONSON: It won't be. They changed the bloody coins twice in *my* lifetime already; imagine how times they'd have changed it *since* then.

FLAXLEY: And even if it was legal tender, that conductor tried to charge us five thousand lig each for that train trip. Makes me think, fifty two lig doesn't go very far these days.

(He then nodded sternly.)

FLAXLEY: Well, seeing as it's late and we have no money, we're going to have to use cunning. We're going to need a clever ruse to get sympathy from a hotelier!

(He allowed himself a wry smile then looked to Mandika.)

FLAXLEY: A good sob story ought to do it. Something to make a hotelier generously find a room for us *despite* the late hour.

(He then grimaced uneasily.)

FLAXLEY: Then we can reward his generosity in the morning by sneaking out without paying.

(He shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: Still, it has to be done, I suppose.

MANDIKA: Okay, but... why are you looking at *me*?

(Flaxley widened his wry smile then looked her up and down.)

FLAXLEY: Well... I've had an idea...

MANDIKA: No! Don't even think about using me in one of your silly plans!!!

FLAXLEY: It's not silly, Mandika... or shall we call you 'the bride'?

MANDIKA: You can call me 'ma'am' and like it.

FLAXLEY: Well fine, have it your way. With this plan we might even be able to get a nice *big* hotel suite, but if you'd rather sleep out here on the street...

MANDIKA: I'll do it!!!

FLAXLEY: Good girl. Okay, listen up...

(Much to everyone's delight, Flaxley's plan worked like a charm. Having made Lefiat and Mandika pretend they were newlyweds, stranded in the city after the wheel fell off their carriage, they managed to acquire the honeymoon suite of one of East Edea's better hotels. Buoyed by the thought of sleeping a comfortable bed, Mandika had put in the best acting performance of her life and had even been gifted a complimentary bottle of champagne. Lefiat, to his credit, had failed to give the game away, and just stood there silently as Mandika told the hotel manager about how everything had gone wrong for her and her mute husband. As a result, the manager was only too happy to offer her the shiny key to the excelsior honeymoon suite on the promise that she'd pay him in the morning after she'd been to the cashpoint. Having no idea what a cashpoint was, she simply agreed and the deal was complete.

Once inside their room, Mandika had had to recite her sorrowful tale for a second time, this time, to the female member of staff who'd shown them to the room. Having been expecting a tip, she'd stubbornly refused to leave until Mandika once again explained how her and her mute husband would be broke until the following day. It really was the performance of a lifetime.

Once the member of staff left, Mandika opened the window and signalled to Flaxley and Kritz. Having collected Derek and Bonson who were waiting at the back of the hotel for a signal, the four of them then had to sneak their way into the hotel and find the room. It hadn't been easy, but the plan was ultimately a complete success.

Looking forward to putting his feet up, despite the fact he'd just spent five hours sitting on a train, Bonson availed himself of a comfortable chair as soon as he entered the room. Also feeling the effects of what had been a long, bewildering day, Flaxley, Derek and Kritz, glanced around the large, finely decorated suite with approval then also nestled themselves into a seat. Having taken up a comfy armchair already, Mandika also looked somewhat tired. Lefiat, on the other hand, stood by a table at the side of the room looking oddly excitable.)

LEFIAT: This is great. I love this room.

(Mandika beamed.)

MANDIKA: I know. Some of my best work, even if I do say so myself.

(She then smirked at Kritz arrogantly.)

MANDIKA: You just expect great things from *me*, though. And unlike someone round here, I don't have to *point out* my good work to people in the desperate hope they'll appreciate my efforts.

(Kritz looked at her blankly.)

KRITZ: Isn't that exactly what you're doing right now though?

(Mandika looked to her emptily for a moment then bit her lip.)

MANDIKA: Damn it!

KRITZ: You did a great job though, Mandika.

(Mandika sighed then offered Kritz a grateful smile.)

MANDIKA: Thanks.

FLAXLEY: Indeed, you did us proud here, Mandika. This room is superb.

BONSON: It is rather pleasant, yes.

LEFIAT: It's amazing. Check out the carpet, it's all like furry and that!

(Ignoring Lefiat's excitement, Derek sighed heavily. All he could think about was his

beloved Zanne's suffering.)

DEREK: I can't believe this has happened. My poor Zanne! I bet *she* won't be sleeping in luxury tonight. While we're here, she's...

FLAXLEY: Derek, my friend. I know it's hard for you when we have to sleep, but...

DEREK: No, no, you don't have to justify this stopover to me, Flaxley. I know you're all tired. And none of you *had* to come and help me save her so I can hardly complain. Believe me, I am grateful to all of you! I'm just anxious, that's all.

(Lefiat gave him a sympathetic smile which then broke into an excited grin.)

LEFIAT: Cheer up, mate! Let me make you a coffee!

DEREK: Um, no thanks. With respect, Lefiat, I've had your coffee before!

LEFIAT: No, you don't understand, the woman who showed us up to this room, showed us this coffee-making contraption!

(He lifted an odd looking white container from the nearby table and beamed.)

LEFIAT: It's called a kettle!

DEREK: Is there coffee in it?

LEFIAT: No, but you fill it with water and it makes it boil!

BONSON: That's amazing!

LEFIAT: And there's coffee and milk in the cupboard here! Everything we need to make a cup of coffee.

BONSON: Including the cups, I take it?

LEFIAT: Yeah, them too.

KRITZ: Wow, that's awesome. Shall I make us all a cup then?

LEFIAT: No!!! I saw it first. And besides, you don't know about the plug yet, and how it the kettle uses electricity!

BONSON: Electricity? Like lightning?

LEFIAT: So she said!

BONSON: You must have misheard, such a thing could not be!

DEREK: Yes it can, we use electricity for everything on Tryme 17.

BONSON: Really?

DEREK: Really.

BONSON: Are you sure about that?

MANDIKA: That's what the woman told us, Bonson.

(She blushed.)

MANDIKA: I've got a feeling the harnessing of electricity is a common practice these days, to be honest!

BONSON: And what makes you think that?

MANDIKA: Well, judging by her sarcastic tone when she gave me a tutorial on how to use the kettle, she was patronising me like I'm an idiot!

BONSON: You...

MANDIKA: Shut up, Bonson!

LEFIAT: She wasn't patronising you, Mandika!

MANDIKA: Lefiat, she went on to tell me how to hold a cup!

LEFIAT: Well, maybe then. So, do you want some or don't you?

(There was an uneasy silence for a second.)

FLAXLEY: Oh go on then, let's trust him!

(Lefiat bounced with delight.)

LEFIAT: Great! Six coffees coming up!

(Several minutes later, having reluctantly stomached a barely drinkable beverage on Lefiat's behalf, not without protest in Bonson's case, everyone spread out around the room to make themselves as comfortable as they could. Bonson lay himself cross legged on the bed, Lefiat

and Mandika slouched themselves on a sofa and Kritz paced over to the window to stare at the world outside. Flaxley swiftly stepped up behind her and slipped his arms lovingly around her waist. Derek, however, remained slumped in his seat, anguishing sorrowfully about Zanne.)

DEREK: I can't let her die, she only came here for *me*, I feel so responsible!

FLAXLEY: Don't worry, Derek, we'll do everything in our power to save her, you mark my words!

(Derek looked up for a moment then straight back down and shook his head.)

DEREK: Now, I'm endangering your lives too!

FLAXLEY: Derek, I know exactly how you feel, my friend. Only twelve months ago, the boot was on the other foot, remember? You risked your life for me during *my* time of pain when I thought *I'd* lost the dearest thing in *my* life, Kritz here!

(Moved by his words, Kritz tipped her head right back against his chest and looked up at him with a yearning glint in her eyes.)

KRITZ: You're not going to be sorry you said that!

(With that, she about turned in his arms then stepped past him, grabbing his hand before leading him into the en suite bathroom and closing the door behind them.)

BONSON: Lucky bastard.

DEREK: Seriously chaps, we may have one hell of a battle on our hands; I can't thank you enough for coming to help me!

LEFIAT: That's okay! I'm a knight, it's my job!

(Bonson sighed.)

BONSON: I can't be bothered to insult you right now...

(He yawned.)

BONSON: Say that again when I'm not so sleepy!

(Bonson then closed his eyes to take a nap when the air was filled with the sound of Kritz's pleased groans.)

BONSON: What the?

(As Bonson lay there looking horrified, Lefiat turned bright red then looked to the floor, grinning like a naughty schoolboy. Mandika could only gape in abject abhorrence at what she was hearing and Derek could only stare at the wall wearing an uncomfortable grimace.)

BONSON: That's obscene! I don't want to hear other people doing it, even if one of them *is* Kritz!

LEFIAT: He-he.

MANDIKA: Have they no shame? We're sitting right here on the other side of the bloody door for heaven's sake. It's disgusting.

DEREK: Um... uncomfortable.

LEFIAT: He-he.

(Desperate to start a conversation and take her mind off of the noise, Mandika then said the first thing that came into her head.)

MANDIKA: Didn't see any dogs in Tifaeris, did you?

BONSON: What?

DEREK: Dogs?

MANDIKA: Yes... let's talk about something, anything!

(With Kritz's cries of approval from behind the door growing ever louder, Bonson and Derek looked to one another then nodded at Mandika frantically.)

BONSON: Right, conversation, yes... exceptional idea.

DEREK: Agreed.

BONSON: What was the question again?

MANDIKA: Dogs. Did you see any in Tifaeris?

BONSON: No, but then again, I didn't look.

DEREK: Hopefully there are none, bloody things! I hate dogs.

MANDIKA: You're crazy, Derek. Dogs are amazing creatures.

(Taking no part in the conversation, Lefiat swiftly descending into full on giggle mode.)

LEFIAT: They're doing it... in the bathroom!

(Ignoring him, Bonson immediately returned to the topic in hand and raised his voice in a desperate bid to drown out Kritz's ever loudening joyous exclamations.)

BONSON: Um... it is funny though, isn't it? The way they've all disappeared from Guevina, I mean.

DEREK: In what way?

BONSON: Until two years ago Guevina used to be full of dogs roaming at night, now there are none!

DEREK: Perhaps they... went to a warmer climate or something!

(Bonson frowned, dismayed by Derek's unintelligent suggestion.)

BONSON: Have you been drinking?

DEREK: You know for a fact that I haven't!

BONSON: Warmer climate indeed!

MANDIKA: They are awesome though, dogs. I used to have one when I was a kid. I really miss having that big black boxer in my bed every night.

LEFIAT: He-he.

BONSON: Grow up, Lefiat!

(He then proceeded to giggle like a schoolboy as well.)

BONSON: You're so immature.

(As the next twenty or so minutes wore on, Bonson, Mandika and Derek gave up trying to hold a conversation, and just sat there with their hands over their ears, looking highly embarrassed. Just when they were beginning to think Kritz's squeals of delight would never cease, however, she yelled out in a very loud, euphoric voice.)

KRITZ: Yes!!! Oh my god that was amazing!!!

(Suddenly, there was silence. Slowly, Bonson, Derek and Mandika all removed their hands from their ears then breathed a welcome sigh of relief.)

BONSON: Thank the stars, that's over!

MANDIKA: Yeah, peace at last!

(Just then, they heard Flaxley speak up arrogantly from behind the door.)

FLAXLEY: Well, that's the foreplay over, darling! Now time for the main event!

(At once, they all sighed in despair and their shoulders slumped.)

BONSON: Why can't he be more like me? I'd have finished a long time ago!

MANDIKA: Perhaps that's why you're single!

BONSON: Hey!

(One solid hour later when Flaxley and Kritz emerged from the bathroom cuddling and laughing, they were immediately greeted by three pairs of angry and disgusted eyes plus a grinning Lefiat. Stunned by the harsh reception, Kritz looked to them and bit her lip uneasily.)

KRITZ: What's wrong?

BONSON: You, you bloody banshee!

(At once her eyes bulged and she bit her nails nervously.)

KRITZ: You heard us?

MANDIKA: Heard you? It was almost like we were in there with you!!!

BONSON: Every two bloody seconds, "oh my god". Like you have some sort of personal

deity and were begging him to join in.

(Kritz could only whimper and hide her face.)

KRITZ: Oh my god!

BONSON: She's at it again. You just can't help yourself, can you?

KRITZ: I'm so embarrassed.

(Flaxley scoffed.)

FLAXLEY: I'm not. I don't care what you lot think! I just had sex with the best looking woman in the world, there's no way I'm apologising for *that*!

(With that, he sat himself on an armchair and pulled Kritz down onto his lap. Nestling comfortably into the seat, he then looked over to Bonson.)

FLAXLEY: So what have you chaps been up to?

(Bonson snarled angrily.)

BONSON: Well we certainly weren't making babies like someone round here!

FLAXLEY: I only asked!

(Mandika looked thoughtful and gave Bonson an enquiring glance.)

MANDIKA: How come *you* never had children, Bonson?

(Bonson gave her a disturbed glance.)

BONSON: Because I'm a man, you idiot! It's not physically possible.

(Mandika rolled her eyes.)

MANDIKA: You know what I mean. How come you never fathered any?

(Looking deeply saddened all of a sudden, Kritz climbed from Flaxley's lap and went and stood by the window again.)

BONSON: Are you okay, Kritz?

KRITZ: Yeah, I'm fine. Just give me a minute.

MANDIKA: Don't change the subject, Bonson. How come you never had kids?

(As Flaxley looked to Kritz and bit his lip uneasily, Bonson furrowed his brow at Mandika.)

BONSON: I hate children!

MANDIKA: But, you were married once! Didn't your wife want any?

BONSON: It's a long story!

MANDIKA: So? We're not going anywhere! Tell us.

(Seeing several pairs of eyes staring back at him expectantly, Bonson groaned to himself then looked to the ceiling.)

BONSON: Fine, I'll tell you. Not that it's any of your business, but...

(He then lowered his head and glanced at Mandika as he started to relate his sorry story.)

BONSON: We tried to have kids, the wife and I, it just didn't seem to happen. She never got pregnant. Well, in the end she got so depressed about it, she lost all hope and gave up. She said having sex just reminded her of her failure. So, we simply stopped trying!

LEFIAT: That's not a long story!

BONSON: I haven't finished yet!

LEFIAT: Oh!

DEREK: Why don't you make coffee or something, Lefiat?

LEFIAT: Great idea, who wants one?

DEREK: Just you, I'd imagine. Carry on, Bonson!

BONSON: Thank you. Anyway, naturally, I decided to get my sex elsewhere...

MANDIKA: What do you mean, "naturally"? You animal!

BONSON: I'm a man, Mandika, men have needs!

MANDIKA: You're a disgrace!

(Bonson was furious.)

BONSON: At least I don't go about shagging random guards when my significant other isn't around, like a certain someone in this room.

(At once Mandika's eyes bulged with horror and she looked at Lefiat to try and plead her innocence. Much to her relief, however, Lefiat was busy looking at Kritz and shaking his head, very much under the impression that Bonson had been referring to her. Seeing she was in the clear, she allowed herself a sigh of relief and decided to let him think what he liked.)

MANDIKA: Carry on, Lefiat.

LEFIAT: Eh?

MANDIKA: Nothing.

BONSON: Now, as I was saying, the woman I was seeing, she *did* get pregnant!

Unfortunately, she was married too.

MANDIKA: Whore!

BONSON: Fuck you!!!

MANDIKA: Her, not you! Although...

BONSON: Stop right there, you! And anyway, she wasn't a whore and if you say that again, I'll punch you right on the noggin.

MANDIKA: Alright, calm down.

(Bonson rolled his eyes then sighed inwardly.)

BONSON: Anyway, to cut a long story short, the woman I was seeing... well, her husband thought *he* was the child's father and I was frozen out. It was downhill from there really. I became estranged from my only child and my love life took an almighty nosedive. I lost the woman I was seeing, my marriage went arse upwards and I've barely even sniffed a beaver since.

MANDIKA: Bonson!!! Good god, man!

BONSON: Too frank, ma'am? I'd apologise only I couldn't care less what you think. With the exception of that Trepe woman last year, I've barely had any sex in the last two hundred years so I'm allowed to be bitter.

(As they all shook their heads at him, Bonson sighed.)

BONSON: It's a miracle I manage to stay so incredibly jolly all the time really.

(As everyone concealed their amused grins, Mandika mused outwardly with an alarmed expression on her face.)

MANDIKA: So somewhere out there you have a grown up child? And they've got no idea who their real father is?

(Bonson shrugged.)

BONSON: Somewhere, yes.

MANDIKA: Wow, and it could be anyone. It could even be you, Lefiat!

(Lefiat stared at Bonson in horror.)

LEFIAT: No, not you!!! You can't be my real dad surely!!!

(Bonson was enraged by the mere thought.)

BONSON: What??? No!!!

MANDIKA: How can you be so sure?

BONSON: Well for one, the child was a girl! Not just built like one.

LEFIAT: Thank the gods for that.

(He then furrowed his brow.)

LEFIAT: And hey, I'm not built like a girl!

BONSON: True, you're built like a twig!

LEFIAT: Hey!

(Lefiat rolled his neck nonchalantly.)

LEFIAT: I've always dreamt that my stupid dad wasn't my real father, now at least I know it could be worse. Imagine having you as a father?

(Mandika shuddered.)

MANDIKA: What a ghastly thought. Bonson for a father...

(She then allowed herself a hearty chuckle.)

MANDIKA: I bet it was one ugly baby.

(Bonson raised an embittered eyebrow and glared at her.)

BONSON: How do you know she wasn't pretty like her mother?

MANDIKA: Because if her mother was pretty she wouldn't have slept with you!

(Alarmed by the swiftness of her retort, Bonson's nostrils flared.)

BONSON: Hey! I'll have you know, I was quite the presentable chap back in the day...

(He shook his head and folded his arms indignantly.)

BONSON: Besides, when you bare Lefiat's children, *then* we can discuss ugly babies, okay?

(Mandika glared at him coldly for a moment then sat back and replied calmly.)

MANDIKA: We already discussed that actually, Bonson.

(She smiled.)

MANDIKA: *If* I do end up marrying Lefiat it might be kinder to society if we don't have any children. You know, just in case. I can always adopt an heir to the throne.

(As Bonson burst out laughing, Lefiat nodded in full agreement.)

LEFIAT: Yeah! I remember that conversation.

(He forced a weak smile.)

LEFIAT: Mandika?

MANDIKA: Yes, darling?

LEFIAT: Are you trying to crush my soul?

MANDIKA: Not at all. I just think it makes sense to do whatever it takes to bring through a suitable heir. My oldest child will go on to become king or queen and if they were take after you in the brain department...

LEFIAT: Let's not have this conversation right now, Mandika. In fact let's never have this conversation ever again.

(As Lefiat seethed, Mandika smiled warmly then leant to the highly amused Bonson and spoke quietly in his ear.)

MANDIKA: We don't quite see eye to eye on the subject yet.

BONSON: Evidently.

(Astonished by the conversation he'd just witnessed, Flaxley shook his head in bewilderment then looked to Kritz as she stood by the window silently. Despite having her back to him he could tell she was greatly hurting inside. Well aware of the source of her pain, he bit his lip then rose quickly to his feet and stepped up behind her. He'd already respected her request to be given a minute and now he was determined to do whatever he could to lift her spirits.)

FLAXLEY: Darling?

(Upon hearing his voice just behind her head, she quickly turned around and buried her head in his chest. Holding her tight, Flaxley lowered his head and spoke softly in her ear.)

FLAXLEY: We will have a child, my love, don't you worry about that!

(Lifted by his presence, she looked up at him and tried to smile.)

KRITZ: I know... it's just that... baby talk brings it all back to me!

FLAXLEY: I know, darling. It's hard, but we have to accept it. We lost a son through no fault of our own. Life goes on though, my love, it has too. We'll go mad otherwise. And someday, some beautiful day, we will have a child together!

KRITZ: I know. But... I'll never stop missing him, we may have never seen him, but to me, he was real!

FLAXLEY: I know, my love, I know, but we can't let what Jazzu did defeat us. She paid with her life and now we have to get on with ours.

KRITZ: Yes, we do.

(With that, she led Flaxley to the sofa then gestured for him to sit. Nodding warmly, Flaxley obliged her request then she sat down across his lap again. As she casually laid her head

upon Flaxley's chest, Derek looked to her and smiled.)

DEREK: Everything okay, Kritz?

KRITZ: I'm fine! Thanks, Derek.

(Finally managing to stop chuckling to himself, Bonson looked to her and scoffed.)

BONSON: Fine? You're more than fine, Kritz. You're perfection from your tits to your toes, you are.

(As Kritz started to chuckle, Flaxley glared at Bonson angrily.)

FLAXLEY: Bonson!

BONSON: What? It was a compliment! I was trying to be nice, for pity's sake.

(Looking fed up to the back teeth, he folded his arms indignantly then glanced away.)

BONSON: I don't know why I even bother sometimes.

MANDIKA: Nor do I. With crude compliments like that, it's no *wonder* you can't get a woman, Bonson.

(Looking utterly livid, Bonson threw his head in her direction and snarled.)

BONSON: That's enough of your lip, girly. I've had enough of you. You know, when we find that bloody portal tomorrow, I'm half tempted to sneak everyone else onto it and leave you here.

(He then glared at Lefiat.)

BONSON: You an' all.

LEFIAT: Eh? What did I do this time?

MANDIKA: Like you could sneak everyone away without me noticing. And as if anyone would let you.

BONSON: Even so, given half a chance...

(Desperate to stop them arguing before they could really get going, Flaxley sat forward slightly and raised his voice.)

FLAXLEY: Bonson, you actually raised a very good point there.

(An absolute sucker for a compliment, Bonson relented his anger and looked to Flaxley enquiringly.)

BONSON: I did? That is... of course I did.

(He then tapped his fingers innocently on his knee and smiled.)

BONSON: So, um... which of my many excellent points do you mean?

FLAXLEY: That portal.

BONSON: I see. You want to leave Mandika and Lefiat here too, eh?

MANDIKA: Hey!

FLAXLEY: Of course not, Bonson.

(He rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: The point is, Daman gave us no hints as to how to find the other portal. We can have no idea where it is! My worry is we'll be searching all over East Edea tomorrow and find nothing.

DEREK: Don't start me worrying, Flaxley!

BONSON: It's a valid concern though, it could be anywhere!

(Feeling extremely ill at ease, Mandika looked to Flaxley with fear in her eyes.)

MANDIKA: To be honest with you, that the least of *my* worries. I'm more worried about Kajice, when we get there! The queen of all witches! The gods can only guess what kind of power she's got.

FLAXLEY: Kajice, eh?

(He nodded positively then offered her a smile.)

FLAXLEY: We'll wipe the floor with her, you'll see. I, for one, don't intend to cross a glacier, struggle through an unfamiliar time then cross another glacier just to lose to some witch! Do you?

DEREK: That's what I like to hear, Flaxley! Positivity!

FLAXLEY: Besides, if you ask me... the fact she's made such an effort to stop people reaching this Desha village pretty much proves she isn't all that strong!

BONSON: Isn't all that strong? She's the *queen* of all witches, Flaxley? Not the laughing stock of all witches, the *queen*. And you saw what she was capable of with your own eyes back at the East Grange Mountains.

FLAXLEY: I know, but I just get the feeling that if she was *that* tough, she wouldn't go to such lengths to restrict entry to south Skiro! You'd certainly never stumble upon it accidentally! I mean, she's basically hiding and only wimps need to hide.

LEFIAT: What happened to never underestimating anyone, Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: I wasn't.

(He rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: I'm just trying to make you lot feel more confident! You see, the bottom line is, it *will* be a hard battle, yes, but then we've had hard battles before!

(As everyone pondered his optimistic words, Kritz looked across at them and shrugged.)

KRITZ: I think we should forget about Kajice until we get there, to be honest. Let's just concentrate on finding the other portal in the morning!

BONSON: I agree!

DEREK: Me too. Let's concentrate on the job in hand... and once again, I thank you all for this!

KRITZ: No need, Derek. You'd do the same for us, you already have in fact!

FLAXLEY: Quite, it's no big deal; this is just what friends do, Derek.

(Lefiat nodded.)

LEFIAT: Yeah, friends help each other out. And, despite the fact you're all bloody horrible to me all the time, I consider you lot *great* friends!

(Mandika looked impressed by his words and beamed joyfully)

MANDIKA: He's right, you guys are amazing. Sure, we disagree, fight and argue but you're the best friends I've got. You guys are the *only* people that spend time with me who I can say for certain aren't after anything in return!

BONSON: You've nothing to give us, have you?

MANDIKA: What I mean is...

(She sighed then looked to Bonson sorrowfully.)

MANDIKA: You were pretty much right when you were insulting me earlier, Bonson. As a princess, most of my so-called friends in Guevina only spend time with me because they're paid to!

(Bonson returned her sorrowful pout with a sympathetic smile.)

BONSON: Well, there's no *other* reason anyone would want to spent time with you. Just be grateful they have that one.

MANDIKA: Hey!!! That's plain nasty!

LEFIAT: Yeah! You're always being mean, Bonson!

FLAXLEY: And just when everyone was finally getting along!

(Feeling the weight of several icy stares coming his way, Bonson waved his hands before himself dismissively.)

BONSON: Oh come off it, you lot. Let's not bang on about who was mean to who... in fact, let's change the subject entirely.

(He beamed.)

BONSON: I mean, isn't the future great?

(Letting the mean old man off the hook, Flaxley raised a curious eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: In what way?

BONSON: Well... the technology, for one.

MANDIKA: Boring!

BONSON: Excuse me?

MANDIKA: Look... seeing as we're all stuck in here for the night, let's do something fun for a change.

BONSON: Discussing technology *is* fun.

MANDIKA: No it isn't.

(Bonson looked thoughtful for a moment then conceded to her point.)

BONSON: True, actually. Discussing it with five simple-minded buffoons such as yourselves would be infuriating. I'll save it for intelligent company.

(As everyone glared at him, Bonson glanced away then spoke up in a small voice.)

BONSON: So... did you have anything in mind, Mandika?

(Mandika shook her head at him then shrugged.)

MANDIKA: We could always play a game.

BONSON: A game? Are you twelve? Count me out!

FLAXLEY: Me too, I have a book to read!

KRITZ: Actually, Mandika, I just happen to have some playing cards in my bag!

BONSON: You have? Why?

KRITZ: No special reason, Bonson. I take them everywhere with me! So who fancies a game?

LEFIAT: Not with you, Flaxley says you cheat badly!

(Kritz was most offended and glared at Flaxley furiously.)

KRITZ: I cheat brilliantly!

(Flaxley grinned at her innocently then looked away.)

FLAXLEY: Indeed you do, dear.

MANDIKA: Either way, *I* aint playing with you either!

DEREK: I will, I can read her mind!

KRITZ: Then you'll know what cards I've got!

DEREK: Yes, and how they differ from the ones you were dealt!

KRITZ: Fine, be boring then! Come on Flaxley, let's have sex again!

(Before the grinning Flaxley could even begin to reply, Bonson, Derek and Mandika all sat up swiftly and remonstrated with her desperately.)

MANDIKA: Fine, we'll play!

BONSON: Anything but that!

LEFIAT: Tee he.

DEREK: Deal me in!

KRITZ: Not you!

(As everyone converged on the table to play cards, Flaxley gaped in bewilderment.)

FLAXLEY: But...

(He then furrowed his brow furiously.)

FLAXLEY: That offer of sex wasn't even *remotely* genuine, was it?

KRITZ: Nope.

(Flaxley shook his head at her coldly as she pulled her cards from her bag, then looked away and mumbled under his breath deviously.)

FLAXLEY: Fine, I'll just do you while you're sleeping then.

(With that, he reached for his bag and pulled out the book he'd stolen from the library in Tifaeris. Watching as Kritz dealt her cards onto the table, watched over by her three unenthusiastic opponents; he grinned to himself then settled into his seat to begin reading it.

As the next hour passed, everyone tried their hardest to relax and take their minds off of the mission that lay ahead. At first, Derek found relaxing harder than most having been banned

from joining in the card game. All he could do was watch and marvel at the way Kritz's devious mind worked. It turned out to be hugely entertaining, however, and he eventually managed to settle a little. Not once did she think about the odds, all she thought about was how to manipulate the deck in her favour. Being naturally suspicious, Mandika watched her like a hawk trying to second guess what she was up to, never even coming close to figuring her out. Bonson, on the other hand, knew she was a cheat and didn't even bother trying. The most amusing part, however, was Kritz's bewilderment at how Lefiat kept beating her. Having no idea what he was doing, he wasn't thinking like a card player and was making moves that an intelligent person would never even dream of doing. As a result, she had no idea how to counter him and was starting to get niggled. Derek's biggest laugh of the night coming when Kritz started to suspect that Lefiat might actually be a card playing genius. As they made their way through the hotel's coffee supply, however, his luck eventually ran out and just like Mandika and Bonson had, he ended up losing so many games he gave up trying.

With the card game over, they all then decided to relax and silence reigned supreme as Flaxley sat in the corner reading. As he perused the pages, however, he started to get angrier and angrier until he couldn't keep his rage to himself. Growling, he dropped the open book on his lap and yelled at it.)

FLAXLEY: That's not what happened; *he* lost the key of peace!!!

(At once, everyone looked over to him from where they were slouching at the table.)

KRITZ: What's up, my love?

(Flaxley raised his eyes bitterly and sneered.)

FLAXLEY: Nothing!

LEFIAT: I couldn't help losing the key of peace!

DEREK: Yes, Lefiat, you tell us that at least once a day!

(Looking lost in his thoughts, Bonson exhaled in awe.)

BONSON: That key of peace was really something!

MANDIKA: It taught Dim Lee a lesson, that's for certain.

BONSON: Indeed it did.

(He then bit his lip ponderously.)

BONSON: I wonder what the other two keys do?

KRITZ: What other two?

BONSON: There were three, remember? The key of peace, the key of liberty, and the key of...

(As he wracked his brains, Lefiat looked to him and shrugged.)

LEFIAT: Love?

BONSON: No, nothing sissy like that!

DEREK: Justice!

BONSON: That's the chap! Daman reckons that *all* the keys are active, but the other two are lost and don't work for some unknown reason! Shame that!

DEREK: Yes, Zanne could do with liberty and justice right now!

FLAXLEY: Fear not, Derek, we'll save her! Trust me.

(Derek smiled.)

DEREK: Thanks, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: Now, back to this excuse of a book!

(As Flaxley returned to reading, Derek sighed to himself and hung his head.)

DEREK: Poor, poor Zanne.

(Keen to do her bit in cheering up the little green misery before her, Mandika offered him a kind smile.)

MANDIKA: Cheer up, Derek. It's not the end of the world.

DEREK: What?

(Taken aback by her insensitive comment, Derek glared at her.)

DEREK: How could you say that?

BONSON: She was trying to be nice, Derek!

(Feeling quite sheepish, Mandika nodded and pointed to Bonson.)

MANDIKA: See!

BONSON: Out of character I know, but she meant well!

MANDIKA: Hey!

(Derek rolled his eyes and looked to the floor.)

DEREK: Losing Zanne *is* the end of the world for me!

BONSON: Yes, I suppose it is!

LEFIAT: I know how you feel, Derek. Losing Mandika would be the end of *my* world too!

(Bonson gave him a dismissive glance.)

BONSON: Losing Mandika sooner or later is inevitable with *you* as her knight!

MANDIKA: What?

LEFIAT: Hey!

BONSON: And yes, the king would see to it that it really *is* the end of your world!

KRITZ: Come on, guys. Enough about the end of the world, Zanne will be fine...

(She smiled to Derek.)

KRITZ: You know we'll do our best, Derek!

(Derek nodded and offered a smile.)

DEREK: Yeah... I do. Thanks, Kritz!

(Bonson mused, stroked his chin and looked to the ceiling.)

BONSON: Hmm... you know, apparently the world nearly *did* end once!

(Flaxley glanced over his book at him and raised a curious eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: Really? Does it say so on the ceiling?

BONSON: No, but if I raise my head and hold my chin, I look intelligent and people listen!

FLAXLEY: I see!

DEREK: Wait, what do you mean it nearly ended?

(Bonson beamed, delighted that his knowledge was being called upon.)

BONSON: Well, Derek, according to Daman Siria, many centuries ago the creators themselves had to use all their powers to entrap some untold evil before it could take over the world!

DEREK: Really?

BONSON: Indeed!

DEREK: So the world wasn't going to end, it was just going to change!

BONSON: True, but my exaggeration got your attention, so who cares about the details?

(Everyone rolled their eyes as Bonson went on to elaborate liberally.)

BONSON: This evil, 'Everkei' they called him, was a master necromancer. He also had a vast army. I suppose with the necromancy, that army never got any smaller either. Basically they were a phenomenal force and not one for good either.

LEFIAT: So what happened?

BONSON: The details are quite sketchy but apparently the creators had to combine *all* their powers to stop it. I don't know how exactly. I'll learn more once I become a fully fledged wise man!

FLAXLEY: Is that why some people in Guevina refer to the devil as Everkei?

(Bonson shrugged.)

BONSON: I would assume so. Like I said, there's more to it which I'll learn once I ascend to my neo-godly state. Of course I won't be able to share the knowledge with you. Only the wisest of wise folk are privileged to that information, you see!

(He sat back and rested his hands behind his head.)

BONSON: I'd love to tell you more but alas I won't be permitted to say too much to you humble mortals!

(He gave a conceited grin.)

BONSON: Now if you've finished grilling me for my wealth of knowledge, I'm going to get some kip! We've a busy day ahead.

FLAXLEY: Good idea, Bonson. We should call it a night.

LEFIAT: Cool. Thanks to Bonson's story, I'm sleepy now.

BONSON: Why, you cheeky little...

FLAXLEY: Never mind arguing, let's just settle down for the night. It's getting late!

MANDIKA: You mean "later"!

FLAXLEY: Yes, thank the stars you're here, Mandika!

MANDIKA: You're welcome!

FLAXLEY: Like Bonson said, we've got a lot of work ahead of us tomorrow, so we're gonna need all the rest we can get.

BONSON: That's not what I said; my economy of phrasing was far more efficient.

FLAXLEY: Bonson...

BONSON: Now, let's get some sleep before Flaxley hits me.

MANDIKA: Sleeping certainly wouldn't be a problem *after* he hits you.

BONSON: Quite, but internal bleeding might be. Night all!

(With that, Bonson headed for the massive bed. Beaten to it by Mandika and Kritz, however, he turned the air blue then headed for the sofa and rolled Lefiat off of it. As Bonson settled down, chuckling to himself, Lefiat called him a few choice names then lay himself down on the sofa opposite. Flaxley, for his part, availed himself of a chaise lounge and Derek nestled into an armchair. After such a long and gruelling day, they were all extremely tired and within ten minutes, everyone except Derek had dozed off. Rather than facing another long lonely night, Derek watched them for a moment then cast sleep magic on himself and joined them in their well deserved slumber.)

(As the morning sun appeared in the sky and the pulsating noise of East Edea's nightclubs faded, all were sleeping soundly. Snoring filled the room and nothing stirred until the sixth hour when Flaxley opened his eyes to find Kritz using his considerable frame as a mattress. Baffled as to quite how she got there without waking him, he raised his head and got a mouth full of her auburn hair, making him choke and awaken everyone with a start.)

KRITZ: Hey, not in my ear!

(In that moment, Bonson sat bolt upright in horrified disgust.)

BONSON: Flaxley, that's disgusting!

FLAXLEY: I was choking on her hair, Bonson!

BONSON: Like I want to hear about you kinky sex games!

KRITZ: Shut your face, Bonson!

BONSON: Yes, and you shut your legs!

(Stepping to the centre of the room, desperate to get going as soon as possible, Derek spoke up determinedly.)

DEREK: Morning all! Let's eat some food then get going! There's a big bowl of fruit on the side and that white cupboard beneath it is full of oddly packaged snack foods. I woke up in the night and tried some... they're really nice actually...

(He shook his head then refocused on his point.)

DEREK: Let's have our fill then sneak out of here without paying and find that portal!

(Mandika gave a crestfallen sigh.)

MANDIKA: I've become a common criminal!

(She then paused to scoff at her own comment.)

MANDIKA: What am I saying? I'll never be common!

(Having discovered and mastered the use of the taps, they all washed up then sampled the delights of chocolate bars and chilled puddings from the minibar. Suddenly the future didn't seem so bad. Kritz and Mandika were especially enamoured with the chocolate. The morning had been quite a revelation. Having been able to wash herself in a closed bathroom with hot running water then stuff her face with chocolate, Mandika was in a good mood. Rivalled only by Bonson for being a world class grouch in the morning, this was hitherto unheard of. Once all the chocolate was gone, however, and she remembered the mission that lay ahead, she swiftly reverted to form.)

Future East Edea, 7am...

(As the seventh hour came, everyone gathered at the hotel room door, packed and ready to leave. The plan now was to sneak out of the hotel unnoticed then begin their search for the portal. Very much concentrating solely on getting everyone out of the building before even beginning to think about how they'd find the portal, however, Flaxley focussed his mind on the task in hand, then opened the hotel room door and peaked outside into the corridor.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, the coast is clear, let's go!

(In perfect silence, they then proceeded to head out of the room slowly and cautiously, in single file. Taking extreme care not be noticed, they crept to the end of the corridor, then sneaked down the stairs, emerging in the quiet reception. With only the reception desk to pass, Flaxley mused to himself for a moment then looked to Lefiat.)

FLAXLEY: Okay Lefiat, you go first!

BONSON: Are you sure that's wise?

FLAXLEY: Bonson, it's common sense...

LEFIAT: Yeah, Bonson, leave me alone. This is child's play for a knight like me.

(With that, he paced forth towards the reception desk being watched carefully by his allies.)

BONSON: You know, he's bound to do something wrong!

(Sure enough, they could only watch in despair as Lefiat fell to the floor and attempted to crawl past the reception desk.)

FLAXLEY: What's he doing?

DEREK: He's sneaking out.

FLAXLEY: But... *he's* allowed to come and go until checking out time! He's a resident!

MANDIKA: I knew I should have gone.

BONSON: And *I* knew *he* shouldn't have.

FLAXLEY: All he had to do was keep them distracted while *we* sneaked out.

KRITZ: Maybe you should have told *him* that.

MANDIKA: You should have told *me*, at least. Then I could have told you that the people on reception think Lefiat's a mute. How was *he* going to distract them?

(Flaxley stared dead ahead and gulped.)

FLAXLEY: I did wonder how you managed to pull it off without him saying something dumb to mess it up.

(He looked enlightened then stood tall.)

FLAXLEY: Well, don't worry. Go *now*, Mandika. Pick him up and dust him down or something. If they ask, pretend he's mute *and* retarded.

BONSON: Not much pretence required *there*.

MANDIKA: Bonson!

(She rolled her eyes then looked towards reception.)

MANDIKA: Leave it to me.

(She went to step towards Lefiat then froze to the spot and gasped. Lefiat had just crawled head first, straight into the owner of the hotel as he swept the floor.)

HOTELIER: Are you okay? Why are you crawling across the floor?

(Looking thoroughly rattled, Lefiat stood up and grimaced at him uneasily.)

FLAXLEY: Go now, Mandika. Quick.

(Unfortunately, for Mandika, before she could even take two steps, Lefiat spoke up in a panicked bellow and gave the game away.)

LEFIAT: I wasn't sneaking out without paying!!!

HOTELIER: Hey... you can talk!

(Unsurprisingly, he looked a tad suspicious.)

HOTELIER: Wait... sneaking out without paying? I never suggested you were!

(He looked horrified and stepped back.)

HOTELIER: What the hell??? You and that woman of yours are planning to pull a fast one, aren't you???

(Staring at him as if he'd been caught with his hand in the hotelier's wallet, Lefiat mumbled incoherently for a moment as he tried to conjure an excuse.)

LEFIAT: Well, see... leave me alone!!!

(With that, he panicked and sprinted for the door.)

LEFIAT: He's onto us, guys. Leg it!!!

(Not even remotely surprised by what he was seeing, Bonson hung his head.)

BONSON: I knew it!

(Wondering quite who Lefiat meant when he said "guys", the landlord swiftly glanced around and spotted Mandika with her four illegitimate room guests. In no doubt whatsoever that *all six* of them had stayed the night with no intention of paying their bill, he raced to the reception desk and yelled over it at the receptionist.)

HOTELIER: Call security!!!

(Stung into action, Flaxley looked to his allies and furrowed his brow menacingly.)

FLAXLEY: Run!

(With that, they all raced for the exit, Flaxley making sure to intimidate the hotelier with his bulk so he wouldn't try to stop the others. Once outside, they raced to where a terrified Lefiat bounced on the balls of his feet in wait for them then shot off down the road.)

BONSON: You cock, Lefiat!

LEFIAT: It wasn't my fault!

BONSON: Whose was it then? Dim Lee's?

FLAXLEY: Never mind arguing, run for it!!!

BONSON: What do you *think* we're doing???

(As they charged off down the street, four security men raced from the hotel and started to hurry after them.)

BONSON: Once again, Lefiat, top job!

LEFIAT: Leave me alone!

(As his little green legs sprinted forth like the clappers, Derek looked back and spotted the four security men being joined by two passing police officers and gulped.)

DEREK: There's six of them, right on our arses!

(As he continued to look back, he then focussed his energy on reading their minds. At once, his eyes bulged and he rapidly picked up speed.)

DEREK: Shit!!!

MANDIKA: Language, Derek!

DEREK: Fuck my language, they *all* have projectile weapons!!!

FLAXLEY: What???

DEREK: And what's more, they've spotted yours and Lefiat's swords! They consider us armed and dangerous!!!

KRITZ: Meaning?

DEREK: I can't say for sure but on *my* planet that means shoot to kill!!!

(With that, they all seemed to run three times as fast.)

BONSON: I'm going to drown you in the sea when we get back, Lefiat!!!

LEFIAT: We're not *getting* back!!! We're all gonna die!!!

(Mandika cried as she raced forth.)

MANDIKA: I'm too young, pretty and magnificent to die!!!

DEREK: Mandika, try not panic!!! Hopefully we can outrun them!

KRITZ: Yeah, right! Unless we can outrun their projectile weapons, I say panic it is!!!

FLAXLEY: No! Panicking isn't going to help!

BONSON: Like it makes a difference if we panic or not!!! If they shoot us, we're done for!

FLAXLEY: Then we'll just have to see to it that that doesn't happen!!!

(He mused to himself then spoke through gritted teeth.)

FLAXLEY: Hopefully, they can't project their weapons around corners! Take this left turn!!!

(With that, he veered off to the left. Running for their lives, the others immediately followed suit.)

BONSON: I'm too old for this!

(Only a matter of fifty feet behind them at this time, the police officers on their tail, listened hard to their chief over the radio.)

CHIEF: If they're carrying offensive weapons, you have permission to shoot on sight!

(At once, the two officers acknowledged the message and both they and the security men drew their guns.)

POLICE 1: Excellent!

(As Flaxley led his comrades forth along the long, thin passageway they'd raced into, he gritted his teeth and clenched his fists.)

FLAXLEY: This is infuriating. It's going to be hard enough to find that bloody portal without projectile weapon wielding maniacs up our backsides.

BONSON: And even if we lose them, were going to need eyes in our arses. If they think we're dangerous, they're not going to stop looking until they find us again.

FLAXLEY: Exactly. This is a disaster!

BONSON: No, this is just a typical day with Lefiat!!!

(Back at the entrance to the passageway at this time, the six pursing law enforcement operatives all stopped running and grinned to one another.)

POLICE 1: Well, well. This is going to be easy; they've run into a dead end. Now all we need to do is decide whether to shoot them immediately or beat them a bit first.

(With that, he drew his baton and smirked at his fellow officer.)

POLICE 1: You point your gun at them; I'll break a few limbs.

POLICE 2: You get to have all the fun.

POLICE 1: Yeah, well. As sergeant, I have to make these decisions, you see. That's why I earn the big bucks, mate. Don't worry; I'll save some limbs for you. Now, come on.

(In the passageway at this time, the six allies were about to make a horrifying discovery.

Sprinting for dear life, they charged around a corner at the end of the passageway and were immediately confronted by a fifty foot high brick wall. The corner was merely an alcove and there was nowhere left to run.)

BONSON: This is a dead end!!!

FLAXLEY: Shit! And they were at the entrance last time I glanced back! We're trapped!

(As they stood there staring up at the wall, knowing they were boxed in on three sides with

potential killers just around the corner, blocking the only exit, they all winced uneasily. Looking utterly defeated, Mandika then sat down and started to cry.)

MANDIKA: I'll never get to be queen!

KRITZ: Says who? We're not dead yet, Mandika.

(She looked uncertain.)

KRITZ: We just have to hope our magic can defeat their futuristic weapons... weapons which can probably disintegrate you instantly or something.

BONSON: Our one thousand year old magic against a thousands years worth of advanced technology? We're screwed.

(Looking utterly broken, Derek glanced back towards the corner then held his head in his hands.

DEREK: This can't be happening!

(Despairing of everyone's negativity, Flaxley stood tall and scoffed.)

FLAXLEY: Well I, for one, am *not* going to just stand here and get shot. If they want to take me down then they'll have to take me down fighting.

(As he folded his arms aggressively, Derek looked to him solemnly.)

DEREK: Going down fighting isn't going to help Zanne, is it?

FLAXLEY: Then we'll just have to win like we always do.

BONSON: Against futuristic projectile weapons, Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: I never said it'd be easy.

BONSON: Good, only I'd hate to have to laugh at you.

FLAXLEY: Bonson, we may have overestimated their technology for all we know.

BONSON: I suppose.

KRITZ: Flaxley's right. For all we know, our magic might be more than enough. Let's get ready to fight them with everything we've got.

(She then whimpered.)

KRITZ: I just hope they don't disintegrate me.

(Just then, Lefiat thought he saw something in the corner of his eye and did a double take.)

LEFIAT: What's that?

(As he stood there pointing to the floor beneath Mandika, Bonson rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: They're Mandika's feet, you twit!

LEFIAT: Not them, you blind bugger... that!

(Sure enough, beneath Mandika's feet, a silver plate was rising from the ground, elevating her several inches above the tarmac. Mandika was, of course, panic stricken.)

MANDIKA: Help!!! Weird things are happening!!!

(Sighting the plate, Bonson was overcome with joy.)

BONSON: Looks like we don't have to find *it*, it finds *us*! That's the portal!!!

MANDIKA: It is??? Thank the stars. Quickly get on, guys.

(At once, everyone exhaled in delight and they all swiftly clambered aboard the plate.)

DEREK: We're coming, Zanne!

KRITZ: You know, I really thought I was going to get reduced to a pile of dust then!

LEFIAT: You should have known better really, *we* always win!

(Their joy and elation was immediately interrupted, however, as the armed police officers raced around the corner and pointed their weapons at them.)

POLICE 1: Freeze, bitches!!!

BONSON: Hmm, where *we're* going, we just might! Let's do it, chaps.

(With that, they all proceeded to chant at the same time.)

ALL: Unto the coven we cross! Unto the coven we cross! Unto the coven we cross!

(With that, the plate, Bonson, Mandika, Kriz, Derek and Flaxley all disappeared into the ether, leaving Lefiat behind. With his eyes tightly shut, he floated back down to the solid

ground and continued to chant to himself determinedly in front of lawmen's astonished eyes.)

LEFIAT: Unto the cavern we go, unto the cavern we go, unto the cavern we...

(He then opened his eyes and looked all about himself in utter bewilderment.)

LEFIAT: Eh? I'm still here!!!

(He then threw his hands up in abject despair.)

LEFIAT: Oh, no! For fuck sake. Why me???

(Unable to believe what they'd seen the two police officers looked to one another then glanced at the astonished security men.)

POLICE 1: Was that some sort of... witchcraft?

POLICE 2: I don't know.

(Looking very much on edge, the lead police officer then wafted his gun at Lefiat, under the mistaken impression that *he'd* made everyone disappear.)

POLICE 1: What *are* you??? How did you do that???

(Very much overcome with despair and frustration, Lefiat flapped his arms wildly then jumped up and down on the spot.)

LEFIAT: I'll tell you what I am! I'm bloody cursed, that's what I am. It's not fair!!! Why does everything always happen to me?

(As the officers looked on in amazement, he then proceeded to throw his arms about liberally and curse his very existence.)

LEFIAT: Right from the minute I was bloody born it's been one catastrophe after another. I'm sure the gods are having a laugh at me. Look at me! I'm built like a beanpole, I've got the same haircut as a poodle, I can't read, I'm as thick as two short planks and everything I try to do ends up the same bloody way. Disaster. In the last two years alone, I've lost the king's horses, set fire to our flag, burnt down a wing of the castle, fell out of the same window six times, locked myself in the tallest tower for two weeks and now *this*! Honestly, there's only so much a man can take!

(As Lefiat proceeded to pace in circles constantly asking "why me", the two police officers shared a baffled glance.)

POLICE 1: He seems to be mentally unstable, if you ask me.

POLICE 2: What shall we do then?

POLICE 1: Mentally unstable and carrying a sword... I say we shoot him.

POLICE 2: You say that about everyone, but this time... agreed!

(With that, they raised their guns and steadied themselves only to see Lefiat disappear before their very eyes, just as the others had done.)

POLICE 1: Right...

POLICE 2: Okay...

POLICE 1: This is going to take some explaining to the chief.

(His fellow officer couldn't help but offer him a smug grin.)

POLICE 2: Well, good luck with that, sergeant. That's why you get the big bucks, mate.

(A matter of seconds after they'd disappeared from the East Edea of the future, Bonson, Mandika, Kritz, Derek and Flaxley found themselves materialising inside an icy cavern. Relieved to have made it out alive, they all deep breaths then glanced around at the shiny blue rocks surrounding them. They then took a nervous glance towards the nearby exit. Outside the cave, the land was awash with snow.)

BONSON: Right! So... this must be south Skiro then, right?

FLAXLEY: I expect so! All I know for certain right now is, I'm bloody cold!!!

MANDIKA: Winter clothes!!!

KRITZ: Change!!!

FLAXLEY: Damn right. As quickly as possible everyone!!!

(With that, they all hurried their packs off their backs and proceeded to change back into winter clothing before they froze to death.)

MANDIKA: I've never felt so cold in all my glorious life!

FLAXLEY: Then hurry up, Daman Siria told us a man could freeze in minutes here!

KRITZ: And what about a woman?

(Flaxley furrowed his brow at her.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz, by man, I mean mankind!

KRITZ: I know that! I was joking, obviously!

(Flaxley glanced away and muttered to himself.)

FLAXLEY: Yes... I wonder!

(Just under a minute later, Mandika pulled her furry hat down over her hair to complete her transformation, then looked to her allies and sighed. She could never have previously imagined a scenario where *she* 'd find herself changing an entire outfit in under sixty seconds. Normally such a task would take her hours and include the help of several attendants. It was a measure of just how cold south Skiro was that she'd been inspired to do such a thing.

Having changed in a fraction of that time, Flaxley looked towards the gleaming white cavern exit and took a deep breath to psych himself up for the march into the icy world beyond. Well aware that the others might also want to take a moment, he waiting for a good thirty seconds more then turned and offered them all a smile.)

FLAXLEY: Okay chaps, you ready to hit the road?

MANDIKA: Kritz hasn't finished changing yet!

KRITZ: Yes, I have!

MANDIKA: No! You've still got them high heeled boots on!

KRITZ: Yes, and I aint gonna be changing them!

BONSON: Are you sure that's wise? They're hardly practical!

KRITZ: I don't care! They're sexy!

BONSON: Even so, walking about on tip-toe like that you could slip on the ice and twist your ankle.

KRITZ: Hardly. I've pretty much mastered walking in them now.

BONSON: Yes but...

KRITZ: And I sprinted from them future police officers in them just now. Trust me, I'll be fine.

BONSON: Well, you say that, but...

KRITZ: But nothing, I'm wearing these and that's final. Like *you* said back in Tifaeris, Bonson, I'm a grown woman, I should be able to do as I like!

BONSON: I never said I was a grown woman!

KRITZ: You know damn well what I mean!

BONSON: I do, and I must concede, you're right! You're an adult and it's up to you what you do.

KRITZ: Thank you.

FLAXLEY: Right. On that note, let's get going.

(With that, Bonson, Flaxley, Derek and Kritz all slung their packs on their backs then started to head for the brightly lit exit. Mandika watched them go then sighed and held her pack out to the side.)

MANDIKA: Carry this, Lefiat.

(Just as she spoke, Lefiat appeared behind her as if from nowhere, pacing in circles and mumbling to himself in despair.)

LEFIAT: Why? This sort of thing never happens to anyone else. Why do the gods hate me?

(Turning to watch him pace, Mandika dropped her pack then threw her hands to her hips angrily.)

MANDIKA: Lefiat!!!

(Upon hearing the sound of Mandika's voice, Lefiat swiftly raised his head and stared in her direction. At once, his misery evaporated and a look of sheer delight crossed his brow.)

LEFIAT: Mandika!!! Thank the moon!!!

(With that, he raced up to her and threw his arms around her.)

LEFIAT: I thought I'd lost you forever.

(As the others paced up behind her, looking somewhat peeved, Mandika fought him off then reprimanded him angrily.)

MANDIKA: Get off me!!!

LEFIAT: But, I thought I'd lost you forever.

FLAXLEY: Quit babbling, you moron. Why aren't you changed yet?

LEFIAT: Eh? I only just got here!

DEREK: We've *all* only just got here, Lefiat.

BONSON: Indeed, and *we're* all changed.

MANDIKA: Except Kritz.

KRITZ: Shut it!

FLAXLEY: Just hurry up and put your winter clothes on.

(Lefiat pouted then started to remove his bag.)

LEFIAT: I can't believe none of you are even pleased to see me again.

MANDIKA: Again? What do you mean, "again"?

BONSON: Yeah, you haven't even been anywhere, you fool.

LEFIAT: Yes, I...

(A peeved expression then crossed Lefiat's brow and he pouted miserably.)

LEFIAT: Oh, I see. Like that is it? You didn't even notice I wasn't here.

FLAXLEY: Just get changed, you're holding everyone up.

BONSON: Quite. Like you were asked to several minutes ago!

LEFIAT: I wasn't here several minutes ago!!!

MANDIKA: What do you mean you weren't here several minutes ago?

(Lefiat pouted at her and slumped his shoulders.)

LEFIAT: I was stuck in the future. You lot all disappeared and I was stuck there. I said 'unto the cavern we go' but nothing happened.

(Reading Lefiat's mind, Derek rolled his eyes then glared up at him blankly.)

DEREK: The phrase is 'unto the coven we cross', you idiot.

LEFIAT: It is? What's a coven then?

BONSON: The same thing it was when I told you on north Skiro!

(He rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: Pillock.

DEREK: Wait, this makes no sense. If you said the code wrong, you shouldn't have been able to make it here at all.

LEFIAT: Maybe, the portal decided I was close enough and let me come anyway, albeit a few minutes later than everyone else.

DEREK: Don't be stupid, magic doesn't work that way.

LEFIAT: Well, it must have been something like that 'cause I got the phrase wrong and yet I still made it.

FLAXLEY: How or why you got here is irrelevant, Lefiat. All you have to worry about right now is getting changed, so why aren't you?

(Lefiat looked to him and pouted.)

LEFIAT: Everyone was talking to me.

FLAXLEY: You can't change and talk at the same time?

(He furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: My mistake. I forgot who I was talking to. Just get changed, Lefiat. The rest of you, let's turn away and leave him to it.

(With that, they all turned their backs on Lefiat and gathered in a semi circle, facing the exit.)

FLAXLEY: So, bit of a mystery, you reckon? How Lefiat got here.

DEREK: Well yeah, it seems to defy all logic.

BONSON: Although it does seem to sum up our rotten luck. By rights we should be shot of him forever and yet, here he is.

MANDIKA: That's mean, Bonson.

BONSON: I know. The gods really do seem to have it in for us.

MANDIKA: I mean, *you're* mean.

FLAXLEY: Look, never mind squabbling. Conserve your energy for crossing the glacier.
(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: As soon as Lefiat's ready, we're out of here.

(Just then, a small nervous voice rose up from behind them.)

LEFIAT: Um... how do I take this stupid tie off?

DEREK: Oh, for the love of the stars, we'll be here all day at this rate.

(Flaxley shook his head then paced towards Lefiat aggressively.)

FLAXLEY: No, we won't, Derek. Come here, Lefiat!!!

(Lefiat looked terrified.)

LEFIAT: What are you gonna do???

FLAXLEY: I'm going to put and end to your buffoonery, that's what.

(A minute or so later, when Lefiat was finally changed, courtesy of some unwanted, angry assistance from an impatient Flaxley, they all picked up their packs again then headed towards the cave exit. Picking up Mandika's bag, along with his own, Lefiat pouted and glanced at Mandika.)

LEFIAT: Flaxley was really heavy-handed with me. He's a bully. He practically bent me in half when he forced this coat onto me. Do I get any sympathy from you though? Not one bit. You just make me carry your stupid bag. I shouldn't even act surprised though. You lot don't care about me. I mean, nobody even noticed I was missing.

(He sighed.)

LEFIAT: I have to know, Mandika. How far would *you* have got before you realised? Half way to Kajice? All the way? Back to Guevina? What?

(As they headed out of the cave and into the bright, snowy white expanse outside, Mandika simply ignored him and paced ahead to walk with Kritz instead. Watching her go, Lefiat furrowed his brow then looked down at his feet as they trudged miserably across the crunchy snow.)

LEFIAT: It's all so miserably unfair. I hate being me.

(He then glanced up at the vast white expanse of nothingness that stretched over the horizon and forced an unconvincing smile. South Skiro wasn't as intensely cold as north Skiro and the wind was nowhere near as oppressive. Best of all, the snow wasn't constantly swirling in his face like it did on north Skiro. Lifted by this, he allowed himself a contented shrug as he ambled along.)

LEFIAT: It could be worse, I suppose. At least the snow isn't all up in my face.

(With that, he tripped over his own foot and landed face first in the snow.)

LEFIAT: Why??? Why does the world hate me, why???

(As Flaxley and his party headed forth into the seemingly empty wilderness they could have

had no idea that they were *not* alone. In a heavily weathered castle, not too far away, a tall blonde woman, whose beauty rivalled Kritz, was sitting in a windowless room staring into a crystal ball. The image it projected illuminated the room, showing up the mortar between each ancient grey block. As she flicked back her hair, she tried to find words for the horror of what she saw in her ball. Squinting into the bright light, she shook with anger as she watched Derek and his band of human helpers pace across the south Skiro snow. Looking absolutely livid, she clenched her fist then growled furiously.)

KAJICE: Intruders? How can this be? Nobody but nobody knows about the corridor of time.

(She then flicked her long blonde hair once again and brought her face closer to the sphere.)

KAJICE: That funny green creature? It matches the beast we plan to sacrifice.

(Utterly exasperated by the sight, she leant to one side and grabbed a small staff from beside her seat then sat up again.)

KAJICE: So, you plan to rescue her, do you? Fools!!!

(She then cackled in a murderous manner.)

KAJICE: Very well. If you plan to challenge me... let me introduce you to Aleclaw.

(With that, she lifted her arms into the air, raised her head to the ceiling then bellowed so loudly the floor shook and everything within the room vibrated violently.)

KAJICE: Oh, great keeper of the snowy skies, the mistress of doom is calling! Bring yourself forth... Aleclaw arise... Aleclaw seek... Aleclaw destroy!!!

(She then jumped to her feet and pointed her staff, with her arms fully extended at the crystal ball. At once, the tip of the staff turned blue then sent a fizzing bolt of electricity into the ball. Moments later, as the electricity faded, she slowly released her evil stance then sat down with an evil smile on her face to observe the outcome of her actions.)

(Out upon the snows of south Skiro at the time, the six intrepid travellers, continued to pace across the soft white landscape in search of Desha village. For Derek, it was an uncomfortable hike. Knowing his beloved Zanne was being held captive somewhere on this side of this glacier, he was becoming increasingly tense. Pacing forth through the snow with his five human allies, he couldn't help but fear what he'd find when they finally reached her.)

DEREK: Do you reckon they'd have hurt her, Bonson?

BONSON: Doubtful, they plan to sacrifice her on the equinox, don't they?

DEREK: Yeah, but... do you think they'll torture her in the meantime? I mean, are they even feeding her?

BONSON: I wouldn't know, Derek. I don't know anymore about Kajice than you do.

DEREK: I see.

(He shook his head then looked to Flaxley.)

DEREK: Let's hurry, shall we?

FLAXLEY: Calm down, Derek. We're going as quickly as we can. Walking in thick snow isn't easy!

KRITZ: Actually, with massive spikes for heels, it's not even remotely difficult.

FLAXLEY: Yes, well... lucky you.

(Derek nodded acceptingly.)

DEREK: Sorry, I don't mean to be impatient, I'm just stressed, that's all!

FLAXLEY: Don't worry about it, Derek. Besides, we're actually setting a good pace, I reckon. It isn't half as bitter this side of the crevice and that makes all this walking a million times easier!

BONSON: Indeed. We've been lucky with the weather this time!

LEFIAT: It's still bloody cold though!

BONSON: Obviously! We're on a glacier, you pillock!

LEFIAT: Don't start, Bonson, I've had enough of your mouth for one lifetime!

BONSON: Flummoxed by the endless wisdom it spouts, are we?

LEFIAT: What? No, I'm sick of... just forget it.

(Just then, the obscenely loud cry of an eagle echoed across the sky, causing everyone to stop and swiftly crane their necks upwards.)

KRITZ: Holy crap! Look at the size of that bird!

FLAXLEY: It's huge!

MANDIKA: It's bigger than a bloody cuddyfinkle, look at it!!!

BONSON: Indeed. Handsome beast though!

(Awestruck, they all stood there watching it admiringly for a few moments, when their expressions of awe turned to ones of sudden realisation.)

FLAXLEY: It's heading right for us!!!

(Sure enough, the giant bird of prey was heading down from the sky at an angle and trajectory that could only result in it ploughing right through them. Panicking instantly, Mandika screamed then leapt head first into a pile of snow.)

BONSON: That'll show it, ma'am, let's moon the thing!

FLAXLEY: Bonson!

BONSON: What? You think burying our heads in the snow and sticking our arses in the air is a *good* idea, do you?

FLAXLEY: No...

BONSON: Well then!

FLAXLEY: Just... pull her head out of the snow, will you?

(Rolling his eyes, Bonson went to do as he was asked when Mandika's muffled, whimpering voice rose up out of the snow.)

MANDIKA: I'm fine where I am, thank you.

FLAXLEY: Fine... as long as she can breathe.

(With that, Flaxley drew his sword and snarled towards the incoming foe. Trying to look competent, Lefiat stepped aside him and nodded. Just behind them, Kritz drew back her fists and Derek pointed his arm towards it, ready to cast his magic. Not wanting any part of it, Bonson threw his arms up in defeat then raced away. Once he was at what he considered a safe distance, he then put down his bag and sat on it.)

BONSON: Right, good luck chaps! Begin!

(As the winged beast closed in, it became obvious to all that this creature was at least thirty feet wide with extremely sharp teeth and talons. Under no illusions that it'd be a formidable foe, Bonson nodded to himself, feeling vindicated in his decision to sit the fight out.

Knowing battle was now imminent, the others also started to wish they'd had that option to. Having taken the decision to fight it however, they all sunk in battle stances as they awaited the first attack.)

FLAXLEY: Brace yourselves, chaps!

(Seeing his four allies and Mandika's trembling backside awaiting the giant flying menace, ready to give their all for the cause, Bonson felt uneasy and bit his lip.)

BONSON: It's no good, I can't just sit here and watch you lot battle that thing!

(With that, he heaved, about turned and sat down facing the other way.)

BONSON: That's better!

(As he closed his eyes and took a soothing breath of fresh wintry air, battle commenced behind him. Having reached ground level, the colossal airborne creature let out another deafening cry then went in for the kill, its sharp beak poised to skewer Flaxley. Having seen the move coming from quite literally a mile away, Flaxley simply leapt aside and slashed it with his sword as it passed.)

FLAXLEY: Take that, vile fiend!

(As his sword clashed with the bird's sharp beak, it let out a loud squawk then immediately ascended back into the sky above swerving to avoid two fireballs that Derek had fired off in its direction. Watching it go, Flaxley stood tall and scoffed.)

FLAXLEY: Come again if you dare, filthy beast!

KRITZ: Nice one, darling!

DEREK: What about me? I fired magic at it.

KRITZ: You missed.

DEREK: Right... like that is it?

(Unable to take his eyes of the giant bird, Lefiat watched it circle in the air, his mouth seemingly fixed open.)

LEFIAT: It's coming back around!

FLAXLEY: Foolish Ornith wants another go, does it?

(With that, Flaxley sunk into position again, ready to confront the evil creature.)

FLAXLEY: Big mistake, birdie boy.

(Sure enough, having circled in the sky to pick up speed the giant eagle swooped down once again. Fully expecting a repeat of the first attack, everyone sunk into fighting stances and Flaxley prepared to swing his sword then leap to one side again. Much to his bewilderment, however, once the attack came, the bird fluctuated from left to right as if in two minds who to attack first.)

FLAXLEY: What is it doing?

(Having created confusion in Flaxley's mind, the bird then darted straight at him.)

FLAXLEY: Shit!

(Having been rushed into a badly timed swing, his attack was wild and missed by inches. To make matters worse, as the giant bird zoomed past, it grabbed his blade tight in its talons and veered upwards, yanking it from his grasp as it took to the sky again. Unsurprisingly, Flaxley was mortified.)

FLAXLEY: My sword!!! It stole my sword!!!

(Lefiat looked to him urgently and held out his blade.)

LEFIAT: Here, use mine!

FLAXLEY: That puny thing wouldn't even pierce its skin. Hell, I shave with a bigger blade than that!

(With that, he proceeded to chase the bird around from below yelling upwards furiously.)

FLAXLEY: Give that back, it has sentimental value! Hey!!!

(Understanding his pain, Kritz called out to him urgently.)

KRITZ: Don't worry, darling. Leave it to *me*; I'll get it back for you.

FLAXLEY: How?

KRITZ: Simple. Just let me face its next attack.

(Putting his full faith in her, Flaxley nodded sternly then raced behind her. Not quite sharing Flaxley's confidence in her, Derek grimaced uneasily.)

DEREK: You, Kritz? But you don't even have a weapon and your water magic won't stop something that size!

KRITZ: Just trust me, Derek. I'm not *entirely* useless.

DEREK: I never said you were, it's just...

KRITZ: Then be quiet and back me up.

DEREK: Well, okay.

(As the bird returned for another swoop, still holding Flaxley's sword, Kritz took up Flaxley's position with her hands on her hips, willing it to come down and attack her. Ready to back her up, Flaxley, Lefiat and Derek stood just behind her, Flaxley pining for his beloved blade.)

KRITZ: Come on, you overgrown pigeon, let's go, you and me!

(As the others watched on, ready to jump in, she sunk into a fighting position and snarled.)

KRITZ: Come on!!!

(Once again the winged nasty descended to almost ground level then thrust back it's wings. Gathering speed, it whooshed across the snow then pushed out its beak in a bid to plough straight through Kritz's torso.)

KRITZ: Failed!!!

(With impact imminent, she jumped down onto her back and kicked the airborne menace's undercarriage as it passed over her.)

LEFIAT: Cool!

(Instinctively, the creature flew upwards, dropping the sword to the ground. Flaxley was overjoyed to say the least.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz, you're the perfect woman and I love you.

KRITZ: Well... yeah, I am.

(Feeling a world of relief, Flaxley ran to retrieve his sword with a desperate look in his eyes. Upon reaching it, he swooped down and grabbed it, his heart skipping a beat as he stared lovingly at the blade.)

FLAXLEY: My precious weapon! I thought I'd lost you forever!

(He stroked the hilt lovingly for a moment then looked up into the sky at the offending creature. Starting to turn red with rage, he then spoke through gritted teeth.)

FLAXLEY: Stand back you lot, this just got personal!!!

(As Flaxley stared up the giant bird with a face like thunder, he threw his gauntlets and his helmet on the ground and growled at the top of his voice.)

FLAXLEY: Come, Louise, we have work to do!

(He then glanced over his shoulder at Kritz and spoke in an extremely serious tone.)

FLAXLEY: Seriously. I'd get back if I were you! And get Mandika out of here too, this is going to get bloody.

(Having never seen such a furious look on his face, Kritz flinched then determinedly started to usher everyone away from her growling husband.)

KRITZ: Guys, move back. I've never seen him that angry before!

LEFIAT: Wait! He said Louise. Who the hell's Louise?

KRITZ: His sword. Now move back.

(With that, she pulled Mandika up out of the snow then dragged her away towards Bonson. Keeping one eye on the furious knight behind them, Lefiat and Derek followed on.)

MANDIKA: Hey, what are you doing???

KRITZ: Getting you away from the fight.

(Having heard them approach, Bonson swivelled on his bag to face them.)

BONSON: Have you won yet?

KRITZ: No, we've decided to leave Flaxley to it.

BONSON: That's my preferred fighting style too.

(Having arrived at Bonson's side, Lefiat watched Flaxley snarling and shaking his fist at the sky then bit his lip and shrugged at Kritz.)

LEFIAT: I'm confused. You say he named his sword?

KRITZ: Yeah.

BONSON: It's a knight thing, Lefiat. You wouldn't understand.

LEFIAT: Oh.

(He looked peeved.)

LEFIAT: Hey!!!

(Still baffled as to why she'd been made to move, Mandika pouted.)

MANDIKA: Why did you move me? I was perfectly safe where I was.

KRITZ: Because Flaxley told me too.

(She then shrugged uneasily.)

KRITZ: He had a murderous glint in his eye and quite frankly, I really didn't think it'd be wise to argue with him about it.

(Mandika furrowed her brow at her then glanced at Flaxley. At once, she shuddered and leant away.)

MANDIKA: He looks positively insane with rage.

KRITZ: My point exactly.

(As Flaxley watched Kajice's precious summon, the mighty Aleclaw, circle around in the sky, his patience continued to grow thinner. Absolutely chomping at the bit to attack it, he growled then bellowed at it to hurry up. Unfortunately for him, however, the rampaging beast had another target in mind. Angry at being kicked, it picked up speed then swooped down with its eyes firmly fixed on Kritz. Immediately realising that she was the target, Kritz gaped in horror and cried out.)

KRITZ: Not good!!!

(In full agreement with her sentiments, her four allies all rounded on her immediately.)

BONSON: You stupid bint, Kritz. It's coming right at us!!!

MANDIKA: I told you I was perfectly safe where I was!!!

(Fortunately, Flaxley had also noticed the bird's deviation from its usual path and raced to put himself between its vengeful self and his comrades. Snarling, he then braced himself as the furious creature increased its pace and lunged towards him.)

FLAXLEY: Hurry up, you clumsy waste of feathers!

(Fuming as it homed in on him at great speed, he then spoke in a bitter tone and raised his blade.)

FLAXLEY: Nobody touches my sword! Nobody!!!

(With that, he came out fighting. Slashing and chopping at Aleclaw like a man possessed from the moment it was in reach, he looked like a butcher on a mission. The others could only watch in bewilderment, utterly disturbed by the brutality of Flaxley's attack.)

KRITZ: Poor creature!

DEREK: Indeed! Though it was either it or us, I suppose!

KRITZ: Yeah, but what a horrible way to go!

(Lefiat could only gape in utter dismay.)

LEFIAT: Wow. Remind me never to touch *his* sword!

(Kritz nodded slowly in agreement then smiled merrily.)

KRITZ: Still, look on the bright side. As disturbing as this is to watch, at least now we've got something to cook for dinner today!

LEFIAT: Yeah? What?

(As Kritz gave Lefiat a sideways glance, Flaxley continued to dice the bird with his trusty sword, yelling furiously as he did so. Swinging violently with no thought of stopping any time soon, he soon began to feel dizzy, until eventually he fell backwards onto his posterior.)

FLAXLEY: Whoa, head rush!

(Letting go of his anger, he then sat and strained his eyes. As his eyes came back into focus, he spotted his five allies approaching and smiled.)

FLAXLEY: Ah, hello chaps! Done it! He's dead!

(Spying the small pieces of bloodied flesh dotted all around him, Bonson raised a curious eyebrow.)

BONSON: Ever thought of working in a slaughterhouse, Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: What? No!

BONSON: Shame, it seems you've missed your vocation!

FLAXLEY: Not really, Bonson.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: A slaughterhouse worker would just pick up the pieces now and sell them on. As a knight, however, I learned something from the experience!

DEREK: Such as?

FLAXLEY: Well for one, that was no ordinary animal attack. That was a minion of some sort!

MANDIKA: A minion?

BONSON: I concur, that was no ordinary beast. It was definitely a summoned minion.

FLAXLEY: Yes, probably Kajice's.

DEREK: Then... she knows we're here?

(At once, everyone shared a horrified glance.)

FLAXLEY: Precisely! So look lively chaps, things just got interesting.

(Having watched her beloved Aleclaw being chopped into tiny pieces through her crystal ball, Kajice was beside herself with rage.)

KAJICE: Aleclaw, my precious pet!!!

(She fumbled her fingers through her hair, shaking with fury.)

KAJICE: Worthless human scum, you shall pay for this insolence...

(With that, she jumped to her feet and proceeded to summon her next minion.)

KAJICE: Dark creature of the crevice, rise up from your resting place; gorge yourself on the souls in the snow! Melmera, step forth hungry one, your time has come!!!

(Looking absolutely livid she then pointed her staff at the crystal ball and another fizzing jolt of electricity shot from the tip, illuminating every angry line on her furrowed brow.)

KAJICE: Make them suffer!!!

(As the electricity petered out, she then sat down and rubbed her hands together to watch.

Only a matter of seconds later, however, she rolled her eyes then stood up.)

KAJICE: Sod waiting. It'll take that slow bugger ages to get there.

(With that, she stood up from her seat in the small, dark room and headed to the creaky wooden door. Satisfied she'd done all she could do for now, she yanked it open then passed through it, walking tall like an arrogant goddess.)

(Back outside in the freezing temperatures of South Skiro at this time, the six nervous allies had already gathered themselves together and resumed their unforgiving journey. Convinced that Kajice knew they were there, the last thing they wanted to do was hang around and wait for her next minion to attack. And so, without any delay, they'd immediately dusted themselves down, scooped up some choice bird meat cutlets, then set off again.)

DEREK: The sooner we get there, the better!

BONSON: Obviously!

(Mandika whimpered.)

MANDIKA: Flaxley? Do you think Kajice just sensed us... or do you think we're being watched?

FLAXLEY: I don't know, Mandika.

BONSON: Yes, that's what I tell people. Mandika *who*, I say.

MANDIKA: Shut up, Bonson.

FLAXLEY: Indeed. Look, all I can say is this. On the off chance that she *is* watching us, we're going to have to be careful. Keep your eyes out for anything usual.

(He then shook his head despairingly.)

FLAXLEY: So far we've had to contend with Dim Lee, futuristic law enforcement officers

and a giant bloody eagle. What's next I wonder. I really hate not knowing what we're going to be up against! This trip has been hell and frankly, I'm starting to hate every second of it.

BONSON: Well, you're not the only one, Flaxley! I know I've said it before, but I really am too old for this nonsense!

MANDIKA: You're only as old as you feel, Bonson!

BONSON: Yes, and I feel about 90 right now!

(Lefiat giggled.)

LEFIAT: Nonsense, you look more like 60!

(He laughed to himself.)

LEFIAT: See, told you I'd get you back!

BONSON: Yes, Lefiat. What a wit you are.

LEFIAT: Cheers.

(Mandika then whispered in his ear.)

LEFIAT: What do you mean, he *is* 60? I thought he was 50!

BONSON: I *am* 50!!!

MANDIKA: Yeah, right. You claim to be 50, but only an idiot would believe that.

LEFIAT: I believed it.

MANDIKA: Exactly.

BONSON: But I am...

(He glared at Derek.)

BONSON: You told them!!! I strictly told you not to say anything and you betrayed me!!!

DEREK: I never said a word, Bonson. They all *knew* you were lying about your age.

BONSON: But...

MANDIKA: Yeah, it's not Derek's fault.

BONSON: Then you how could you possibly have known???

MANDIKA: Simple. You don't look fifty, so I checked the employment records at the castle.

BONSON: Why you devious little...

(He then hung his head and sighed.)

BONSON: Stupid, fucking princess!

(Lefiat looked to him and puffed out in bewilderment.)

LEFIAT: Wow. Sixty? That's like prehistoric!

BONSON: I'm not too old to smash *your* skull though, sonny boy!

MANDIKA: Come off it, Bonson, you'd need a sledgehammer to smash a skull *that* thick!

(Highly amused by Mandika's comment, Bonson chuckled heartily. Curiously, so did Lefiat.)

LEFIAT: Nice one, sweetheart! That told him.

(Bonson looked to Mandika in disbelief.)

BONSON: He actually thought you were defending him!

LEFIAT: What?

BONSON: Unbelievable.

(Over the next half an hour or so, as Flaxley and Kritz soldiered on determinedly at the front of the pack, Bonson started to fall behind. Exhausted and feeling horribly out of his depth, his legs were struggling to muster the energy they needed to keep going. Trudging forth in the middle of the pack with Lefiat and Mandika, Derek glanced over his shoulder then bit his lip uneasily. Starting to get somewhat concerned about his aging friend, he then dropped back to have a word with him.)

DEREK: You okay, Bonson?

BONSON: No, not really.

DEREK: I didn't think so. You really haven't been yourself today, have you?

(Bonson gave him a sideways glance.)

BONSON: I haven't?

DEREK: No. You're as quick-witted as ever but... I don't know, you seem a little off.

BONSON: Off?

DEREK: Yeah, you know, deflated.

(Bonson sighed and shook his head.)

BONSON: You read my mind, didn't you?

(Derek nodded apologetically.)

DEREK: Sorry.

BONSON: Then you ought to know *why* I'm deflated.

(He sighed.)

BONSON: I'm a sixty year old former butler not a warrior. Which begs the question, why am I here? Why did I come? What use could I possibly be? Physically I'm not up to having battles! And this walk is killing me.

DEREK: Don't underestimate your worth, Bonson, you have your uses!

BONSON: Such as?

DEREK: Well...

(His expression turned blank.)

BONSON: Some friend you are!

DEREK: Sorry, Bonson, I can't seem to think straight about anything lately, what with Zanne an' all!

BONSON: I understand!

(He sighed.)

BONSON: Then I'll tell you why I'm here, Derek. The only purpose I serve is an extra target for the enemy! That can be the only reason why Flaxley let me come. I mean, surely he knows I'm not up to it!

DEREK: No way! Flaxley let you come because he has faith in you!

BONSON: Bullshit, I'm nothing but a decoy!

DEREK: Don't be ridiculous. Flaxley would never use a fellow human being as a decoy!

BONSON: No? Then why did he throw Lefiat at that nasty creature that was protecting the key of peace?

DEREK: That was different.

(He then gave Bonson a sympathetic smile.)

DEREK: Look, don't worry, old chap. Whatever happens, I'll look after you!

(Bonson gave him a grateful glance.)

BONSON: Look after me? Since when did I become so useless? I really am too old for this!

(Having overheard Bonson's complaint, Mandika dropped back and helped herself to a part in their private conversation.)

MANDIKA: Yes, you *are* told for this, but how do you think *I* feel?

BONSON: A bit doughy I'd wager.

MANDIKA: Doughy??? Why you...

BONSON: Fine, I don't know, Mandika. Let's ask Lefiat, he feels you a lot.

(Having heard his name, Lefiat glared over his shoulder and slowed to allow them to catch up.)

LEFIAT: Ask me what?

BONSON: Private joke, Lefiat!

(Resuming his walk as soon as they caught him up, Lefiat furrowed his brow.)

LEFIAT: About me?

BONSON: Don't be silly, I share jokes about you with everyone!

LEFIAT: Eh?

MANDIKA: Never mind that; let's get back to talking about *me*. What about *my* woes?
(Bonson looked sick to the back teeth.)

BONSON: What about them?

MANDIKA: You think you're too old for this?

BONSON: And?

MANDIKA: Put yourself in *my* shoes, I'm a princess, I'm too *good* for this, I should be in the castle doing royal things...

DEREK: You've already done this speech!

(Mandika stared dead ahead and nodded to confirm her thoughts.)

MANDIKA: Well, it's true! I'm a classy lady, I don't fight...

(Far from willing to sit through another of Mandika's rants, Bonson and Derek glanced at one another then deliberately dropped back, leaving her to it.)

MANDIKA: I'm an example of all things elegant. Sophistication is my middle name. I shouldn't be out here running the gauntlet of evil like some kind of savage, it's just not right. I don't belong. I shouldn't be here. I'm better than this.

(Sighing heavily she then glanced to her side and spotted only a bored looking Lefiat walking besides her.)

MANDIKA: What? Where did they go?

(Looking absolutely livid, she glared over her shoulder at Derek and Bonson, then flared her nostrils at Lefiat.)

MANDIKA: They buggered off while I was talking! Can you believe they did that???

(Looking far from interested, Lefiat sighed emptily.)

LEFIAT: Yes, dear!

MANDIKA: Yes, dear?

(At once her brow furrowed and she flapped her arms angrily.)

MANDIKA: You weren't listening to me either!!!

LEFIAT: I was! You said... stuff!

MANDIKA: Stuff?

(Lefiat looked to her innocently then grinned.)

LEFIAT: Yeah, lots of... stuff.

(Realising he'd been rumbled, he then sighed and hung his head.)

LEFIAT: I'm sorry, Mandika. It's just... when you start banging on about how great you are, I kind of switch off. I can't help it.

(Greatly offended by his reply, she folded her arms and pouted.)

MANDIKA: Like that, is it?

(As Lefiat proceeded to sweat uneasily, Mandika glanced to one side and allowed herself a devious smirk. Straightening her lips, she then looked to him through heartbroken eyes.)

MANDIKA: You've let me down, Lefiat. Not just as a boyfriend but as my knight.

(Lefiat looked mortified.)

LEFIAT: Don't say that, Mandika.

MANDIKA: But it's true.

(She sighed emptily.)

MANDIKA: And it's not *just* today. Despite being my sworn protector and guardian, two days ago, you were willing to abandon me. To just go off and leave me behind.

(She shook her head solemnly.)

MANDIKA: You wait until my dad...

(She looked straight at him.)

MANDIKA: The king...

(She then looked ahead again.)

MANDIKA: You wait 'til *he* hears about it!

LEFIAT: But... I'd *never* abandon you.

MANDIKA: Liar! You were willing to come on this mission and leave *me* with Bonson at first. Weren't you?

LEFIAT: Oh... yeah, that... but you were okay with it, you said.

MANDIKA: I was just *pretending* to be okay with it! Truth was, I was hurt and astonished that you'd be so neglectful.

(She pouted.)

MANDIKA: You're only duty in life is supposed to be guarding *me* but instead you *volunteered* for this trip and tried to palm *me* off on Bonson. I mean Bonson of all people! I was hurt, Lefiat.

LEFIAT: But... I just wanted to do the right thing by Derek, Mandika.

MANDIKA: By neglecting your duty to go swanning off with an alien while *I'm* left at the mercy of a grumpy old man who doesn't even like me? A grumpy old man who openly admits he'd save *himself* over me every time!

(She shook her head disdainfully.)

MANDIKA: Your sole duty is to protect *me* from harm, Lefiat, and yet you were willing to bugger off with Derek and leave my safety in the hands of *that* sixty year old, hatemonger with a heart condition! How could someone I consider my friend, my lover and my knight, hurt my heart so much?

(Lefiat pouted at her sorrowfully.)

LEFIAT: I feel really guilty now.

MANDIKA: Good, you deserve to.

(She then shook her head.)

MANDIKA: I shudder to think what my dad will make of it all.

(Swiftly turning to face her, Lefiat trembled from head to foot.)

LEFIAT: He'll go mental!

MANDIKA: Probably.

(Lefiat whimpered.)

LEFIAT: Mandika, I'm sorry. *Please* don't tell him anything. I'll be a better knight from now on, I swear.

(She gave him a hurt glance for a few moments then sighed and looked away.)

MANDIKA: Well, maybe I *could* keep my mouth shut...

LEFIAT: Please, I'll do anything.

MANDIKA: Anything?

LEFIAT: Anything you ask.

MANDIKA: Okay. Carry me!

(Lefiat gaped at her for a moment then pouted sorrowfully.)

LEFIAT: But, I'm already carrying your bag!

MANDIKA: Fine, then don't come crying to me when my dad hears...

LEFIAT: Fine!!! You win.

(He looked to his feet then groaned in defeat.)

LEFIAT: You always bloody win.

(With that, he slipped his pack from his back then stepped in front of her. Grinning fiendishly, Mandika leapt up on his back and wrapped her arms around his neck.)

MANDIKA: Sucker.

LEFIAT: What?

MANDIKA: I sneezed.

LEFIAT: Oh. Bless you.

MANDIKA: Thanks. Now get a move on.

LEFIAT: Yeah... okay.

(Stooping to pick up their bags, Lefiat then groaned miserably to himself and set off across the glacier again.)

(As the next few hours passed, the party marched on solidly across the glacier, Bonson managing to keep apace with Derek despite his aching limbs and disillusionment. Well aware that his aging friend needed all the help he could get, Derek managed to keep the old man's mind off his woes by striking up a conversation about ale. A master stroke if ever there was one. With the thought of downing a celebratory flagon once the journey was over, Bonson had all the reason he needed to soldier on. Pacing just ahead of them, the super strong and ultra fit duo of Flaxley and Kritz, had barely felt the effects of their long walk. More than used to physical exertion, the trek was barely testing them at all. At the back of the group, however, the unfortunate Lefiat was struggling forth on buckling legs. Despite carrying Mandika and two large bags, however, he was still managing to keep up somehow. That was, until Mandika heard a thudding sound coming from up ahead of them. Looking alarmed, she halted Lefiat, jumped to the ground and stared in front of her, clearly unsettled by something.)

MANDIKA: What was that? I heard something!

LEFIAT: Probably, the sound of my back breaking!

(Genuinely concerned by Mandika's claim, Flaxley drew his sword and aired a few words of caution to all those behind him.)

FLAXLEY: Keep your eyes peeled everyone.

(Set on edge by Flaxley's caution, they all stepped up slowly behind him.)

BONSON: I can't see anything!

DEREK: I didn't *hear* anything! Perhaps you imagined it, Mandika!

MANDIKA: I know what I heard, Derek!

DEREK: Do you?

(She gave him her most condescending glance.)

MANDIKA: Yes... a noise!

(After a few more moments of cautious observation, Flaxley shook his head then turned to face the others.)

FLAXLEY: This is silly, whatever you heard...

(He looked at Mandika.)

FLAXLEY: If indeed you heard anything... isn't there now!

MANDIKA: I tell you, I heard something; it was eerie and familiar.

BONSON: Perhaps you dozed off and dreamt it!

MANDIKA: Don't be ridiculous!

(Grinning sarcastically, Flaxley walked up to her and patted her on the head.)

FLAXLEY: Don't worry princess, we understand. You missed your nap time and you we're tired! You just rest on Lefiat's back and go back to sleep, we'll take care of you if anything should occur.

(Looking deeply hurt, Mandika pouted at him.)

MANDIKA: Don't patronise me, Flaxley, you know I...

(She then stopped as if frozen in time and stared straight ahead in horror.)

BONSON: Is she having one of her turns again?

FLAXLEY: I'm not sure!

(Wearing a baffled expression, he glanced over his shoulder at where she was staring and received quite a start.)

FLAXLEY: Great mountains of the north!!! It's... him!!!

(At once, they all faced in the same direction and gasped in horror at the sight of an enormous, bloated ball of blubber with huge hands slowly approaching them from ahead. It was as tall as a second storey roof and equally as wide.)

KRITZ: It can't be!

LEFIAT: Those huge hands...

BONSON: And that enormous mouth!

MANDIKA: S-see, I told you!

DEREK: It's...

(All at once, they muttered its name in stunned dismay.)

ALL: Melmero!

(First to snap out of his trance, Flaxley swiftly tried to enliven the others as the sluggish giant approached angrily.)

FLAXLEY: Get with it, chaps; you know what this thing is capable of! It uses psych-out magic, remember? Don't let it dishearten you!

KRITZ: But Flaxley, this makes no sense! We fried that thing to a crisp two years ago!

FLAXLEY: Yes, and we fried Dim Lee to a crisp last year, but *he* still returned!

DEREK: Only that wasn't really Dim Lee!

MANDIKA: Maybe this isn't really Melmero! I made Melmero slip on ice and you lot killed it remember?

BONSON: Like you'd ever let us forget.

FLAXLEY: Well, whether this is the real Melmero or not... come, we've got a fight on our hands!

MANDIKA: Right, I'll go and hide! Good luck!

FLAXLEY: No, Mandika! Stay close. As long as you're nearby we'll be able to keep you safe. This place is far too dangerous for you to go running off and hiding.

MANDIKA: No way! Staying close to you lot means staying close to that thing, and that's the last place *I'd* call safe!

FLAXLEY: Look, for all we know, Kajice might be watching our every move. If you get separated from us, she might despatch another minion to get you.

DEREK: He's right. You don't have to join in with the fight, but staying close just makes sense.

(Looking extremely put out, Mandika stamped her foot and snarled at Flaxley.)

MANDIKA: Fine, but if Melmero harms one hair on my head, Flaxley, you'll be losing yours!

FLAXLEY: With respect, Mandika, says who?

MANDIKA: The Guevina army that's who!

(Flaxley couldn't help but laugh.)

FLAXLEY: Good one.

MANDIKA: Excuse me?

FLAXLEY: Let's face it, princess, in a battle between myself and the Guevina army, the smart money would be on me!

DEREK: Look, I'm sorry to interrupt your private discussion but... Melmero!

FLAXLEY: Ah yes, come chaps, let's kill it!

(Bonson shook his head and sighed.)

BONSON: Oh goodie, I do enjoy these fights!

(As the slimy creature approached, with all the speed and thunder of an uninspired tortoise, Flaxley nodded to his allies then raced forth to meet it head on. Waiting for it to come to them, after all, would have taken all afternoon. Swift and aerodynamic it was not.

Stopping a good twenty feet from the sizeable menace, Flaxley stood tall and snarled at it as

Kritz, Derek, Lefiat and Bonson slowly caught him up. A few seconds later when Mandika sheepishly crept up and stood beside them, he gave his allies a reaffirming nod then stared up into the creature's hateful eyes.)

FLAXLEY: So, Melmero, is it?

(As if Flaxley had made the world's funniest joke, the massive beast roared with laughter, then clapped its hands together, sending a jet of slime flying over Mandika.)

MANDIKA: Ew, that's gross!

(As she stood there, bent over and dripping with slime, the beast continued to laugh heartily, offering no reply to Flaxley's question.)

BONSON: Is that all its going to do?

DEREK: I shouldn't think so!

(Pouting and very much on the verge of bursting into tears, Mandika screamed out to the heavens.)

MANDIKA: Look at me!!! I'm all slimy and yucky... and my hair!!!

(She looked to Flaxley and her bottom lip quivered.)

MANDIKA: My hair's all sticky and horrible!

(Without even looking, Flaxley continued to stare at the beast and replied in a dismissive tone.)

FLAXLEY: Nonsense, you look lovely!

(Unimpressed by Flaxley's reaction, Kritz shook her head and mumbled under her breath.)

KRITZ: Men just don't understand!

MANDIKA: I know. Men are rubbish.

(With that, she burst into tears and attempted to throw her arms around Kritz. Pushing her away to avoid getting her own hair covered in slime, Kritz grimaced uneasily.)

KRITZ: It's fine, Mandika. We'll sort your hair out afterwards, okay?

(Looking slightly calmed, Mandika then stepped away from her and nodded acceptingly.)

MANDIKA: Thanks, Kritz. At least I can rely on you.

(Removing his eyes from the giant before him, Flaxley gave them a sideways glance and rolled his eyes. Returning to the task in hand he then stared back at the giggling beast.)

FLAXLEY: Right... anyway...

(He then furrowed his brow and raised his voice.)

FLAXLEY: Hey, Melmero! I asked you a question!!!

(Finally acknowledging him, the chubby giant ceased laughing and replied in an all too familiar, deep, booming voice.)

MELMERA: So, you knew Melmero. Then *you* must be the ones who killed him!

(Not about to antagonise the beast by admitting it, Flaxley said nothing.)

LEFIAT: Yeah, that was us!

FLAXLEY: I'm so glad you came, Lefiat!

LEFIAT: Really? Thanks, Flaxley!

MELMERA: So it *was* you! And you probably think you can take *me*, Melmera, down too. Well hear this, Melmero was weak and unskilled. He was nowhere near as strong or refined as I!

(Soaked through and covered in slime, Mandika replied through gritted teeth.)

MANDIKA: Refined? Refined? You're disgusting! Look at me!

(Far from offended, the huge hungry killer simply scoffed.)

MELMERA: You say disgusting, I say accomplished. You see, I know exactly how to demoralise mere snack foods like you! With you, small one, your hair means everything. Now look at the state of it. It's a putrid mess. And without nice hair you feel worthless, because nice hair is *all* you have. Now, you have nothing.

(At once, Mandika pouted and hung her head, completely taken in by his psych-out magic.)

MELMERA: Now who's next?

FLAXLEY: Give it up, gut bucket. You can't demoralise us that easily. Everyone knows damn well that Kritz won't rest until she's made Mandika's hair look incredible again.

KRITZ: It's true. We can't have you looking like that, Mandika.

(At once, Mandika's smile returned to her face.)

FLAXLEY: See, she's smiling again. Psych-out magic is wasted on us, arse face.

(Melmera snarled.)

MELMERA: She may well be smiling now. But she won't be smiling when I eat her face.

FLAXLEY: Dream on, Melmera. Just like Melmero, you'll be too slow to catch us, and ultimately, *you'll* be the one to die!

MELMERA: You think so, do you?

(As Flaxley and the beast continued to exchange verbal insults, Mandika looked enlightened. Replaying the trick she played on Melmero two years earlier in her mind, she allowed herself a wry smile then checked her magic bracelet. She had every confidence that the same trick would definitely win the day again this time. Having no idea what she was planning, Melmera scanned what he viewed as the tasty treats before him and singled out Lefiat for a dose of his psych-out magic.)

MELMERA: Now, where was I? Let's start with you...

(He pointed to Lefiat.)

LEFIAT: I'm not listening to you!

(He covered his ears.)

MELMERA: You call yourself a knight? You...

(Just then, much to everyone's dismay Mandika paced from the pack and headed for Melmera. Stopping just out of Melmera's reach, she looked up and sighed.)

MANDIKA: Melmera?

(At once, Flaxley and Lefiat raced forward to grab her.)

LEFIAT: No, Mandika!

FLAXLEY: Come back here, you fool!

(As they both made a mad scramble towards her, Lefiat stepped in front of Flaxley and tripped over his foot. As a result, Flaxley toppled over him and they both landed in a heap.)

FLAXLEY: You tit, Lefiat!!!

(As he struggled to his feet, Mandika smiled nervously at Melmera and whimpered.)

MANDIKA: I want to go home now, Mr Melmera! Please let me go.

(Unable to believe its luck, Melmera beamed with delight.)

MELMERA: That would be a no!

(With that, he jumped forwards and threw out his hand to grab her.)

BONSON: No!

LEFIAT: Mandika!!!

(Much to everyone's relief, she just managed to leap back out of harms way in time. As she did so, she fired her glacier magic at the ground in front of her with the intention of making Melmera slip on it, just as she'd done with Melmero two years before hand.)

MANDIKA: You'll have to catch me first!!!

(Much to her utter humiliation, however, the giant foe took one step onto the ice, then stopped dead and stared at her in absolute bewilderment. In that moment, time seemed to stand still in Mandika's world. As she sheepishly crept backwards to re-join her allies, an empty silence descended and a strange howling wind seemed to rise up and blow balls of snow across the glacier. The subject of several disapproving glances, she could have sworn she heard bells tolling in the distance as she proceeded to shrink on the spot. Following a lengthy period of silent distain aimed squarely at the whimpering Mandika, Flaxley climbed to his feet, dragged Lefiat to his then raised his palm towards Melmera and broke the

silence.)

FLAXLEY: Just a minute, Melmera!

(With that, he walked over to the already severely humiliated Mandika and raised a belittling eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: Mandika? Glacier magic?

MANDIKA: Well...

FLAXLEY: Take a look around you, what do you see?

(Quite hurt by all the negative glances she was receiving, she whimpered and looked at her feet.)

MANDIKA: A glacier!

FLAXLEY: A glacier, correct. Now, can you spot the tiny flaw in your plan?

(Drowning in shame, she said nothing as Flaxley returned to where he'd been standing before the debacle began.)

FLAXLEY: Right, now where were we?

MELMERA: I was about to eat you when the uneducated one decided to cover this already frozen lake... with ice!

(Mandika whimpered.)

MANDIKA: Yeah alright, there's no need to rub it in! Like I'm not embarrassed enough.

MELMERA: Who cares about that? I really want to eat you now!!!

(With that, Melmera leapt forwards and rampaged towards Mandika. As she stood there and screamed, fearing for her life, however, Lefiat swiftly bundled her out of the way and raced away with her.)

MANDIKA: I'm scared!

(At this point, all hell broke loose. Determined to bag itself a quick and easy snack, Melmera swiftly diverted its attention from Mandika and Lefiat and proceeded to rampage and stamp across the snow towards Derek instead, on the grounds that he was nearer.)

DEREK: Shit!!!

(As Derek raced away, the giant killer then diverted its attention to Bonson, once again because he was closer. Suffice to say, the fight immediately become chaotic. With everyone running away then coming back again as soon as it had stopped chasing them, Melmera found itself switching targets every five seconds. Driven on purely by its craving for human or alien meat, it kept switching its attention to the *nearest* person every time without fail. It was very much the tactic of a *hungry* killer, not a clever one.

Melmera's foolish decision making was, however, the only thing the allies had to their advantage. They had no idea how to even hurt it, let alone kill it. Getting too close with a sword could prove fatal, and if it was anything like Melmero, they knew using magic on it would be a waste of time.

Determined to find a way to inflict damage on the rampaging beast, Flaxley observed the madness for a moment then raised a thoughtful eyebrow. Watching as Melmera continued stamping around desperately, drooling from its colossal mouth, an idea popped into his head and he raced over to Derek urgently.)

FLAXLEY: Derek. I think we can use this idiot's desperation to our advantage.

DEREK: You've figured out how to kill it?

FLAXLEY: Not even close. Let's learn to walk before we try to run.

DEREK: Meaning?

FLAXLEY: We need to find its weakness, right?

(Derek nodded.)

DEREK: Of course.

FLAXLEY: Well, I'm thinking Kritz and I can keep it occupied, while *you* try to find out what that weakness is.

(Glancing to where Melmera was bounding after Kritz, Derek nodded.)

DEREK: I'll do what I can, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: Top man.

(With that, Flaxley deliberately charged at Melmera to get its attention.)

FLAXLEY: Over here, fatso!

(At once, Melmera threw out a slimy hand in his direction and growled.)

MELMERA: Fool.

(Having evaded the giant extremity with ease, Flaxley raced at Kritz with Melmera bounding after him.)

FLAXLEY: Take up the slack, my love.

(Understanding exactly what he meant, Kritz nodded sternly.)

KRITZ: Will do, darling.

(With that, she charged past Flaxley and proceeded to place her thumbs in her ears then poke her tongue out at the hungry killer.)

KRITZ: You suck, Melmera!

(Just as they planned, Melmera forgot all about Flaxley and immediately diverted its attention to Kritz instead. Playing the creature like a fool, Flaxley then raced in and took its attention back. Time and time again, they raced around switching Melmera's attention between them and the hungry giant fell for it every time.)

MELMERA: Why defy your fate? Sooner or later, I shall devour you all!!!

(As he watched Flaxley and Kritz keep the beast occupied, Lefiat looked to Bonson determinedly.)

LEFIAT: While they're keeping it busy, we should use magic on it!

BONSON: It absorbs magic you fool, well Melmero did!

(Standing just behind them, Mandika raised her voice imploringly.)

MANDIKA: It has to be worth a try!

LEFIAT: Yeah!

BONSON: Well, yes, I suppose it does... but let's go behind it and do it.

MANDIKA: Shoot it the back, you mean?

BONSON: Like a big girly coward, yes. It's the Bonson way!

MANDIKA: I like it.

LEFIAT: Let's do that then.

(With that, they raced behind the marauding foe, keeping a safe distance between themselves and its giant hands. Once in position, Bonson then nodded sternly.)

BONSON: Ready, you two?

LEFIAT: Yeah.

MANDIKA: Ready.

BONSON: Fire!!!

(In unison, Bonson fired Inferno at him, Mandika unleashed her icy magic and Lefiat released a powerful lightning bolt. At once, the three elemental assaults struck into Melmera's sizable back and all fizzled out in a miserable anti-climax of nothingness.)

BONSON: What the hell?

(Melmera's voice bellowed out as it attempted to swat Kritz.)

MELMERA: Ha! Magic is no threat to Melmera!

(In no fear of their attacks whatsoever, it then attempted to splat Flaxley.)

BONSON: Oh there's a surprise, once again battle commences and I'm fucking useless.

MANDIKA: Melmero needed to use his hands to absorb magic, this one's completely immune!

(Just then, Derek raced over to them from where he'd stood and observed the fight.)

DEREK: Chaps...

BONSON: Oh, there you are. You going to join in at any point?

MANDIKA: Yeah, I was going to say the same thing.

DEREK: Flaxley told me to observe the thing and find its weakness.

MANDIKA: Oh, right. And?

DEREK: Apart from being slow and stupid, it doesn't seem to have one.

BONSON: Perfect. Let's exploit that.

(He rolled his eyes.)

DEREK: Don't be facetious, Bonson. We may not be able to harm it physically but I think I've found a way around that.

BONSON: Are you saying you have a plan?

DEREK: Yes I am.

BONSON: Then make it a good one. One mistake from Flaxley or Kritz and they're gonna be monster food.

(They looked to where, Melmera swished an arm at Kritz, forcing her to dive out of harms way.)

DEREK: Damn it. Come on, let's get busy. There's no time to waste.

MANDIKA: I agree! Pass me my bag, Lefiat.

(Derek stared at Melmera and sneered.)

DEREK: Forget your bag. Pelt that fat bastard, Melmera with all the magic you've got, chaps!!! Just keep shooting it until I tell you otherwise.

BONSON: What for?

DEREK: Trust me, Bonson. It's all part of the plan.

BONSON: Yes, but...

DEREK: Is that trusting me?

BONSON: Fine! Not that there's any point though. It absorbs magic.

(He rolled his eyes then stared up at Melmera.)

BONSON: Okay, Mandika, you too, halfwit, let's do this.

(With that, Bonson held his arm towards Melmera, fixed his stance, then unleashed his most powerful fireball into its back. As the fireball petered out with barely a whimper, Melmera scoffed.)

MELMERA: Pathetic!

(Immediately, Bonson furrowed his brow then turned and glared at Lefiat and Mandika.)

BONSON: You two, why didn't you fire your magic???

(Much to his annoyance, Lefiat was holding Mandika's bag open for her while she delved inside it with both arms.)

BONSON: What are you doing??? We're in the middle of a battle, for heaven's sake.

(Mandika furrowed her brow and pulled out her hairbrush.)

MANDIKA: Derek said there's no time to waste, so instead of standing about wasting time, I'm going to brush this slime out of my hair.

DEREK: Mandika, the battle...

MANDIKA: Forget the battle. Flaxley and Kritz seem to have it covered!

(She gestured to where Flaxley skidded majestically past Kritz on the ice to take Melmera's attention from her.)

MANDIKA: See? Besides, we were *beyond* useless when *we* joined in.

(Derek growled.)

DEREK: Mandika! Put the brush away and pay attention.

MANDIKA: Hey, don't order *me* around, I'm a princess.

(She rolled her neck.)

MANDIKA: Are *you* a princess?

DEREK: Mandika, I know how we can kill it but we need your help.

(She gave him an uncertain glance for a moment then sighed.)

MANDIKA: Fine. Why didn't you just say so earlier?

DEREK: I did!

MANDIKA: Then you must have whispered it, because *I* didn't hear you.

(With that, she slipped the brush back in her bag then turned to face him.)

MANDIKA: I'm listening.

DEREK: Right...

(He spoke to them with extreme urgency in his voice.)

DEREK: Your magic attacks may have appeared useless but he flinched. I mean for a split second he was rooted to the spot.

BONSON: Really, I didn't notice.

DEREK: Trust me, I saw it as clear as day from where I was.

LEFIAT: Okay, so how does that help?

MANDIKA: Yeah.

BONSON: I get it. If he's rooted to the spot, Flaxley can lay into him with his sword.

DEREK: Wrong.

(Bonson looked peeved.)

BONSON: Excuse me?

DEREK: Sorry Bonson, that wouldn't work. He's using a mystic shield. That's why the magic doesn't work. Annoyingly, nor will a sword. He's completely immune from attack.

BONSON: Immune? Then he's unbeatable?

DEREK: No. When you attacked him just now, the shield kicked in to absorb the magic.

With that shield up, he couldn't move. So if you pummel him with magic he'll be rooted to the spot, and that's just what we need.

BONSON: I hope you're not suggesting we stand here and keep him rooted all day while you three go off and rescue Zanne.

DEREK: Of course not.

LEFIAT: What then?

DEREK: Simple, just bombard him with magic and leave the rest to me.

(Bonson looked doubtful for a moment then sighed.)

BONSON: Fine, but this had better work.

DEREK: Trust me.

(He nodded.)

DEREK: Okay, fire when ready.

(Bonson looked to Lefiat and Mandika then shrugged.)

BONSON: Shall we?

MANDIKA: Uh huh.

(With that, they proceeded to lace Melmera with their magic. One shot after another, constantly crashed into his back. Ice, lightning, fire, a non-stop stream of elemental punishment. As before, the magic was simply fizzling out to nothing but just as Derek had suggested, the mystic shield protecting the giant killer was also reducing its ability to move to practically nothing.)

BONSON: Well bugger me, you're right, Derek. He can't move.

(He grinned to where Derek had been standing and raised a curious eyebrow.)

BONSON: Where'd he go?

(With the magical bombardment in progress, Derek had raced over to let Flaxley and Kritz in on his plan. With urgency etched all over his little green face, he yelled to them over the sound of the magical onslaught.)

DEREK: Head over to the others, chaps. Leave the rest to me.

FLAXLEY: You need any help?

DEREK: No, now go!!!

(Trusting his diminutive friend completely, Flaxley led Kritz over to Bonson, Lefiat and Mandika and watched on with interest as Derek proceeded to fire lightning magic into the thick ice around Melmera.)

FLAXLEY: Ingenious.

(He mused to himself.)

FLAXLEY: And yet bloody obvious when you think about it.

(Frozen to the spot, Melmera bellowed.)

MELMERA: Is this all you've got? You can not keep this up all day. Once you tire, you shall make an easy catch!

(The foul creature seemed to smile as its shield snuffed out their magic.)

MELMERA: All you're doing is delaying me!!! I shall have my banquet!!!

(As Melmera laughed out loud, Derek yelled out.)

DEREK: That's enough! Run for it!!!

(Immediately, the magical onslaught stopped and Melmera was shocked to see Derek bound past him at breakneck speed.)

MELMERA: Fool!!!

(Freed from the prison of its own magic shield, it started to stomp towards where Derek had joined the others.)

MELMERA: Come back, you cowards!!!

(As it completed its first step, however, a loud crack echoed across the sky from the ice beneath its feet.)

MELMERA: What the?

(Much to its horror, it looked down and realised it was standing precariously on rapidly cracking ice.)

MELMERA: No!!!

(Well out of harms way, the six allies looked on with interest.)

FLAXLEY: Nice work, Derek!

DEREK: Common sense, really! Melt the ground beneath him and let him drown. His only mistake was telling us this is a frozen lake.

LEFIAT: Nice one, Derek!

BONSON: Indeed, good thinking.

(Derek beamed.)

DEREK: What do you think, Flaxley? Shall I let him suffer or do the decent thing?

FLAXLEY: Go on, finish him off!

DEREK: Okay!

(As the terrified Melmera trod carefully on the ever thinning ice, Derek proceeded to fire more Lightning magic around it. Seconds later, the inevitable happened.)

MELMERA: No!!!

(The ice broke into pieces and the foul creature plummeted into the ice cold water below, from which there would be no escape.)

DEREK: I don't think *he'll* be bothering us again!

BONSON: What an awful way to go! Freezing to death!

LEFIAT: He's lucky, we fried Melmero!

(For a good few seconds more, they watched on as the water settled where Melmera had fallen.)

BONSON: Oh well, it comes to us all in the end!

KRITZ: What's next I wonder!

BONSON: Sorry?

KRITZ: Well, if we're being watched that surely won't be the last thing sent to attack us!

FLAXLEY: You're right, my love.

(She beamed.)

KRITZ: Of course.

(Flaxley then looked to Derek and smiled.)

FLAXLEY: Nice work, Derek. You made that Melmera look a complete fool.

(Mandika looked extremely peeved.)

MANDIKA: Hey, don't overlook our part. We pummelled it with magic for ages.

FLAXLEY: I know, I know. You did a sterling job. In fact we all did.

(He beamed.)

FLAXLEY: Another battle under our belts. Another outstanding victory. Well done, chaps.

(They all smiled, feeling rather pleased with themselves.)

DEREK: We do make a good team, has to be said.

MANDIKA: Yeah, Kajice won't stand a chance.

(Flaxley gave her a playful smile.)

FLAXLEY: Though that last battle would have been much easier if you hadn't fired all that ice onto the ground, Mandika. You made Derek's job of melting it *twice* as hard.

(Everyone chuckled as Mandika's shoulders slumped.)

MANDIKA: You lot are mean, everyone makes mistakes, you know.

(Lefiat hung his head.)

LEFIAT: Yeah, *I* can vouch for that!

MANDIKA: Not just you, Lefiat. You all do.

(She sneered.)

MANDIKA: Bastards.

FLAXLEY: I was only joking, Mandika, you did well.

(He then glanced to the heavens and bit his lip uneasily.)

FLAXLEY: Looks like time isn't on our side, chaps! We've only a few more hours until nightfall from the looks of things.

DEREK: Better get moving then. I'd like to avoid camping out tonight if we can.

(He shrugged.)

DEREK: If we need to set up camp though, don't worry; I'll keep watch for minions!

FLAXLEY: Excellent. Right, let's be on our way then.

(Looking extremely put out, Mandika stamped her foot and glared at Flaxley.)

MANDIKA: I'm all slimy still.

(She snarled.)

MANDIKA: I'm not budging another inch until I've got all this crap off of me.

(Derek gave her an exasperated glance.)

DEREK: Mandika, don't do this to me. Zanne is heaven's knows where, suffering heaven knows what at the hands of heaven knows who. We can't afford all these stops.

(Much to nobody's surprise, Kritz interceded on Mandika's behalf.)

KRITZ: Be fair, Derek. We can't expect her to keep going with all that gunk dripping off her. And the gods only know what damage it might do to her hair if we leave it.

MANDIKA: Exactly. Thank you, Kritz.

KRITZ: Come here, Mandika. Let's get you cleaned up.

(As Mandika approached Kritz, Flaxley looked to Derek and raised a baffled eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: There's no middle ground with those two. They're either best friends or they hate each other. Women make no sense.

(Derek nodded.)

DEREK: They're the same the universe over, Flaxley.

(He then glanced at Bonson before looking back at Flaxley.)

DEREK: Listen, Flaxley. Bonson's feeling pretty low right now.

FLAXLEY: Yes, I had spotted that.

DEREK: Yes well, he's grumpy and bitter even when he's in a *good* mood, but right now he's really at a low ebb.

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: That would explain his appalling attitude towards everyone.

DEREK: Yes well, my point is, we should keep an eye on him, try to lift his spirits a bit.

FLAXLEY: Okay, I'll see what I can do.

(He then looked to where Kritz was wiping Mandika down with a towel, stolen from the East Edea hotel, and exhaled lustfully.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz is a fine looking filly. I'm a lusty man, Derek.

(He grimaced and slowly closed his eyes in shame.)

FLAXLEY: I meant lucky.

DEREK: Of course you did, Flaxley.

(Feeling quite the fool, Flaxley grinned at him then glanced at Kritz again.)

FLAXLEY: Then we're agreed.

(Watching Flaxley drool, Mandika rolled her eyes then looked to Kritz.)

MANDIKA: Don't you ever get sick of Flaxley lusting over you like that?

(Kritz wiped some slime from the side of Mandika's nose and grinned.)

KRITZ: Is he ogling my bum still?

MANDIKA: Yup!

KRITZ: No, it's okay. I can't complain that my husband finds me attractive, can I? Having said that, he's usually a lot more subtle than this.

MANDIKA: I should hope so too.

KRITZ: It's a bit baffling really. I wouldn't have thought this skirt was that sexy, to be honest.

(Mandika sneered bitterly.)

MANDIKA: It's not!

(Kritz gave a stifled laugh then stepped back to look at her.)

KRITZ: All done, I think. That's the gunk off, at least.

MANDIKA: Really?

(She looked down at both her hands then felt her hair.)

MANDIKA: Wow, good job. Thank you.

KRITZ: My pleasure, babe. Now keep still while I brush your hair.

MANDIKA: Ponytail, please.

KRITZ: Coming right up.

(Five minutes later, once she'd finished fixing Mandika's hair for her, Kritz pulled her mirror from her bag and allowed Mandika to check out her reflection. Approving greatly of what she saw, Mandika smiled gratefully at Kritz, handed her the mirror then looked to Derek.)

MANDIKA: Okay, I'm good to go. Let's get a move on shall we, people?

(Derek nodded sternly.)

DEREK: Yes, we shall. About time too.

BONSON: I propose a five minute rest!

DEREK: Denied. Now let's go.

BONSON: Why, you... little green wanker, you.

(As they all started to head off, Mandika pointed to her feet and bellowed at Lefiat.)

MANDIKA: Lefiat? Get over here and carry me!!!

LEFIAT: But...

(His shoulders sunk then he paced over to her miserably.)

LEFIAT: Oh, for... fine!

(A few moments later, once Mandika was mounted up on his back, their march across the icy wasteland resumed once more.)

(As the next hour passed, Flaxley and Kritz continued onwards, marching with ease as they chatted comfortably together. Feeling no strain or fatigue whatsoever, they could have continued on at their current pace long into the night. The same, however, could not be said of Bonson and Lefiat. For them, the last hour had felt more like a day and a half. Bonson, being kept company by Derek, was aching all over and Lefiat, burdened with the lazy princess looked like a heart attack waiting to happen. Glancing back at them as they continued on across the snowy wilderness, Flaxley's face bore an uneasy expression.)

FLAXLEY: They don't look comfortable at all.

(As he turned his head to look where he was going, Kritz sighed solemnly.)

KRITZ: That's hardly surprising really. This has been one hell of a walk, especially for Bonson at his age.

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Yeah, I'm worried about him, actually.

KRITZ: So you should be, he already had a heart attack once.

FLAXLEY: No. I mean, I'm worried about his state of mind. According to Derek he's pretty down. Not just in one his customary bad moods, he's miserable, apparently.

KRITZ: How come?

(She bit her lip.)

KRITZ: Apart from the obvious.

(Flaxley glanced to her and nodded.)

FLAXLEY: That's what I intend to find out. As soon as I get a chance, I'll talk to him.

KRITZ: Good idea.

(They shared a loving smile for a moment then Flaxley puffed out in awe of her.)

FLAXLEY: Damn it, Kritz. How *do* you do it?

KRITZ: How do I do what?

FLAXLEY: How do you always manage to come out of a battle having rolled on the ground, done somersaults and all kinds of acrobatics and *still* look like a goddess?

(She offered him a coy smile.)

KRITZ: Maybe I *am* a goddess.

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: No maybe about it.

(She gave him a warm smile then grimaced.)

KRITZ: Tell you what though; they were right about these shoes.

FLAXLEY: What do you mean?

KRITZ: These high heels. Landing from a somersault was tricky; I nearly did a Lefiat twice.

(Flaxley rubbed his chin.)

FLAXLEY: Really? Falling over in front of that Melmera could have been fatal.

KRITZ: I know. And this skirt didn't help much. I tried to cartwheel away at one point, but it's so tight I couldn't part my legs wide enough.

(She sighed.)

KRITZ: Maybe I should have stuck with the ski pants.

FLAXLEY: Don't say that, darling.

(She grabbed his arm and offered him a reassuring smile.)

KRITZ: Don't worry; it's too late to change now anyway.

FLAXLEY: That's a relief.

KRITZ: I'm definitely going to have more of these boots made, though. They're really sexy.
(Flaxley beamed.)

FLAXLEY: Yes they are.

KRITZ: And being this much taller will make kissing you a lot easier.
(She grimaced.)

KRITZ: Sometimes my back hurts when I stretch up there.

FLAXLEY: I get the same problem stooping down to your height.
(She mused outwardly.)

KRITZ: I should get a pair made that makes us the same height.
(Flaxley looked unsure.)

FLAXLEY: Wouldn't they look ridiculous though?

KRITZ: Oh, I dunno. If five inch heels are sexy, imagine *fourteen* inch heels!
(Flaxley gave her a troubled glance.)

FLAXLEY: I'm trying to but I keep picturing clowns for some reason.

KRITZ: No, not like stilts, I'm talking about *sexy* boots. Sexy but really high.

FLAXLEY: Hmm... I think we're picturing very different things.

KRITZ: Must be...

(Just then, they heard Mandika's voice rise up from just behind them.)

MANDIKA: Faster, stupid. What's wrong with you?

LEFIAT: I'm going as fast as I can, Mandika. You're heavy!

MANDIKA: I'm what???

LEFIAT: Um... I mean your bag is heavy!

MANDIKA: Better.

(Looking shattered, Lefiat staggered aside Flaxley and puffed out.)

LEFIAT: That better?

MANDIKA: It'll do.

(As the weary Lefiat struggled onwards, Mandika clung onto his aching back and looked to Flaxley.)

MANDIKA: Flaxley, can we rest soon? I'm getting tired.

(Flaxley gave her a disbelieving glance.)

FLAXLEY: Tired? How can *you* be tired?

MANDIKA: It's been a long day.

FLAXLEY: Unbelievable.

MANDIKA: It's not just me, Lefiat's tired too.

KRITZ: Then get off of him and walk.

(Mandika gave her a belittling glance.)

MANDIKA: That'd make me even *more* tired, you idiot!

(Kritz just looked at her in disbelief.)

KRITZ: Lazy cow.

MANDIKA: I wasn't talking to you anyway, Kritz. I was talking to Flaxley. If I wanted to talk to an idiot, I could have just stayed back there with Lefiat.

LEFIAT: Hey!

MANDIKA: So, Flaxley? Can we at least take a break?

FLAXLEY: I suppose we could...

(He looked at the shattered Lefiat and mused to himself.)

FLAXLEY: Looks like *he* could definitely use one.

(He nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, we'll stop here for a bit then.

LEFIAT: Thank heavens for that!

(With that, he immediately set Mandika down then bent double to get his breath back.)

LEFIAT: I'm knackered.

MANDIKA: Bloody weakling.

(As Bonson and Derek caught up, Flaxley nodded and enlightened them to the situation.)

FLAXLEY: We're taking a breather, chaps.

BONSON: Good. My feet have decided to hurt and all my other limbs have come out in sympathy with them.

(Still gasping for breath, Lefiat stood up straight and placed his hands on his hips.)

LEFIAT: You know, there's an apple tree outside my bedroom window back at the palace.

(As Lefiat stood there nodding to himself to affirm his words, Bonson looked at him and raised an eyebrow.)

BONSON: I get where you're coming from, Lefiat, but I can't help feeling the validity of your point was somewhat hindered by its lack of relevance.

LEFIAT: Eh?

BONSON: My mistake. I forgot to translate it into idiot for you. I'm saying, what the hell does that have to do with anything?

LEFIAT: Oh.

(He shrugged.)

LEFIAT: Just saying, I could really use one of these apples right now. I'm bloody starving.

KRITZ: I'm not surprised. You've got no energy left from carrying *that* lazy cow.

(She gestured to Mandika.)

MANDIKA: Don't judge *me*, you common nobody. He's *my* knight and I'll do what I like with him.

LEFIAT: What's energy got to do with it anyway? I'm hungry, not tired. *And* I'm tired.

(He looked baffled.)

LEFIAT: Wait... are hunger and tiredness linked then?

(Bonson rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: For heaven's sake, Lefiat. Remember last week, when we discussed how food gives you energy?

LEFIAT: Yeah?

(He looked into his eyes waiting for him to elaborate.)

LEFIAT: And?

(Bonson stared at him in defeat.)

BONSON: And what? Food gives you energy, that pretty much covers it!

LEFIAT: Right... so what are you saying?

(Bonson coldly glared right through him.)

BONSON: I'm going to cast Inferno magic at you in a minute.

LEFIAT: What?

FLAXLEY: Look, never mind that. Kritz packed what fruit we didn't eat this morning in her pack, so let's all sit down and have something to eat and a rest, okay? It'll do us all the power of good.

(Derek sighed.)

DEREK: I suppose we should, yes.

(He clenched his fists.)

DEREK: What I'd give to be a super-being with no need of rest or sustenance. Every delay just twists the knife even harder.

(Flaxley gave him a sympathetic glance.)

FLAXLEY: I remember that feeling only too well, old chap. Just hang in there the best you can, Derek.

DEREK: I will.

FLAXLEY: Right. Now let's make ourselves as comfortable as we can while Kritz hands out

the fruit.

KRITZ: Okay...

(She then looked to Mandika and smiled.)

KRITZ: Then after we've rested, what say you walk and carry your own bag for a while?

You know, just to give Lefiat a break.

(Mandika scoffed at her coldly.)

MANDIKA: Why should I?

(She looked away indignantly and mumbled under her breath.)

MANDIKA: It's got nothing to do with *you* anyway... you tart.

(Unfortunately for her, Kritz wasn't deaf and immediately barked at her furiously.)

KRITZ: What did you say???

(At first, Mandika looked frightened but her fearful expression very soon evaporated to be replaced by a sneering one. This mission had been grating her last nerve since the moment they'd set out and she'd finally snapped. Being on this glacier with them was mortifying and right now taking out her frustration on someone just felt right. And so, looking forward to releasing all her pent up anger full in the knowledge that Flaxley or Lefiat would protect her with their lives, she looked at the fuming Kritz and scoffed bitterly.)

MANDIKA: You heard me... you enormous tart, you!

(Kritz immediately turned red and her nostrils flared violently.)

KRITZ: That's it, I warned you!!!

(Desperate to spare Mandika's teeth, Flaxley quickly leapt between them and restraining the decidedly livid Kritz.)

FLAXLEY: Don't start this again!!! Let's settle this like adults!

KRITZ: No, this time I'm gonna beat some respect into that bitch!

(Mandika looked livid and glared at Lefiat.)

MANDIKA: Lefiat? Are you gonna let her speak to me like that?

LEFIAT: Eh? Me?

MANDIKA: She insulted me; it's your job to protect me!

(Lefiat looked horribly out of his depth and trembled.)

LEFIAT: Um... be nice, Kritz!

KRITZ: Butt out, mistake boy, this is between me and *that* cow!

MANDIKA: Cow? She called me a cow, Lefiat, *and* she called me bitch just now! Do something.

(Utterly stuck for what to do, Lefiat just pouted. He knew he had to obey Mandika but at the same time, he didn't want to upset Kritz.)

LEFIAT: But, Mandika...

MANDIKA: Lefiat, do something! I'm a princess! I resent being talked down to by the likes of her!

(As Lefiat whimpered and treaded up and down uncomfortably on the snow, Flaxley retained a firm grip on Kritz and spoke up angrily.)

FLAXLEY: Mandika! I know you're angry, but please, stop this crazy talk!

MANDIKA: You can shut up too, I demand she apologises!

KRITZ: For what??? *You* called *me* a tart!

MANDIKA: So? I'm a princess; I demand the right to look down on you! It's my privilege to call you what I like! Someone needs to put you in your place! You're a humble peasant, Kritz! I, on the other hand, come from the loins of royalty!

KRITZ: I couldn't care less if you were the queen of the entire bloody universe! Let me go, Flaxley!!! I'm gonna kill her!!!

(Just then Mandika's demeanour changed dramatically. The angry look on her face evaporated and she stepped behind Lefiat wearing a cocky smirk.)

MANDIKA: Let her go, Flaxley. If she wants to get at me, she'll have to get past Lefiat first and he's good at protecting *me*!

(Lefiat gulped and immediately proceeded to sweat profusely. Fighting Kritz was the last thing he wanted to do. For one, she was his friend and secondly, in the unlikely event that he survived the fight, Flaxley would kill him.)

LEFIAT: I don't wanna be here!!!

(Much to his further dismay, Kritz then stopped struggling to escape Flaxley's grasp, adopted the same cocky smirk that Mandika was wearing and stared coldly in Mandika's eyes.)

KRITZ: Like that, is it?

(She sneered.)

KRITZ: You're not the only one who can ask her man to fight her battles for her. Flaxley, get Lefiat out of the way for me!

MANDIKA: Draw your sword and stand your ground, Lefiat.

(With no choice but to obey her command, Lefiat whimpered in terror and nervously drew his sword. He then pointed it towards Flaxley, his hand trembling so violently that the tip of the blade was virtually a blur.)

MANDIKA: That's it.

LEFIAT: I hate you, Mandika.

(Kritz just scoffed then gestured towards Lefiat.)

KRITZ: Go on, Flaxley, darling, slap him into next week then leave that bitch to me!

(Flaxley looked utterly perplexed.)

FLAXLEY: What? How did this happen? I mean... one minute... and now this.

(Flaxley looked at Kritz and gestured towards Lefiat.)

FLAXLEY: Do you seriously expect me to fight this fool?

KRITZ: Yes!

(Flaxley groaned then looked to the sky. Knowing he'd have to take definitive action to bring the sorry episode to a close, he then let go of Kritz and stepped up to the terrified Lefiat and bellowed.)

FLAXLEY: Give me that!

(With that, he swiped the sword straight out of Lefiat's trembling hand then pushed him out of the way to approach Mandika.)

FLAXLEY: Mandika, we need to talk!

(He then turned to Kritz and spoke in a firm tone.)

FLAXLEY: This ends now, okay?

(Incensed that Flaxley hadn't fought for her, Kritz decided to revert back to her original plan of beating Mandika up instead. Unfortunately for her, however, Flaxley blocked her path.)

KRITZ: She's had it! Now get out of my way!

(Swiftly coming to the end of his tether, Flaxley bellowed at her in no uncertain tone.)

FLAXLEY: Stop it!!!

(She flinched and leant back.)

KRITZ: Don't yell at *me*.

(One look into his angry eyes, however, told her he meant business and she stepped back, raising her hands in defeat.)

KRITZ: Fine, I'll ease off. But I'm doing it for *you* not her.

(She glared at Mandika then turned her back.)

FLAXLEY: Right. Derek, set up camp, would you? It'll be dark by the time I've sorted all this out, so we might as well stop here for the night.

(Derek sighed then reluctantly nodded in agreement.)

DEREK: Will do, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: Okay, Mandika, Bonson, come with me!

(Knowing things couldn't go on with the mood so sour, Flaxley then led Mandika and Bonson to one side. Watching them go, Kritz shook her head and went to assist Derek as he set up camp. Lefiat, for his part, sat in the snow panting heavily and thanking his lucky stars that it was over.)

(When Daman Siria stated that he'd packed everyone all the essentials they'd need for a trip across the glacier, he hadn't been exaggerating. It seemed he'd thought of everything. Derek's pack even contained two logs, just in case they needed to make a fire. Thanks to Daman's forethought, while Flaxley led Mandika and Bonson to one side, Derek and Kritz were able to simply gather some rocks then start a blaze for everyone to warm themselves around. Without his farsightedness, starting a fire in a barren icy wasteland would have been impossible.

Looking forward to availing themselves of a place around the campfire, Bonson and Mandika looked back longingly as Flaxley took them a good one hundred feet away then proceeded to interrogate them about their behaviour. Looking very much like a disappointed parent, rather than an angry knight, he looked to Mandika and threw up his arms in despair.)

FLAXLEY: Right, Mandika, let's start with you! What's going on?

(Mandika pouted and looked away.)

MANDIKA: She started it!

(As she stood there sulking, Flaxley shook his head and folded his arms.)

FLAXLEY: Mandika, look... I'm not going to sugar coat this, okay? You can be a bloody nasty person sometimes. Spiteful in fact. But, the nastiness with which you've treated people the last few days though... it's extreme even for you. Now what gives?

(Determined not to answer, she stared hard at the ground and tapped her foot angrily.)

FLAXLEY: Mandika, I was your knight for years, I know when you're unhappy. Now please, what's bothering you?

(She looked at him briefly then looked away again and folded her arms. Seeing he was clearly getting absolutely nowhere, Flaxley shook his head and sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, we'll come back to you, then!

(He then turned to Bonson who was looking equally as unwilling to talk.)

FLAXLEY: Bonson, I've never seen *you* this down before. What's troubling you, old friend?

(Bonson gave him an annoyed glance then spoke up in an angry tone.)

BONSON: Flaxley, Daman said he can't sense me here, remember? So this is the one place in the entire world, the council of the wise can't protect me from death. Which begs the question, why the hell am I here Flaxley? I'm old and slow, I have no weapon skills and all I do is get in the way!

FLAXLEY: That's not true!

BONSON: Unless that *is* why I'm here!

FLAXLEY: What? Why would it be?

BONSON: Flaxley, the only purpose I could possibly serve on missions such as this is as a decoy! After all I'm sixty, I'm unmarried; who's gonna miss me? "Oh well", they'll say "he had a good innings I suppose". I shouldn't be here, Flaxley!

(Having listened in, Mandika then felt brave enough to add her piece.)

MANDIKA: I shouldn't be here either, Flaxley! I'm not strong, I don't have any weapon skills and the only magic I have is glacier, a fat lot of use around here! I can't defend myself and I'm scared!

(Flaxley nodded as their words sunk in then allowed himself a stifled laugh.)

FLAXLEY: You two should hear yourselves. Bonson, you are the wisest man I ever met...

BONSON: You've met Daman Siria, haven't you?

FLAXLEY: So?

BONSON: Then I'm not the wisest man you ever met!

(Eager to comfort his aging friend, Flaxley put his hand on Bonson's shoulder and smiled.)

FLAXLEY: Bonson, who is Daman Siria really? He's not a man like you and I, he teleports around the world and he knows things he shouldn't possibly know. He's on a different plain to you and I, yet would he do this? I doubt it!

BONSON: Yes I get the point, now get your hand off my shoulder, we look like a pair of poofs!

(Conceding to Bonson's request, Flaxley grinned then looked to Mandika.)

FLAXLEY: And you, princess! Under that superiority complex, there beats the heart of a good person! I've seen it. When you look beyond other people's appearances, I'm proud to be your friend! If only you'd do it more often.

(As a small smile crept onto Mandika's lips, Flaxley nodded to her warmly.)

FLAXLEY: I had a hand in raising you, Mandika, I'd protect you with my life!

BONSON: Is that all, Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: No!

(Bonson sighed.)

BONSON: Figures.

FLAXLEY: Look, Bonson, the reason you came is to help your friend! You seem to have forgotten that somewhere along the line, but just remember, Derek needed you, and you were there for him. You stopped and thought about it, sure, but in the end you had the goodness inside you to do the right thing! You should be bloody proud of that if you ask me.

(All at once, Bonson's expression changed to one of realisation.)

BONSON: You're right, I should be. And you know what, I am! I came here to use my wisdom for Derek as and when the need arises, which makes me a pretty bloody awesome bloke. I thank you, Flaxley! I actually *had* forgotten that.

(With his spirits somewhat lifted, he exhaled merrily then headed off back towards where Derek had set up camp. Failing to share Bonson's enthusiasm, Mandika hung her head.)

MANDIKA: *I* only came because I didn't want to walk back to Guevina with Lefiat and end up getting eaten by a cuddyfinkle. Now I wish I'd taken my chances with the cuddyfinkles.

(Flaxley grinned.)

FLAXLEY: You do that a lot.

MANDIKA: It's not funny, Flaxley. I'm scared and I want to go home. If you want to know why I'm so grouchy, there you are. That's why.

(She sighed.)

MANDIKA: So don't bother trying to cheer *me* up. The fact is, I didn't want to come and I wish I wasn't here. So leave me alone.

(Flaxley looked to her blankly for a moment then smiled and put his arm around her.)

FLAXLEY: You know, it never ceases to amaze me how someone as self-obsessed as you can fail to see how amazing she is.

(Sensing a compliment was coming; Mandika raised an enquiring eyebrow and glanced up at him.)

MANDIKA: Go on.

FLAXLEY: Sure, you didn't want to be here and ending up in this mess would drive most people insane, but you've been amazing. Yes, it's been bewildering, even terrifying at times but Mandika, despite the fact you don't even want to be here, you've been an integral part of the team.

(Mandika looked deeply suspicious and pouted.)

MANDIKA: You're patronising me like a blind kid showing its parents its first painting, aren't you?

FLAXLEY: Not at all. Mandika, not only did you snag us an awesome hotel but you translated that teleport thing from Kazooian for us. If you hadn't been here to do that, we'd still be stuck in that bloody cave. Basically, we wouldn't even be here without you. And that's a fact.

(Mandika looked up him distrustfully for a moment then started to smile.)

MANDIKA: That doesn't make me feel any less scared, you know that right?

FLAXLEY: Well, there's nothing I can do about your fear other than tell you I'll protect you with my life, as I swore to do before your father. I just wanted you to know, you're appreciated.

(Mandika nodded.)

MANDIKA: That helps actually.

FLAXLEY: Good. So... if you get upset, don't sound off, talk to us, we care about you.

MANDIKA: Well... I'll try. For Derek's sake. He's the one we're here for right?

FLAXLEY: Spot on!

(Satisfied she was pacified; he then walked her back to the camp to join the others. As they arrived at the fireside, Flaxley paced around it to sit with Kritz and Mandika placed herself down at Lefiat's side.)

DEREK: All sorted?

MANDIKA: Yes, and Kritz?

(Kritz looked up from where she was rummaging in her bag, wearing a hateful scowl.)

MANDIKA: I apologise, I had no right to take my anger out on you, you're a better person than I..

(As everyone stared at her in amazed silence, she scoffed at her own words then continued.)

MANDIKA: Yeah right, you're not *better* than me, obviously, but you're okay!

FLAXLEY: Stop now, before you ruin it!

MANDIKA: Okay!

(Kritz shook her head.)

KRITZ: Wow, okay... apology accepted, but never call me a tart ever again!

MANDIKA: I'll try!

KRITZ: Seriously, I've let it slip a million times, call me it again...

(In no mood to tolerate another one of their arguments, Bonson rolled his eyes then spoke over her.)

BONSON: So, bird meat for dinner then is it, chaps?

(Looking somewhat peeved, Kritz glared at him and thrust her hands to her hips.)

KRITZ: Hey, I was talking!

BONSON: You never *stop* talking; one has to speak when one can with you around!

(Kritz glared at him for a moment then pulled some bird meat from her pack and started to chuckle.)

KRITZ: Fair enough, Bonson, you can insult me all you like, but just you remember who's dishing out the food!

(As she grinned at him arrogantly, his shoulders slumped and a crestfallen expression crossed his brow.)

BONSON: Oh god, *you're* cooking it?

KRITZ: Yes, you cheeky git, I am.

BONSON: Really? Do you have to? Only I think I'd rather chew on my own foot than eat your cooking again.

(Kritz furrowed her brow at him bitterly.)

KRITZ: Fine! You were warned! Half portions for you then.

BONSON: That's still one half too *many*, if you ask me.

KRITZ: Would you rather go with out then?

BONSON: Quite frankly, yes, I would.

(With that, they both started to laugh for a moment until Bonson furrowed his brow and glared coldly into her eyes.)

BONSON: Seriously.

(As Kritz ceased laughing and glared at him furiously, Bonson grinned innocently and scratched the back of his head.)

BONSON: What? Too far?

KRITZ: Yes!

BONSON: Fine. I'll behave.

(As Bonson looked away and grinned to himself, Kritz allowed herself a stifled chuckle then delved into her pack for the rest of the meat.

A short while later, when Kritz started to serve up the piping hot bird meat to her allies, an air of relief washed over the camp. They were all extremely hungry and the freshly cooked food was a joy to receive. At once, everyone's stress levels halved and they all settled down quietly around the fire to savour every last bite.

Once they'd all finished gnawing at their delicious meal, unwittingly supplied to them by Kajice, they all sat and held their bulging stomachs then sat silently watching as the sun disappeared from the sky. It was a truly peaceful moment after what had been a horribly chaotic day.

For well over an hour, not a word was spoken as everyone made the most of the opportunity to rest. Exhausted from the days exertions they all just sat and stared tiredly into the flames. Observing his weary comrades, Flaxley looked up at the moon and bit his lip. Deciding an early night was in order, he then proposed a good night's sleep. Receiving no objections, he looked to Derek and offered him a sympathetic smile. It would be another long night for Derek, keeping watch as his human allies caught up on their necessary hours of rest and he didn't envy him one bit.

Within five minutes of making the decision to call it a night, Flaxley and Derek finished erecting the canvas shelter that Daman had supplied them with then everyone settled down for the night. Being basically a roof with open sides, the shelter offered no protection from the biting wind whatsoever, but should it snow in the night, they'd be covered. After all they'd been through they were grateful for even such a minor luxury. And so, with the shelter erected and everyone laying down waiting, all that remained was for Derek to cast to his magic. Preparing to do just that, he checked his sleep magic supplies then looked to Flaxley.)

DEREK: Early night means early morning, right?

FLAXLEY: Absolutely.

MANDIKA: What? How early?

FLAXLEY: I say we rise when the sun rises.

DEREK: I was thinking the same.

MANDIKA: Then think again!

FLAXLEY: We'll get long enough, Mandika I assure you.

(Mandika pouted at him, the nestled her head into a pack to make herself comfortable.)

MANDIKA: We'd better.

(Flaxley gave her a sideways glance then looked to Derek.)

FLAXLEY: Anyway, goodnight all. And don't worry, Derek, it can't be far now!

DEREK: I agree. I get the feeling it can't be much further too!

(Bonson sighed.)

BONSON: Hopefully we can rescue Zanne without confronting Kajice. I mean Jacquit and Suzbit were bad enough but... the *queen* of all witches. I mean, can you imagine?

MANDIKA: I'm trying not to!

FLAXLEY: Well, we can worry about that once we get to Desha village! In the meantime, let's just a good night's sleep.

LEFIAT: Agreed. Night all.

(As a round of tired goodnight wishes rose into the air, Flaxley looked to Derek.)

FLAXLEY: When you're ready, Derek.

(As they lay there in the snow using their future clothes and normal attire as groundsheets to protect them from the cold, Derek proceeded to cast sleep magic on them all and they immediately dozed off. Dreading the lonely night ahead, Derek then sat himself down on his pack and sighed to himself. Hoping the task of keeping an eye out for danger would help him occupy his mind, he then upped again and started to pace up and down like a guard on sentry duty. Anything to take his mind off his beloved Zanne. For him, morning couldn't come too soon.)

(As dawn began to bring the first bright reflections of sun onto the snow, Derek stood over his allies feeling thoroughly dejected. All night he'd been torturing himself with thoughts of what might have been. How he wished he hadn't insisted on saying goodbye to his friends. If he'd simply waited with Zanne, rather than returning to Tifaeris, he might have been able to help her fight off Kajice and her minions. Had that been the case, Zanne would now be safe and his friends wouldn't now be risking their lives to save her. Such was his state of mind, he never once considered the fact that they might both have been captured had he stayed with her. All his mind would tell him was that he shouldn't have left her out there at the East Grange Mountains on her own, and seeing as he did, it was all his fault.

Riddled with guilt about it all, he looked to the fledgling sun and fought against his emotions as he approached the snoozing Lefiat. Putting on a brave face, he then proceeded to gently rock his shoulder to rouse him from his slumber.)

DEREK: Lefiat, it's morning!

(With his eyes tightly shut, Lefiat nestled his head into his pack and smiled knowingly.)

LEFIAT: Mandika, you're insatiable!

(He then reached his arms out to grab him, causing Derek to leap away in a panic.)

DEREK: Not even in jest!!!

(As his panicked cry echoed across the glacier, everyone in the party was awoken with a start. Reaching for his sword, Flaxley swiftly glanced at Derek with an urgent look upon his brow.)

FLAXLEY: Derek? What's wrong?

(Looking flustered, Derek pointed at Lefiat and whimpered.)

DEREK: Lefiat tried to grope me!

(Mandika sat bolt upright and glared at him.)

MANDIKA: He did what???

(Lefiat gaped uncontrollably and whimpered in shame.)

LEFIAT: I thought he was you, Mandika!

(Unsurprisingly, her royal highness wasn't impressed.)

MANDIKA: You confused me for a three foot tall alien???

LEFIAT: It's a lie!

MANDIKA: How could you?

FLAXLEY: Mandika, calm yourself, he was probably half asleep!

BONSON: And even if he wasn't, there *is* a certain resemblance!

(Much to Lefiat's relief, Mandika immediately switched the focus of her scorn to Bonson.)

MANDIKA: How dare you say I look like Derek? That's plain rude!

BONSON: Quite! Sorry, Derek.

MANDIKA: Hey!!!

DEREK: Enough! We'll say no more about it! Ever!

(As Bonson sat chuckling to himself, Mandika stuck her tongue out at him bitterly.)

MANDIKA: You're a horrible old man!

DEREK: I mean it, Bonson. Mention it again I'll break your legs!

(Bonson looked peeved and furrowed his brow at him.)

BONSON: Hey, I resent that. Why single *me* out? There's four *other* people here, all of whom could bring it up at any time.

DEREK: They *could*, but only you *would*!

(Bonson bit his lip then shrugged in acceptance.)

BONSON: Okay, good point.

(Determined not to let a bad mood fester among the group, Flaxley shook his head then climbed to his feet and immediately tried to calm them all.)

FLAXLEY: People, listen up.

(At once, all eyes turned to Flaxley.)

FLAXLEY: If Daman was right, Desha village is somewhere south of here. We've come a long way together. We can be proud of our efforts so far, *but...* let's not get carried away. (He nodded sternly.)

FLAXLEY: We need to stick together to complete the task. So no more arguing!

(He then stood tall to impose his impressive aura upon his comrades.)

FLAXLEY: Let's be united, shall we? United we're strong... divided... we'll fall.

DEREK: Agreed.

KRITZ: Absolutely.

(Sharing his sentiments, Lefiat nodded, Mandika smiled and Bonson rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: Fine. If you say so, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: Good. So no more complaining about being above this kind of thing and no more snide comments about people dressing like tarts or Lefiat fondling Derek...

(Much to his shock and dismay, he was then immediately rounded on by two furious colleagues.)

DEREK: What did I say about never mentioning it ever again???

KRITZ: Who are you calling a tart???

FLAXLEY: I didn't call you a tart, I was just saying...

KRITZ: That I dress like one???

FLAXLEY: No!

(Bonson grinned and Lefiat and Mandika watched on in amazement as Flaxley desperately tried to pacify his furious friends.)

KRITZ: You know better than anyone how I hate being called that!!!

DEREK: I was very clear about that, never mention it again, I said!!!

FLAXLEY: Look, Kritz...

DEREK: I never thought *you'd* be the one to bring it up again!!!

KRITZ: I thought you liked the way I dress...

FLAXLEY: Kritz, darling...

(Derek scowled.)

DEREK: Don't ignore me, Flaxley!!!

(Flaxley sighed in frustration and looked at Derek.)

FLAXLEY: I can only deal with one issue at a time, Derek...

(Derek read his mind and scoffed angrily.)

DEREK: You're only trying to pacify her first because you think you won't get any sex if you don't!

KRITZ: He what???

DEREK: I read his mind!!!

KRITZ: Is that all I am to you, Flaxley? Something to shag?

DEREK: Something to shag when he's not bringing up things I expressly told everyone never to mention ever again, you mean?

(Sick to the back teeth of their complaining, Flaxley exploded. With his face burning red with rage, he bellowed at the two angry faces before him.)

FLAXLEY: For fuck sake, you two!!!

(He glared at Kritz.)

FLAXLEY: Of course I have to pacify you first, you stupid cow. You're a typical woman!

As long as you've got the hump, I won't get any sex *or* any dinner come to that. In fact you'll bend over backwards to make my life a misery until I've apologised ten thousand times for it. And the stupid thing is, I didn't even do anything to apologise *for*!!!

(While Kritz gaped at him in utter astonishment, he glared at Derek.)

FLAXLEY: As for you, I was only trying to raise morale, you pillock. There was no need to go off on one. That's the same stupid crap I'd expect from one of those three!!!

(He pointed at Bonson, Lefiat and Mandika then threw his arms up in defeat.)

FLAXLEY: Wankers.

(He then kicked his bag and growled.)

FLAXLEY: I came all this way out of the goodness of my heart and I'm expected to baby-sit a group of whining ingrates with all the fighting talent of a badger's left gonad. Do I complain? Do I hell? Then I make one slip of the tongue and I get rounded on like I'm the world's biggest shit-stain.

(Feeling extremely guilty about his outburst, Derek hung his head.)

DEREK: Sorry, Flaxley. I was out of order. I'm stressed about Zanne but that's no excuse.

(Flaxley looked at him coldly for a moment then sighed.)

FLAXLEY: It's fine. Sorry I brought up that thing with Lefiat.

DEREK: It's fine, there's no excuse for how I reacted.

(Not quite ready to forgive him just yet, Kritz pouted at him sorrowfully.)

KRITZ: But... why did you call me a tart?

FLAXLEY: I didn't! I told nobody to make snide comments about it. You know damn well I love how you dress.

(Accepting his words, she scratched behind her ear apologetically.)

KRITZ: My bad. Sorry, darling.

FLAXLEY: Yes, you should be.

KRITZ: I'll make it up to you.

(He puffed out, still clearly not accepting her apology.)

FLAXLEY: Will you now?

KRITZ: Yes! In ways you can't even imagine. I'm very flexible.

(At this point, something in his head told him this would be a good time to let go of his anger and offer her a warm smile.)

FLAXLEY: I'll look forward to it.

(She giggled and played with her hair.)

KRITZ: So will I.

(Just then, Bonson chirped in with his opinion and completely ruined the conciliatory atmosphere.)

BONSON: As one of the whining ingrates with all the fighting talent of a badger's gonad, I'd just like to say thanks for the vote of confidence. As far as pep talks go that was quite exceptional, Flaxley.

KRITZ: In his defence, Bonson, you *do* have no fighting talent and you *are* a whining ingrate.

DEREK: It's true.

(Bonson glared at them coldly for a moment then shrugged.)

BONSON: Who cares, I'm wise.

(Realising he had to restore morale quickly in light of his rant, Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: And that wisdom is why we want you here, Bonson.

BONSON: Normally I'd tell you not to patronise me, Flaxley, but on this occasion I'll pretend it was sincere and go with it.

FLAXLEY: It *was* sincere. We need your brains. Just like we need Mandika and Lefiat for their special talents.

(Flaxley looked away and grimaced hoping against hope that nobody would ask the unanswerable question. Unfortunately, Bonson was in the party.)

BONSON: What special talents?

(Luckily for the cringing Flaxley, he was a quick thinker.)

FLAXLEY: Oh, they know what they are.

BONSON: Good thing *they* do because I'll be buggered if anyone else does.

(Convinced Flaxley was referring to the fact he was a knight, Lefiat accepted his words and beamed.)

LEFIAT: I know what he means.

(Amazingly, Mandika felt the same way.)

MANDIKA: Yeah, so do I.

(She beamed, delighted Flaxley had finally acknowledged that her general magnificence was an asset to the group. Unfortunately for her, however, Derek it seemed, wasn't the only mind reader.)

BONSON: You think your special talent is being royal, don't you?

MANDIKA: Excuse me?

BONSON: You do realise the only person who thinks you're magnificent is you, don't you? (Mandika scoffed.)

MANDIKA: You mean me, my father and several million loyal subjects. And we can't all be wrong.

BONSON: Actually...

FLAXLEY: That's enough from you, Bonson. She's knows what her qualities are so stop trying to put her down.

BONSON: I'm only saying...

FLAXLEY: Well don't or I'll butcher you horribly here and now.

BONSON: Fine. Let her delude herself.

(He folded his arms and looked away bitterly.)

FLAXLEY: Right, let's get going. The sooner this is over the sooner we can all get home and have our way through several flagons of ale. We deserve it.

(With that, Bonson leapt to his feet and started to pack his bag in a blind rush.)

BONSON: Get a move on you lot!!!

(As everyone chuckled, Kritz turned to Flaxley.)

KRITZ: When we get home, ale is the last thing you'll be thinking of.

FLAXLEY: It is?

KRITZ: Well, when I say I'm flexible, I mean...

(She propped herself up on tiptoes and whispered in his ear.)

FLAXLEY: Holy cucumbers of the lost continent!!!

(He yelled out with extreme urgency.)

FLAXLEY: Time's wasting, hurry up!!!

(He then proceeded to join Bonson in trying to set a new world record for packing a bag.)

(Within ten minutes of Flaxley barking the order to hurry up, the camp was packed away and they'd set off in a southerly direction once again. They'd even managed to grab a brief wash in that time, once again courtesy of Kritz's magic. Naturally, Mandika and Kritz weren't happy about having to rush doing each other's hair but in spite of their complaints, spirits in the group were higher than they'd been in a long while. Flaxley's pep talks to Mandika and Bonson the day before had most definitely had a profound effect on them. Now, despite having little heart for a battle, they at least felt they had a role within the group.

As they headed onwards determinedly through the snow, Mandika once again perched squarely on Lefiat's back, Bonson mused skywards and mumbled thoughtfully to himself.)

BONSON: I wonder if aliens carry valuables. If they do, Zanne should reward me for my efforts I reckon. I mean, the least she can do is buy me a pint.

(Having heard his musing, Derek looked to him and smiled.)

DEREK: She'll reward you as best she can, Bonson, don't worry! All of you, in fact.

FLAXLEY: I didn't come here for reward, Derek.

(With extreme urgency, Kritz swiftly gagged his mouth with her hand.)

KRITZ: Don't you ever learn, Flaxley? If she feels like rewarding us, we'd be rude to say no!

BONSON: 'Stupid' is the word you're looking for ma'am!

KRITZ: Yeah, that too!

(Lefiat looked nervous and bit his lip.)

LEFIAT: Um... Flaxley... speaking of rescuing Zanne, how *will* we defeat Kajice?

(With Kritz's hand over his mouth still, Flaxley could only offer him an incoherent, muffled, reply.)

FLAXLEY: Tiff if...

KRITZ: Oh. Sorry, darling.

(She removed her hand from his mouth then glanced away innocently.)

FLAXLEY: Thank you! Thing is, Lefiat... like Bonson said last night, ideally, we want to rescue Zanne and escape before Kajice even notices. If we can, we'll avoid her!

LEFIAT: So, essentially, this is a rescue mission then.

(At once, he received five unimpressed glances accompanied by an extremely slow round of applause.)

LEFIAT: What? I didn't know! Pick on Lefiat day again, I see!

FLAXLEY: We're only joking, my friend!

BONSON: Speak for yourself!

FLAXLEY: Bonson!

BONSON: What? I was joking! Or aren't *I* allowed to make jokes anymore?

LEFIAT: But all *your* jokes are at *my* expense, Bonson!

BONSON: Then you get half the credit!

(Lefiat smiled.)

LEFIAT: I hadn't thought of it like that. Cheers, Bonson!

(The facetious old man grinned to himself.)

BONSON: You're very welcome!

FLAXLEY: Anyway, Lefiat, if you meant to ask how we'd go about fighting Kajice if it can't be avoided, then, well... we'll do what we always do. Fight our natural fight. We'll simply fight her the only way we know how.

BONSON: In your case, Lefiat, badly.

LEFIAT: Hey!

BONSON: Half the credit, remember?

LEFIAT: Oh yeah. Cool.

(Within the hour, the sun had risen high in the sky and the allies had starting making steady progress. With spirits remaining high, they chatted and laughed together showing no sign of trepidation about what lay ahead, a fact not unnoticed by a horrified Kajice. Having sat down in her darkened room, she'd gazed into her crystal ball and her eyes had immediately bulged in horror. Staring agape into the crystal ball, her nostrils flared and her perfect lips quivered in disbelief at the image portrayed before her.)

KAJICE: They're alive???

(She ran her fingers through her hair in distress then her face screwed up with pure anger.)

KAJICE: Damn them to the pits of the deepest crevice! This time I will show no mercy!!!

(She drew a deep breath then growled at the crystal ball.)

KAJICE: Unseen terror of the mountains, hear my command, outsiders roam among us...

(She then stood up and screamed into the crystal ball, her eyes filling with rage.)

KAJICE: Haru, I demand your attendance! Remove these filthy trespassers... now!!!

(With that, she pointed her staff at the ball once again. As always, electricity immediately streamed violently from the tip and thudded into the crystal. As she snarled, forcing out the powerful current with all the energy she could muster, a freak wind whooshed through the room, billowing out her long golden hair. Moments later, the electricity faded to nothing and she lowered her arm again. Adopting a relaxed stance, she then flicked back her hair and minced towards the door.)

KAJICE: Right, that nipped that nonsense in the bud. They won't be getting past Haru, that's for sure. Now, breakfast...

(With that, she slipped through the door then slammed it shut behind her.)

(Oblivious to the fact that Kajice had called forth another summon, the party of six continued soldiering on through the snow, barely challenged by the conditions. Unlike the previous day, the sun felt warm and the wind was light, which made the trek a great deal easier. Carrying Mandika and two packs, however, Lefiat could be forgiven for not noticing the difference.)

LEFIAT: Can't you walk just some off the way?

(Not about to entertain the idea, even for a moment, Mandika put her sweetest voice on.)

MANDIKA: But darling, I've only got little feet, they'll get sore!

LEFIAT: Well... okay!

(Allowing herself a smirk, she then whispered romantically in his ear.)

MANDIKA: Thank you, handsome!

(Lefiat looked extremely miffed.)

LEFIAT: Hey! What are you thanking Flaxley for? *I'm* the one carrying you!!

MANDIKA: I was talking about *you*, numb nuts.

LEFIAT: Eh?

(He then started to laugh.)

LEFIAT: Handsome? Me? You're a card, Mandika.

(Up ahead of Mandika and Lefiat, Flaxley and Kritz led the way, passing the time with a deep and meaningful conversation.)

KRITZ: Sorry, but that makes no sense to me. You already know I flatly refuse to wear underwear unless I absolutely have to.

FLAXLEY: I know that, my love. But...

(He bit his lip and looked to the sky.)

FLAXLEY: How do I explain it? There something sexy about not knowing if a woman has any underwear on or not. And in that skirt, I would have no way of knowing if you did or you didn't. It's quite the turn on.

KRITZ: I still don't get it. I mean, you know for a *fact* that if I'm wearing a skirt, I'm not wearing any underwear. So, you already *know* that I'm not. Why fantasise that I might be?

FLAXLEY: Kritz, I'm talking about fantasy. Leaving such a thing to a man's imagination can be just as sexy as getting your baps out. Are you naked under that skirt or not, just thinking about it is as sexy as hell.

(Kritz glanced at him for a moment then scratched her head.)

KRITZ: But isn't it sexier just *knowing* I'm *not* wearing any underwear? That my bare bum cheeks are touching the leather? That you can run your hand up my thigh and there's nothing stopping you touching me where only *you're* allowed to?

(Flaxley drooled for a moment then glanced away.)

FLAXLEY: It is when you put it like *that*, yes.

KRITZ: See? It's like...

(Just then, the ground started to shake and a heavy thudding sound rose up from up ahead of them.)

FLAXLEY: What the hell is that?

(Immediately, he drew his sword and scanned the snow with his eyes when he spotted giant footprints appearing in the snow before them.)

FLAXLEY: Footprints? On their own??? And they're coming right at us!!!

KRITZ: What? How?

(Before he could answer there was a loud roar and he was battered to the ground by a powerful blow to his torso. Reacting swiftly, Kritz stooped to help him up again then yelled to the others.)

KRITZ: Look out, guys!!!

(Unfortunately, her warning came too late and Derek too was battered to the ground by a mysterious, invisible impact.)

KRITZ: Shit!

(Looking extremely urgent, Flaxley dusted himself down then raced to his comrades as they pulled Derek back to his feet.)

FLAXLEY: Careful, chaps.

DEREK: What the hell *was* that? It hurt!

KRITZ: I don't know; we just saw giant footprints coming at us, then...

(In that moment, the ground-shaking thudding grew louder once again.)

FLAXLEY: Here it comes again, be on your guard, everyone!!!

BONSON: Where? I can't see anything!

KRITZ: It's invisible!!!

BONSON: Oh, that helps!

KRITZ: Just keep your eyes open for giant incoming footprints!

(Cramped tight together in a bunch, they all glanced about the glacier urgently in the direction from which the thud was generating, keeping a sharp eye out for any impressions appearing in the snow.)

FLAXLEY: Where are you, you low down filthy scumbag?

LEFIAT: I'm right here, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: Not you!

BONSON: He meant the other low down, filthy scumbag!

LEFIAT: Oh, my mistake!

(Spotting fresh footprints appearing a mere ten feet in front of them, Kritz screeched.)

KRITZ: Move!!!

(Reacting instinctively, Flaxley, Derek and Kritz dived to one side, Kritz dragging Bonson and Lefiat to the ground with her. As the footprints thundered through the spot where they'd been standing, Kritz looked to them and drew a sigh of relief.)

KRITZ: Close!

(With that, everyone swiftly leapt back to their feet. Having been on Lefiat's back when she dragged him down, Mandika was not amused.)

MANDIKA: What did you do that for, Kritz?

KRITZ: It was coming right at us!

MANDIKA: I'll come right at you in a minute! You almost messed up my hair!

KRITZ: I'd *never* do that on purpose!!!

(Bonson snarled.)

BONSON: Shut up and concentrate, will you?

FLAXLEY: Quite! If we focus hard enough, there's no reason we can't spot the footprints approaching *before* they're almost upon us.

BONSON: Exactly! And when we do, I'll try firing inferno magic at... whatever it is!

DEREK: Good idea, I'll help you with that, Bonson.

FLAXLEY: Right. And should you miss, I'll swipe at it with my sword!

(As they stood together in a group, poised and listening out for the direction of the thudding, the ground started to rumble once again.)

LEFIAT: There!!! It's coming from that way!

(At once, everyone swung to face the noise then Lefiat, Kritz and Mandika raced back out of harms way. Left directly in the path of the incoming foe Derek and Bonson nodded to one another then focussed hard on the snow in front of them. Standing a few feet behind them with his sword poised, Flaxley snarled determinedly.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, get ready, chaps!

(Staring hard at the ground, Derek spotted some huge footprints appearing in view fifty metres away and sunk into a battle stance.)

DEREK: Okay, it's coming. Fire when I give the signal, okay?

BONSON: The signal being?

DEREK: Me shouting "fire".

BONSON: Right.

(He then sighed in bewilderment.)

BONSON: I volunteered for this! What was I thinking?

(Nervously they both stared hard at the ground, watching as the footprints closed in on them rapidly. Then, when the footprints were only thirty feet away, Derek yelled out.)

DEREK: Fire!!!

(Simultaneously they both yelled 'inferno' and flicked their wrists, sending fireballs rampaging forth across the glacier, Derek's a mere three feet off the ground. Much to their dismay however, their fireballs, rampaged over the footprints and just continued going until they thudded into an incline a few hundred feet away.)

BONSON: Now what???

(Realising the invisible foe was still heading for them, Derek looked to him and bellowed desperately.)

DEREK: Dive for cover!

(With that, they attempted to leap well out of the way of the marauding footprints. Unfortunately, however, Bonson didn't make it and was struck violently to the ground. Furious at seeing his aged friend batted aside so viciously, Flaxley bellowed.)

FLAXLEY: Bastard!!!

(With that, he charged towards the advancing footprints and unleashed a flurry of violent sword swings. Having swiped at air several times, he was then knocked off his feet and propelled backwards into a snowy bank ten feet from where he'd been standing. At once, the others rushed to his aid, Bonson limping and holding his stomach.)

KRITZ: Are you okay?

FLAXLEY: I'm fine! Where is it?

KRITZ: It's gone for now.

(She helped him to his feet then glanced around at her comrades.)

KRITZ: We need to come up with another plan before it comes back, guys.

FLAXLEY: Damn right we do.

DEREK: Well, magic doesn't work; we fired right over the footprints, Flaxley. It was as if there was nothing there.

FLAXLEY: Same with my sword! If there was something there to be hit, I would have hit it, I'm certain of that.

MANDIKA: You can't beat that, it's impossible!

BONSON: That's it, Mandika, stay positive!

FLAXLEY: You okay there, Bonson? You looked a little worse for wear.

BONSON: Never mind *me*! I'm just a little winded, that's all. What are we to do about this invisible, un-hittable, violent assailant?

(Flaxley looked worried.)

FLAXLEY: I don't have a clue!

(In worried silence they all glanced around the glacier uneasily, when Kritz looked enlightened.)

KRITZ: Mandika? Do you have much make-up?

MANDIKA: Yes, and it's mine. Use your own cheap rubbish.

FLAXLEY: Kritz, this is no time for vanity!

KRITZ: Idiot! What I'm saying is, that creature is invisible, right?

FLAXLEY: Yes, and?

KRITZ: Well it must have form, we just can't see it. If we used our make-up to paint it however...

MANDIKA: Paint it? I didn't bring *that* much make-up! What a stupid suggestion.

KRITZ: Well, have you got a better one?

FLAXLEY: Actually, it *was* a good idea in theory...

(Just then, the thudding echoed across the glacier once again, as the invisible fiend returned for yet another sortie.)

FLAXLEY: Prepare yourselves!!!

(Immediately, everyone turned to face the noise and braced themselves.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, I can see footprints, get ready to dive, chaps.

(With that, everyone ducked down and bounced on the balls of their feet and stared hard at the snow.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, any moment now... now!!!

(Mercifully, on this occasion, as the roaring assailant charged through them, they all managed to take evasive action. Diving and scattering out of harms way, they all avoided a painful blow and the footprints raced off out of sight again. Looking mightily relieved, they all took a few deep breaths, then upped and assembled in a group again.)

LEFIAT: This is ridiculous; we can't keep this up all day!

FLAXLEY: You're right, let's try the make-up thing then, anything's worth a try!

BONSON: Even that?

MANDIKA: It'll never work, Flaxley. How the hell do you expect to put the make up on it, for a start?

FLAXLEY: By throwing it at it!

BONSON: Flaxley, we couldn't even hit it when we threw fireballs at it. How are you expecting to be any more successful by throwing lipstick at the bloody thing?

MANDIKA: More specifically, *Kritz's* lipstick.

KRITZ: What?

MANDIKA: I'm not wasting mine, it was expensive.

FLAXLEY: I wasn't going to throw lipstick at it!

(He looked to Kritz.)

FLAXLEY: Was I?

KRITZ: No, I was thinking more along the lines of liquid foundation.

FLAXLEY: Right... I'll take your word for that.

(He nodded sternly then held his hand out to her.)

FLAXLEY: Pass me this liquid thingy of yours, my love, let's get this show on the road.

(Kritz shrugged at him.)

KRITZ: I can't. I don't need foundation, my skin's naturally flawless. Mandika has some though.

(Mandika glared at her hatefully.)

MANDIKA: You bitch!

KRITZ: What? I'm just saying.

FLAXLEY: Mandika, do you have some or don't you?

(Mandika growled at him bitterly.)

MANDIKA: Maybe...

(She then glanced away arrogantly.)

MANDIKA: Not that I need it.

FLAXLEY: Good, then give it to *me* so I can throw it over the creature.

(Mandika pouted.)

MANDIKA: But I need it!

(She then shuddered and tried to qualify her comment.)

MANDIKA: I mean, it was a present. I don't wear it or anything.

(She snarled.)

MANDIKA: And anyway, it's only a tiny bottle, there's certainly not enough to paint a creature with it! This plan will never work!

FLAXLEY: Maybe not but we're desperate and quite frankly, we don't have a better idea.

(Just then, Derek stepped forward looking thoughtful.)

DEREK: We do actually!

FLAXLEY: We do?

DEREK: Yes. If I fire lethargy magic in the air, it'll cover everything nearby with magic dust, that should make it visible. I won't be as effective as paint, obviously, but it'll create an outline of the creature at the very *least*. And it won't miss.

FLAXLEY: But, we'll have lethargy magic cast on us if you do that.

DEREK: Yes, but I can use a different magic to dispel that straight afterwards!

(Flaxley pondered the idea for a moment then nodded.)

DEREK: Surely it's worth a try!

FLAXLEY: I agree. Okay, Derek, let's give *that* a go!

(Just then, the ground started to shake again and a roar rose up in the distance. At once, they

all stared in the direction of the noise and everyone except Derek prepared to evade the attack. Keeping a sharp eye out for footprints, Derek focussed hard on the ground, ready to cast his magic.)

FLAXLEY: Good luck, Derek!

DEREK: Shouldn't need luck, Flaxley! Nothing can avoid lethargy dust.

(As the footprints came into view, Derek nodded to himself then raised his arm in the air. Holding his focus, he watched on until he was certain the creature was in range, then bellowed out at the top of his lungs.)

DEREK: Lethargy!!!

(At once, a blinding flash filled the sky and particles of dust rained down all around.

Shielding his eyes from the brightness, Flaxley squinted at the snow through his fingers then yelled out in horror.)

FLAXLEY: Footprints!!! Dive!!!

(Sure enough, the footprints were upon them. Unfortunately, however, being under the influence of the lethargy magic, diving out of the way was an almost impossible task.)

BONSON: I can hardly move!

MANDIKA: Nor can I!

(As a result of their involuntary inaction, the invisible fiend was able to flatten them all like bowling pins as it charged through them. Bodies went everywhere and they all landed scattered about on the snow in varying uncomfortable positions.)

KRITZ: Ouch!

LEFIAT: That bloody hurt!

(Bonson growled bitterly.)

BONSON: I think it's safe to say that, unlike us, it's immune to lethargy magic.

MANDIKA: Looks that way.

DEREK: Just a minute, chaps!

(Grimacing, Derek strained every sinew to point his hand at himself. Once he'd finally managed the task, he puffed out with exhaustion then cast the spell to remove the lethargy magic on himself. Back to his normal spritely self again, he then leapt to his feet and cast it on his prostrate allies. At once, they all staggered to their feet and gathered around him.)

FLAXLEY: Thanks, Derek.

DEREK: You're welcome. Now let's just hope it worked!

(With that, they all glanced about the glacier once again as they awaited its next attack. This time, however, rather than waiting with fear in their eyes, they were waiting with hope in their hearts.)

FLAXLEY: If the plan worked, keep an eye out for a weak looking area then attack it with everything you've got.

(Nodding to Flaxley's words, they all continued to scan the snowy lands with their eyes for the next thirty seconds or so, when the creature's foul roar echoed across the sky once more. At once, they all stared in the direction of the roar, desperately hoping that Derek's plan had been successful. Standing there with their fingers crossed, they all craned their necks forth when much to their astonishment, a cylindrical cluster of dust particles came into view over the snowy incline before them.)

MANDIKA: I can see something, guys!

BONSON: Me too. Not sure what though.

(Flaxley bit his lip and mused to himself.)

FLAXLEY: Looks like the tip of a giant battle club to me.

(As they continued to watch the creature race over the incline, it soon became quite clear that the dust particles *were* indeed forming the shape of a huge club.)

FLAXLEY: Ah, so that's its weapon! Nice work, Derek!

DEREK: Thanks, Flaxley!

(Lefiat bit his lip nervously.)

LEFIAT: That's a huge club! Can you imagine how powerful this thing must be?

(Set on edge by Lefiat's words, everyone shared a trouble glance then stared ahead again.)

FLAXLEY: Don't be intimidated, chaps! If it can be hit, it can be killed, no matter how strong it is.

(Absorbing Flaxley's words, they nodded nervously and watched on as the creature slowly appeared into view over the ridge. First, the entire length of the massive club appeared, followed by a puny, twig like arm that didn't look anywhere near big enough to wield it. As if that wasn't a bewildering enough sight, the feeble looking arm then turned out to be attached to a thin elongated body, reminiscent of a chipolata.)

BONSON: What in the world is that?

(Struck dumb, they continued to watch on in amazement as the tiny stick like creature's feet came into view. At once, their jaws dropped. The creature was only two feet tall and yet had feet a hundred times the size of Flaxley's. To put it mildly, it looked ridiculous.)

DEREK: It's smaller than me!

BONSON: Those feet are ridiculous!

KRITZ: It looks like a sausage! Except with a giant club. It's a giant-club wielding sausage!

BONSON: With ridiculous feet!

KRITZ: Yeah!

MANDIKA: No, wonder the magic didn't work! You fired it over its head!

FLAXLEY: Yes, then I lashed my sword over its head straight after!

(With nothing but utter disdain for their pretentious, incoming foe, they all continued to watch it approach with scornful looks on their faces.)

LEFIAT: What a fake!

(Completely unaware of its visibility the odd ball creature charged towards them again, putting a cone to its mouth to create a fake roar.)

BONSON: Well that's just pathetic!

KRITZ: I know, right? I'm actually embarrassed for it.

(Onward it charged, gathering speed as it made its way towards them. Totally unimpressed, they all just stood there and watched it approach with disgust, not even bothering to adopt a fighting stance. Eager to dish out another battering, as the creature drew near it raised its club high, then suddenly skidded to a halt about six feet before them. A cold silence then descended as it scanned the unimpressed faces staring back at it. Continuing to hold the club aloft in a tiny, trembling hand, it looked silently across their scornful eyes for a good few moments then shuddered all over and spoke up in a small, nerdy voice.)

HARU: Um... you can see me, can't you?

(At once, they all nodded in utter contempt. Well and truly rumbled, the bizarre being said nothing and glanced to its left before slowly starting to sidle away. Looking terrified, it then screamed for dear life and ran away, dropping the club as it fled. Watching it go, Derek bit his lip and shrugged.)

DEREK: That was different, I suppose.

(Nodding in agreement, they all watched as it charged over the ridge in front of them then disappeared.)

FLAXLEY: Right... that's that then. Might as well get going.

DEREK: Indeed!

KRITZ: Let's go then!

(Having seen Haru's failure via her crystal ball, Kajice was livid.)

KAJICE: How do you fools keep surviving???

(She hung her head in defeat.)

KAJICE: So, you've almost made it here to Desha village. Kudos, you mortal nuisances. My crystal ball can only scan the icy lands beyond this town and once you get here I won't be able to trace you. You've done well. I underestimated you... I won't make that mistake again.

(With that, she paced over to the door, yanked it open and yelled.)

KAJICE: You, guard, get over here.

(As an armour clad guard approached her from the corridor outside the room, she stared hard into his eyes and issued him an order.)

KAJICE: Spread the word, I want *everyone* on sentry duty until further notice. I need everyone on high alert. Tell them to defend this castle with their lives. When you've done that I want *you* to take some men down into the village. There's soon to be strangers in town and I need you to find them.

(Her voice then slowed dramatically.)

KAJICE: And when you do... come and get me. I'm going to enjoy making them suffer for this indignity. Nobody dares challenge me and lives, and I mean nobody.

(Back out in the white wilderness at this time, nursing several shiny new bruises and wounds from club attacks, the six intrepid travellers were already back on the march. Determined to make good progress while the weather was still bearable, they'd simply brushed the snow off of themselves and headed off towards the incline over which Haru had fled. Unfortunately, for Lefiat, this meant carrying Mandika again. As the rest of his party headed forth up the incline with ease, he staggered behind slowly, feeling thoroughly miserable.)

LEFIAT: Please Mandika, I'm aching all over. That weird sausage monster battered me good and proper. Please walk!

MANDIKA: I got battered too, don't forget. And what about my feet? You do love me don't you?

(He sighed.)

LEFIAT: Fine, yeah, I understand!

(Resigned to struggling on under the weight of Mandika and both their packs, he hung his head in defeat. Getting ever more exhausted with every step as he struggled against the deep snow and the gradient, he wasn't sure how much longer he could continue before his legs gave way completely. Wallowing in self pity, he sighed to himself and mumbled under his breath.)

LEFIAT: I'll probably die. And I bet these bastards will just bury me in the snow then bugger off. I hate being me.

(Just then, Flaxley called out excitedly from up ahead of him. He'd reached the top of the incline and could barely hide his delight.)

FLAXLEY: Chaps! We're here!!!

(Feeling a world of relief, Lefiat immediately gained a second wind and somehow found the energy to run to top of the slope. As soon as he reached Flaxley's side however, his legs gave up on him and he collapsed onto the snow. Managing to land on her own two feet as he fell, Mandika bellowed at him angrily.)

MANDIKA: Careful, you pillock! You nearly dropped me!

FLAXLEY: Never mind that, look!

(He then pointed ahead of himself and beamed.)

BONSON: Fantastic!

MANDIKA: Awesome!

(Before them was a sharp downhill slope, at the bottom of which lay a beautiful green village, devoid of a single snow drop. Overlooking the village stood a tall castle to their left. Bizarrely, the snow simply stopped some two hundred yards from the edge of the village, almost as if winter ended and summer began in that very spot.)

KRITZ: It looks lovely down there.

(Glancing beyond the sunlit village to where the coastline was surrounded by huge storms, just as north Skiro had been, Bonson sucked his teeth.)

BONSON: Those storms don't look so lovely though.

KRITZ: Well no, of course not.

(Staring down into the settlement, thoroughly taken in by the sight of two fishing boats nestled in the harbour and the hundreds of little wooden homes that were dotted all around the quaint looking village, Flaxley exhaled.)

FLAXLEY: You know, without that grim looking castle and those ferocious storms, that could be any ordinary village, anywhere in the world. It's just... pleasant.

MANDIKA: It really is.

(Captivated by the scene below them and somewhat relieved to have finally reached their destination, they all allowed themselves a moment to absorb the sight before them.)

KRITZ: So, this is Desha village, huh?

DEREK: It's beautiful!

FLAXLEY: Yes, and I think it's safe to say Kajice definitely lives here!

LEFIAT: What makes you say that?

FLAXLEY: The snow just stops at the border. The place is enchanted, you can see it!

BONSON: Yes, there's definitely something magical going on here. Kajice must be very powerful.

DEREK: Then *we* must be very careful!

(Kritz nodded.)

KRITZ: Speaking of which. Come on Derek, let's get Zanne back!

(With that, she started to walk off down the hill.)

KRITZ: Come on!

(Sharing her sentiments entirely, Flaxley, Bonson and Derek proceeded to follow and Mandika climbed back on Lefiat again.)

MANDIKA: Right. Now be careful!

LEFIAT: Aint I always?

(Then, they too, trotted off towards the serenity of Desha village.)

BONSON: We'll have to find shelter when we get there, you know, somewhere to put a plan together!

FLAXLEY: Good idea, Bonson!

(He then turned around and called out to Lefiat.)

FLAXLEY: Keep up, Lefiat?

LEFIAT: Coming, Flaxley!

(With that, he started to run and much to nobody's surprise, tripped over his own foot, sending Mandika flying over his head, landing face first in the snow.)

LEFIAT: Sorry, sorry!

(Pulling her head out of the snow, she twisted to face him then propped herself up and growled at him.)

MANDIKA: You complete idiot!

(Staggering to his feet, Lefiat pouted.)

LEFIAT: That's not nice! It was an accident.

(Looking furious, she then clambered to her feet and immediately climbed back on him wearing a belittling scowl. She then proceeded to moan and complain in his ear all the way

down the hill.)

MANDIKA: My father always said you weren't good enough for me! I should have listened, but no. Time after time I defended you and what do I get in return? Thrown face first into the snow. Honestly, I sometimes wonder why I bother. You know, I could have gone out with anyone, but who did I pick? That's right...

(Much to Lefiat's relief, after he'd endured two solid minutes of nagging, Flaxley stopped marching and called everyone to gather around him, forcing Mandika to be quiet and listen to him. Having thought she'd never stop complaining, he could barely hide his delight. They'd reached the point where the snow ended and the greenery began, two hundred yards from the edge of town. Knowing all too well that being spotted before they reached the village might well end in disaster, Flaxley was eager to alert them to the potential danger ahead.)

FLAXLEY: Right chaps, listen. We know nothing about this place. It might just be an ordinary village enslaved by Kajice, but for all we know the villagers could *all* be Kajice's minions. Therefore, we can't risk being seen by anybody.

(He then pointed towards the village.)

FLAXLEY: See that red house?

(They all looked towards the small dwelling he was pointing to.)

KRITZ: The one next to the break in the fence?

FLAXLEY: That's it. Well, that's where we're going to head. Keep your heads down and line up against the side of house. Got it?

BONSON: Are we going to run, Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: Yes, we are.

BONSON: Bugger, thought so.

FLAXLEY: You're going to run too, Mandika. We can't have you drawing attention to us if Lefiat falls over again.

MANDIKA: But he's quite capable of falling over without *my* help!

LEFIAT: It's true, I fall over a *lot*.

FLAXLEY: Don't argue with me, guys. Let's just do this properly, okay.

MANDIKA: Yeah, okay.

(She slid from Lefiat's back then gave him a sideways glance.)

MANDIKA: You're still carrying my bag though.

LEFIAT: Fine.

FLAXLEY: Right, fair enough. Now come on. Stay low and hurry. Go.

(With that, he ducked down and charged for the gap in the small wooden fence on the edge of town. Following his example, Kritz and Derek immediately raced after him. Sharing a despondent glance, Lefiat, Mandika and Bonson then hurried after them.)

When Flaxley, Kritz and Derek reached the gap in the fence a short while later, they darted through it then threw their backs against the side of the red house. Checking nobody saw them, they all nodded positively then looked to where an exhausted Bonson, a dainty Mandika and the hapless Lefiat raced to catch up.)

FLAXLEY: How anyone can run that slowly is beyond me.

(Stood in between Flaxley and Derek, Kritz smiled and gestured to Mandika.)

KRITZ: Mandika looks so cute when she runs.

DEREK: She runs like a penguin!

KRITZ: A penguin?

DEREK: Her hands poke out her the side and she doesn't move her arms.

(Kritz looked stunned.)

KRITZ: Oh my god, you're right.

(She looked at Flaxley.)

KRITZ: Look, Mandika runs like a penguin.

(Flaxley just shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: No, right now, she's helping Lefiat up. *He* runs like gangly weakling with jelly for feet.

(Kritz looked for herself and sighed.)

KRITZ: He's not an athletic man by any means, is he?

FLAXLEY: That's putting it mildly, my love.

(Once the slow and exhausted trio finally caught up, they pressed their backs against the wall and gasped for breath.)

FLAXLEY: Glad you could make it. My god you three are slow.

BONSON: Don't be like that Flaxley, I'm sixty years old.

MANDIKA: And I'm not a fast runner, never have been.

LEFIAT: I'm just plain useless at everything.

DEREK: Anyway, you're here now. So what's next?

(Flaxley leant forward and glanced left and right along the wall.)

FLAXLEY: Well, for now we need to find somewhere to hide out of sight for a while.

(Just then, an unwashed, rotten-smelling villager wearing a leather hat that followed the contours of his head, trotted around the corner of the house pushing a wheelbarrow. Looking pleased with himself, he beamed through yellow teeth and spoke up in a dopy voice.)

VILLAGER: I knew I saw people running into town. Been having fun in the snow have we?

(He then threw his head in Mandika's direction and beamed.)

VILLAGER: You're not from round here, I can tell!

(She leant away from him and clung onto Lefiat for dear life.)

MANDIKA: A peasant! Get it away from me!

(Alarmed that they'd been spotted, Flaxley stepped away from the wall and quickly attempted to calm the situation.)

FLAXLEY: Actually, we *are* from around here, so no need to panic, just go home and forget you ever saw us.

(The villager scoffed with amusement.)

VILLAGER: You're not from around here, I can tell. If you were, you'd be dead. Kajice killed all the villagers.

(He sighed.)

VILLAGER: Except me. She said killing me would be doing humanity a favour, so she let me go. Not quite sure what she meant by that really.

(He then shrugged.)

VILLAGER: Anyway, you're not local. The only locals are me, Kajice and several hundred of those weird guards of hers.

FLAXLEY: Even so, my good fellow, I must repeat my request. Please leave us alone and go about your business!

(The villager's eyes lit up.)

VILLAGER: Business you say? Now you're talking! I can let you have my wheelbarrow for 100 Lig!

(Flaxley looked confused.)

FLAXLEY: Wheelbarrow?

(As he stared at the stranger in bewilderment, however, he spotted a group of heavily armed guards racing down a street, just over the stranger's shoulder. Greatly concerned, he leant to one side to look past the stranger and get a better view, only to have him step in his way.)

VILLAGER: It's made of genuine wood you know... from trees!

FLAXLEY: What?

VILLAGER: Okay, you drive a hard bargain; I'll let it go for 80, but no less!

FLAXLEY: Look... go away!

(He then swiftly turned to the others.)

FLAXLEY: Quick chaps, there's guards all over the place, let's get out of here!

(With that, he hurriedly led them all down the side of the building they'd been hiding behind.

Keeping a sharp eye out for danger, he checked nobody was around then swiftly darted across a dirt track and crouched down beside an old, broken down, wooden building. As everyone hurried across the track and joined him, Flaxley nodded determinedly.)

FLAXLEY: Keep your eyes open and stay low, chaps!

(He then attempted to lead them away again, only for the villager to push his wheelbarrow in front of him and block his path.)

VILLAGER: This aint your cheap rubbish, you know!

(Bewildered by the interruption, Flaxley glared at the villager angrily.)

FLAXLEY: Why are you still here?

VILLAGER: Okay, 75 and we've got a deal!

FLAXLEY: No, now sod off.

VILLAGER: 70 then!

(As Flaxley quickly attempted to glance around for guards, the villager persisted in blocking his view, determined to make a sale.)

VILLAGER: A deal, is it? 70, I think we said.

BONSON: Do something about him, Flaxley!

VILLAGER: 65 then!

FLAXLEY: Look, clear off!

VILLAGER: Give me 65 and I will. I'll clear off like I've never cleared off before.

FLAXLEY: No. Now piss off.

(As Flaxley tried once again to look for any guards that might be lurking nearby, the villager blocked his eye-line and sighed in defeat.)

VILLAGER: Right, it breaks my heart, but I guess I can let it go for 60!

(Having reached the end of his tether, Flaxley snarled and raised his voice at the villager.)

FLAXLEY: Listen, chummy...

KRITZ: Flaxley! Keep your voice down!

(Realising his mistake he grabbed the villager by his shirt collar, pulled his face close then spoke in a quiet but firm tone.)

FLAXLEY: Look, I don't *need* your wheelbarrow, I don't *want* your wheelbarrow, I don't even *like* your wheelbarrow, now go away!

(Looking deeply hurt by Flaxley's words, the villager hung his head.)

VILLAGER: Fine, if that's how you feel, then...

(He wiped a tear.)

VILLAGER: Let's call it 50!

(Stunned by the man's stubborn persistence, Flaxley threw his hands in the air.)

FLAXLEY: Who *is* this idiot?

BONSON: Allow *me*, Flaxley!

(With that, Bonson coshed the annoying chap over the head with a loose piece of wood from the old broken down building they were standing aside.)

FLAXLEY: Normally I'd say that was uncalled for, but...

BONSON: My pleasure, Flaxley! Now let's find somewhere safe to get out of these thermal clothes! I feel like I'm melting.

DEREK: Damn right!

(Lefiat spoke up as he patted the building beside them.)

LEFIAT: Maybe this building's empty!

(Bonson turned and looked through the hole left by the plank he'd hit the villager with.)

BONSON: Hmm, actually it is! Looks like a disused barn! Perfect.

MANDIKA: Perfect?

BONSON: Perfect for *us*, we can use it as a hideout, *and* to get out of this stuffy winter clothing!

FLAXLEY: Excellent! With guards about, we're bound to get spotted if we stay out here much longer! Let's get inside.

MANDIKA: How?

(Just then, Kritz's smirking voice rose up from behind them.)

KRITZ: This door's unlocked.

(As she stood there holding the barn's side door open, grinning to herself, Bonson gave her a suspicious glance.)

BONSON: Was it unlocked when you found it, Kritz?

KRITZ: I couldn't possibly comment on that, Bonson.

BONSON: I figured as much.

FLAXLEY: Anyway, problem solved. You lot get inside, I just need to do something.

(As everyone headed for the door, Flaxley swiftly picked up the villager and threw him in the wheelbarrow. Keeping an eye out for guards he then raced away and dumped him next to a building three doors down. He then raced back to join the others in the barn.

As he raced through the barn door, Kritz pulled it shut behind him then fixed the latch.)

KRITZ: Welcome back.

FLAXLEY: Thanks, my love.

(He looked her up and down lustfully for a moment then glanced around the barn. Watching as Bonson used the plank he'd coshed the villager over the head with to cover up the gap in the wall, he nodded with satisfaction. Considering the state of the building, the structure was reasonably sturdy and all the other holes in the wall were far too high up for anyone to look through and spot them.)

FLAXLEY: This'll do nicely.

(He then glanced across at the rusty tools on the ground, the stack of hay bails and the wooden water barrel that constituted the entire barn's contents and allowed himself a smile.)

FLAXLEY: Water... something to sit on while we think of a plan... this is perfect, actually.

BONSON: Glad you think so. Now let's all get changed, shall we?

KRITZ: Damn, right.

DEREK: Absolutely.

FLAXLEY: Indeed.

(With that, everyone immediately removed their packs and delved into them for their regular clothing to begin the process of changing. Wanting no repeat of the incident in future Tifaeris, Flaxley insisted Kritz changed behind some stacked hay bails with Mandika where she couldn't be seen. Despite Bonson's protest, Kritz agreed and the entire process passed without incident.

Shortly after they were all changed back into their normal clothing, they all gathered together to discuss their next move. Derek, Mandika and Bonson sat themselves down on some hay bails, while Kritz and Flaxley stood against the wall to their side. Lefiat lay flat on his back upon the ground in a bid to rid himself of the backache he'd acquired from carrying Mandika. Fanning his face, Bonson puffed out and looked to the ceiling.)

BONSON: Hot weather one minute, cold the next, it's a good job Daman Siria was on the ball really!

MANDIKA: Shame all the clothes he picked were rubbish!

BONSON: Well, you were *never* going to be happy no matter what he picked!

MANDIKA: Damn right! Like Kritz said, a man should never pick a woman's clothes for her.

(She looked down herself and sighed.)

MANDIKA: A bloody wedding dress of all things.

DEREK: Actually, Mandika, without the veil it just looks like an ordinary tight white dress.

MANDIKA: That's what I thought it was. Honestly, standards must have seriously fallen in the future, because who'd get married in something this tacky? It looks nothing like a traditional wedding dress, it's way too figure hugging. It's slutty, to be frank.

(Kritz looked to her and beamed.)

KRITZ: It has to be said, Daman did an awesome job in my case.

(Looking her up and down as she stood there in the futuristic clothing that Daman had picked for her, rather than her own, Flaxley drooled lustfully.)

FLAXLEY: He's a man of impeccable taste.

MANDIKA: No, he's just a typical man who finds women in slutty clothes appealing.

KRITZ: Slutty? These are no sluttier than my *own* clothes, which *are* kind of slutty to be fair. I'll give you that one, Mandika.

MANDIKA: Thank you.

BONSON: Personally, I think Daman proved that a man *can* and *should* pick a woman's clothes for her. You look ravishing in that get up you're wearing now, Kritz, and yet in that ghastly below the knee, leather skirt *you* chose to wear...

KRITZ: *Nobody* asked you, Bonson!!! Nobody ever *will*!

(Bonson furrowed his brow at her angrily for a moment then glanced towards the ground.)

BONSON: How rude.

(Just then, his face lit up.)

BONSON: Oh! Superb.

(With that, he leant forwards and scooped up a small metal hammer from beside his foot.)

BONSON: That's handy. I've been meaning to get one of these. I've got some pictures in my room that I've been wanting to hang for a while now and I keep forgetting to borrow a hammer.

MANDIKA: Pictures? Of what exactly?

BONSON: All kinds of things. Landscapes, horses... there's even one of you, Mandika.

(Mandika smiled.)

MANDIKA: There is?

BONSON: Indeed. I can't wait to take a hammer to that one.

MANDIKA: Just makes sure you put it in a prime location when you do.

(Bonson sighed then stooped again to pick up some nails that had been lying with the hammer.)

BONSON: If you're not even going to spot the insult, you waste both *my* time and your own, Mandika.

MANDIKA: Sorry?

BONSON: Never mind.

(As Bonson slipped the hammer into his pack, Derek rolled his eyes then glanced across at his allies.)

DEREK: Anyway chaps, what's the plan?

(Flaxley, who was standing a good few feet away, spoke without facing them, clearly unable to remove his eyes from Kritz's legs.)

FLAXLEY: Well, let's skirt by finding out where Zanne is, then thighs up our options and try to rescue her hips!

(More than a little baffled by Flaxley's reply, they all looked at one another and shook their heads with disdain.)

DEREK: Right. We'll come back to you, Flaxley!

(Inside the dark castle that overlooked the village at this time, Kajice was going to pieces. Wearing a furious expression, she paced impatiently up and down in front of her glowing crystal ball, mumbling to herself.)

KAJICE: What's keeping them? Those fools, can they do nothing right?

(As she paced, a thin man in metallic armour marched in and stood to attention.)

KAJICE: Well?

(Looking furious, she approached him and gestured for him to answer swiftly.)

GUARD: Um...

(As he tried to speak with terror in his eyes, Kajice slapped him across his face.)

KAJICE: Fool!

GUARD: Sorry, your grace. We haven't found them yet, but we will, I promise you my queen!

KAJICE: Then keep searching! Find them!

(She trembled with hatred.)

KAJICE: *Someone* is going to feel the full extent of my wrath, make sure it's *them* and not you!!!

(With that, the guard hurriedly backed away, bowing as he did so.)

GUARD: Yes, my queen, right away!

(Back at the barn in the village in the meantime, the allies were still trying get some sense from Flaxley.)

BONSON: Flaxley, this is important!

FLAXLEY: Excuse me?

(Flaxley looked to Bonson enquiringly.)

FLAXLEY: What?

BONSON: When you've quite finished lusting over Kritz, we have a plan to discuss!

(Flaxley looked back at Kritz's legs and beamed.)

FLAXLEY: Right, I'll let you know when I've finished then!

BONSON: Flaxley!!!

FLAXLEY: I'm joking!

(He rolled his eyes then sat down on a hay stack opposite Derek, Mandika and Bonson.

Looking up at Kritz he then patted the hay next to him.)

FLAXLEY: Come here, tits. Take a load off.

KRITZ: Excuse me?

FLAXLEY: Sit down, my love!

BONSON: You called her 'tits'!

FLAXLEY: What? Don't be silly. So what's this plan then?

(As Kritz sat down by Flaxley's side, Bonson rolled his eyes despairingly.)

BONSON: For heaven's sake, man. Pay attention. We don't *have* a plan!

FLAXLEY: Then why say you did?

(Bonson sighed.)

BONSON: I didn't! I said we needed your help to come up with one, you cock!

(Flaxley, quite taken aback by his ageing friend's tone, spoke directly to Derek.)

FLAXLEY: A plan, huh? Well, first we have to think a few things over, like how we're going to find out where they're keeping Zanne!

(Matching Bonson's disdain, Derek thrust his head into his hands.)

DEREK: The castle obviously, where else?

(Feeling a little miffed by their attitudes, Flaxley sat back.)

FLAXLEY: I was only saying, what's wrong with you lot?

DEREK: Flaxley, I know Kritz is beautiful but what happened to professionalism?

FLAXLEY: Hey! I'm as professional as ever, damn it!

MANDIKA: You're not, even *I've* noticed it!

BONSON: *Especially* you, you mean. Fault finding is what you do best!

(Treating his words with the contempt they deserved, Mandika continued.)

MANDIKA: I mean, it's not like you don't see Kritz everyday, you're married to her!

(Flaxley looked most confused.)

FLAXLEY: You have a problem with my affection for Kritz?

BONSON: Lust is the word I'd have used!

FLAXLEY: Excuse me?

MANDIKA: Anyone would think you'd never even *seen* a scantily clad trollop before.

KRITZ: Hey!

MANDIKA: No offence!

KRITZ: I'll be the judge of that, thank you.

(Bonson shook his head then looked to Flaxley.)

BONSON: What's brought this on, Flaxley? You're like a dog on heat. And it's not like she's a one time only, get her while she's hot kind of deal, she's your wife. You can have her any time. So what gives? Why get all lusty and distracted now?

(Flaxley stared at him blankly for a moment then sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Sorry chaps, I didn't realise I was.

(He then stared down Kritz's top for a moment before chuckling out loud and looking to his allies again.)

FLAXLEY: Only joking. Anyway, back to the plan!

(He nodded firmly then spoke up in an authoritative tone.)

FLAXLEY: I agree, Zanne's bound to be imprisoned in the castle somewhere, so we'll have to get in there somehow and find her... oh, and next time I make a joke you can at least *pretend* to be amused.

BONSON: We would be pretending too, Flaxley.

DEREK: Never mind that, how are we going to get into the castle? That's the next question!

FLAXLEY: Well, assuming that Kajice knows we're here, I think it's safe to say that walking in through the front gate isn't an option. Fortunately, I packed a grappling hook.

KRITZ: You did?

FLAXLEY: Well... *Daman* packed me a grappling hook, we'll have to use it to scale a wall and sneak in!

BONSON: I feared you'd say that!

DEREK: Okay, it's good so far, then what?

FLAXLEY: Then we'll split up into groups and search for her, I suppose!

MANDIKA: Do *I* have to come?

FLAXLEY: Well, I'm not going to leave you here on your own.

MANDIKA: I could wait here with Bonson, actually.

(Bonson looked far from impressed.)

BONSON: No, you bloody couldn't. I came here to help Derek, not to babysit you. I'm going with *them*.

FLAXLEY: And anyway, Mandika, it wouldn't be safe.

(Mandika nodded with understanding then glared at Lefiat.)

MANDIKA: As I thought, a decent knight would never bugger off and leave me with Bonson.

(As she scoffed indignantly, Lefiat sighed sorrowfully.)

LEFIAT: How many times am I going to have to say I'm sorry this time?

MANDIKA: I haven't decided yet.

FLAXLEY: So anyway, that's the plan. Scale the wall, split up and find Zanne.

KRITZ: We'll have to wait for the cover of darkness though won't we?

DEREK: I think that'd be for the best!

BONSON: Right, and when we find her?

(Flaxley gave Bonson a sideways glance.)

FLAXLEY: Well, we rescue her obviously!

BONSON: How?

FLAXLEY: By sneaking out the same way we sneaked in.

BONSON: Right... you make it all sound so easy!

MANDIKA: The worst plans usually *do* sound easy!

DEREK: Don't be so sceptical, simplicity is always the key to a good plan!

(With that, Flaxley clapped his hands together and nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Okay. So, that's settled then, we wait for darkness to fall, then we sneak to the castle, break in, hunt around 'til we find her then escape!

DEREK: Works for me!

KRITZ: Me too!

LEFIAT: That went way over my head, but yeah, whatever.

(Bonson and Mandika just grimaced uneasily at one another and said nothing.)

FLAXLEY: You look constipated, Bonson!

BONSON: Excuse me?

(Just then, there was a loud banging on the barn door. At once, everyone stared at in horror as Kritz jumped to her feet and spoke up in barely above a whisper.)

KRITZ: Quick, hide!

(With that, everyone except Flaxley swiftly ducked down behind the hay bails and hid.)

BONSON: Flaxley, hide!

(Ignoring Bonson's advice, Flaxley listened as a male voice shouted from outside.)

VOICE: Hello? In the name of Kajice, open up.

(Flaxley looked thoughtful for a second then paced towards the barn door much to everyone else's horror.)

DEREK: Flaxley, no!

BONSON: He'll get us all killed!

(Flaxley looked to them and spoke up in a hushed tone.)

FLAXLEY: It's not that lunatic bloke and it's not Kajice, therefore it has to be one of her guards.

KRITZ: Exactly, so leave it well alone.

FLAXLEY: Have a little faith, will you? I know what I'm doing.

(Wearing a knowing expression, Flaxley then stepped up behind the door and yelled through it.)

FLAXLEY: What do you want?

VOICE: I'm under orders to search every premises in the village and to make sure all hands are employed in looking for five human intruders and a giant frog. Kajice's express wishes. (As everyone glared at him furiously, Flaxley nodded thoughtfully.)

FLAXLEY: I'm well aware of Kajice's expresses wishes, thank you very much. I'm searching for them too.

VOICE: Oh, right. My apologies, I thought maybe you lived here.

FLAXLEY: No, no, I'm just searching like you are.

VOICE: Find anything?

FLAXLEY: Not a thing.

VOICE: Okay, well, good luck then.

FLAXLEY: Same to you.

(As he stood listening behind the door, he then heard the man address his colleague.)

VOICE: Cross this one off the list, looks like one of the other groups beat us to it.

(As the sound of footsteps faded away, Flaxley returned to the centre of the room with a grin on his face and the others angrily came out of hiding.)

KRITZ: What were you trying to do?

BONSON: You're insane man!

(Having read Flaxley's mind, Derek nodded.)

DEREK: Nice thinking, Flaxley!

MANDIKA: It was?

BONSON: You could just have pretended there was nobody home.

DEREK: Bonson, like Flaxley said, that mad villager told us the only people here are himself, Kajice and her guards, so that was obviously a guard, right?

BONSON: Right, and?

DEREK: And guards don't come back later when they're searching door to door, they knock the door down.

FLAXLEY: Exactly. So, I had no choice but to pretend to be one of *them* and let them think I'm searching the place. It was the only way to stop them coming in.

MANDIKA: Even so. Risky.

FLAXLEY: Actually, Mandika, letting them think I'm one of their allies and that I already searched this place was perfect.

BONSON: Even if you do say so yourself.

FLAXLEY: No, it was perfect by anybody's standards. We're gonna *need* this place to hide out until dark and now it's been crossed off their list, it's ours. I just secured us it. It's called cunning, Bonson.

(He beamed arrogantly and tapped his cranium.)

FLAXLEY: There's more to being a knight than swinging a sword about, you know!

BONSON: Yes, there's being unbearably smug too.

FLAXLEY: And with damn good reason.

BONSON: Yeah, okay. Fair comment. Good job, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: Thank you.

(Delighted that their war of words was over, Lefiat clapped his hands together excitedly.)

LEFIAT: Great, now that's sorted, let's have coffee!

(Unsurprisingly, he immediately received several scornful looks.)

MANDIKA: And how are we gonna do *that* exactly?

(He grinned at her arrogantly.)

LEFIAT: Simple, *I* used cunning too. Like Flaxley said, there's more to being a knight than swinging a sword about!

(He winked at Flaxley then reached into his bag.)

FLAXLEY: If he ever quotes me again, I'll...

LEFIAT: Ta-da!!!

(With that, he proudly held aloft the kettle from the East Edea hotel.)

LEFIAT: I pinched the kettle!

(Much to his astonishment, everyone sighed in disbelief.)

LEFIAT: What? I took the coffee too, and the powdery milk thing!

(Bonson shook his head.)

BONSON: Allow me!

(He then walked up to him wearing a belittling scowl.)

BONSON: Aren't you forgetting something?

LEFIAT: What?

BONSON: Electricity, you tit!

(He then spanned Lefiat's forehead with his palm.)

BONSON: I despair of you, I really do!

(Deeply offended by Bonson's belittling actions, Lefiat flapped furiously.)

LEFIAT: A tit, am I? I'll show you! Watch.

(As Lefiat proceeded to fill the kettle with water from the barrel inside the barn, everyone watched on in baffled silence, curious to know what he was thinking.)

LEFIAT: There, all full up. Now watch and learn!

(With that, he placed the kettle on the floor then stood back.)

LEFIAT: You want electricity, I'll give you electricity!

(Realising what he was about to do, fear immediately struck everyone's faces and they all dived for cover behind the hay bails. Oblivious to the panic around him, Lefiat stood firm and flicked his fingers towards the kettle.)

LEFIAT: Lightning!

(At once, a jet of powerful electricity rampaged from his fingers and blew the kettle to smithereens. Bits of metal and plastic flew everywhere slamming into the wooden walls, sticking fast like daggers as smoke wafted up into the air. Moments later, as the smoke cleared, everyone removed their arms from over their heads feeling lucky to be alive and glared at him furiously. Oblivious to their scorn, Lefiat just stared at the scorch mark where the kettle used to be and scratched his head.)

LEFIAT: How did that happen?

(Mandika then screamed out in a panic.)

MANDIKA: The hay bails are on fire!!!

(Reacting swiftly, Kritz rushed to douse the flames with her H2O magic, then turned to join the others in glaring at Lefiat again.)

LEFIAT: What? I didn't know!

BONSON: Really, didn't Flaxley tell you? There's more to being a knight than setting fire to buildings, Lefiat!

(As Lefiat hung his head in shame, Flaxley sighed then offered him a smile.)

FLAXLEY: Don't feel bad, Lefiat! Nobody was hurt and... at least you tried, right?

(Lefiat looked up and pouted at him sceptically.)

LEFIAT: Are you patronising me?

FLAXLEY: Well, I can't tell you what I'm *really* thinking, there's ladies present!

(He then clapped his hands together and nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Okay chaps, panic over. Let's try to get some rest; we've a busy evening ahead of us.

(In full agreement with his sentiments, everyone gave Lefiat a final scornful glance then sat down to relax and get themselves mentally prepared for the final part of their mission, the rescue attempt.

It was never easy to relax when facing a difficult mission, but for Derek the wait was *extremely* hard. He spent most of the day staring up at the gaps in the weathered roof, almost willing the sun to go down. He'd come a long way in search of his beloved Zanne and the time couldn't come soon enough.)

Desha Village, Sundown...

(As twilight brought long shadows to Desha village and darkness proceeded to fall, Derek's

torment came to an end and the mission to rescue Zanne began. Equipped with all their belongings, Derek, Flaxley, Kritz, Bonson, Mandika and Lefiat slowly crept from the barn and into the darkened street outside. The first one out, Derek looked up at the silhouette of the castle standing out on the charcoal skyline and clenched his fists.)

DEREK: Not long now, Zanne!

(Flaxley leant over and patted him on the shoulder, giving him a reassuring smile.)

FLAXLEY: Let's go, my friend! I'll lead, you play tail.

DEREK: Gotcha.

(And so, with no more ado, they slowly set off towards the castle, keeping themselves firmly against the walls of buildings so as not to be seen. Knowing guards could well be patrolling the streets still, caution was at a maximum. With Flaxley leading and Derek bringing up the rear, they edged slowly forth, carefully ducking as they crossed streets constantly watching out for guards.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, so far so good!

BONSON: Yes, despite the darkness, Lefiat hasn't fallen over once!

KRITZ: Give him time!

LEFIAT: Shut up. Duck!!!

(With bulging eyes, he swiftly dropped into a crouched position.)

MANDIKA: Duck?

(She was absolutely furious.)

MANDIKA: You've got a pet name for *her*?

(He looked up and pouted indignantly.)

LEFIAT: No! Duck! There's guards coming!

MANDIKA: Oh, right! My bad.

(As everyone stood there grinning, Lefiat furrowed his brow bitterly.)

LEFIAT: Seriously, there's guards coming, duck!

FLAXLEY: Oh, shit! Right!

(Realising their mistake, they all swiftly crouched to hide in the shadows as two guards marched by.)

DEREK: Good work, Lefiat!

(Lefiat shook his head.)

LEFIAT: And you lot call *me* stupid!

BONSON: And your point?

FLAXLEY: Look, there's no time for that, let's get going!

(With that, they all stood up again. Before they could creep one step further, however, a voice rose up from behind them that chilled Flaxley to the bone.)

VILLAGER: Ah, it's you! We never finished our business!

(Grinning, the old man with the wheelbarrow blocked their path then stood there grinning in the moonlight. Not about to tolerate his nonsense, Flaxley replied in a hushed voice.)

FLAXLEY: Go away, you idiot! We don't have time for your silliness!

VILLAGER: There's *always* time to buy one of my wheelbarrows, now where were we? Sixty lig we agreed on, wasn't it?

(Determined to make the villager leave them alone, Flaxley clenched his fist and spoke in no uncertain terms, desperately trying to keep his voice down.)

FLAXLEY: Look, I hate to be rude but, we don't want your clapped out wheelbarrow, now go away before I decide to kill you!

(Undeterred, the villager smiled.)

VILLAGER: You drive a hard bargain, sir, okay, 50 it is then!

(Realising his words alone were never likely to get through to the determined villager, Flaxley stood tall.)

FLAXLEY: Look you demented old git...

(He then yanked him violently towards him and bellowed.)

FLAXLEY: Fuck off!!!

(Having never heard such appalling language, the villager reeled back in horror and gasped. Unfortunately, so did the two guards who'd just happened to be passing when he yelled it.)

GUARD 1: Five strangers and a giant frog!!!

GUARD 2: That's them!!!

(At once, everyone stared in horror at the sight of two, identical, armour clad guards standing on the path before them. Furious about the turn of events, Flaxley glared at the villager and snarled.)

FLAXLEY: Now, look what you've done!!!

(As the two guards raced towards Flaxley with their swords poised, the villager looked nervously about himself.)

VILLAGER: I aint hanging around 'ere!

(And with that, he promptly raced away, rushing his wheelbarrow to safety.)

BONSON: Yes, thanks for that, you silly old git!

(As the villager disappeared from sight, Flaxley confronted the two guards head on.)

GUARD 1: You're under arrest!

FLAXLEY: No, I'm not!

(The second guard looked enlightened and gasped.)

GUARD 2: No, actually, he's right. We're supposed to get Kajice, not arrest them.

GUARD 1: We are? Oh, shit!

FLAXLEY: Well, sadly for you, you'll get to do neither on the grounds that I'm going to kill you right now!

(In absolutely no doubt that Flaxley was serious; the guards both immediately lunged at him with outstretched blades. As they stepped back from their lunges however, their hands were empty and Flaxley was staring back at them with their swords in his hands.)

FLAXLEY: Thank you! Now, as promised...

(He then lunged back at them with their own swords.)

MANDIKA: Flaxley, you killed them!

FLAXLEY: Really? Thanks princess, I always wondered what happened when you put a sword into someone's neck, now I know!

MANDIKA: No, I'm just saying... that was pretty cool.

(She then glared at Lefiat.)

MANDIKA: Why can't you be cool like that?

LEFIAT: Eh?

(As the two guards clanged to the ground, Flaxley rolled his eyes then glanced back at his five comrades determinedly.)

FLAXLEY: Never mind that... and never mind creeping about, let's just run. If those twins there were anything to go by, Kajice's guards are feeble! Let's go.

(With that, Flaxley raced off towards the castle. Following his lead, the others raced after him, watching with awe as he culled three more guards without even breaking his stride.

These few incidents were however, the only notable moments in an otherwise uneventful run. The darkened streets were eerily quiet and apart from the odd clash of steel as Flaxley culled a guard, the only sound was the echo of their own footsteps. Stealth as it turned out, had indeed been a pointless tactic. With only the odd weak guard to stop them, reaching the castle was proving the simplest of tasks.

With little in the way of resistance, they soon found themselves standing on a quiet, grassy patch at the foot of the grey castle, out of sight of any guards who might happen through the

village. With its pointed towers, thick moat and gargoyles towering high above them, the castle looked very much an impenetrable fortress and for a moment, everyone paused to marvel at its sheer size.)

FLAXLEY: Wow, look at this thing! It's massive.

MANDIKA: We'll never get in there!

BONSON: We really didn't think this through, did we?

FLAXLEY: Nonsense, the castle is big, I agree, but we *shall* gain entry!

MANDIKA: Big, yeah... big and scary looking. I don't like it.

FLAXLEY: Scary looking it may be, but it's just a castle, Mandika. An ordinary building. You'll be fine, trust me.

MANDIKA: It's not just the castle, Flaxley. This whole place is freaking me out. Did anyone else notice those guards all seemed to be...

KRITZ: Alike?

MANDIKA: Not just alike, Kritz. They were absolutely identical. Almost as if they were the same person.

BONSON: Maybe they were related. In a small place like this, so far off the beaten track, I wouldn't be at all surprised if there was some inbreeding going on.

(Derek shook his head.)

DEREK: Only you could reach that conclusion, Bonson.

KRITZ: Actually, I thought that too.

BONSON: Well don't you feel a fool, Derek.

DEREK: No, not at all, Bonson. It has nothing to do with inbreeding, they were clones, obviously.

BONSON: Clones?

DEREK: One person magically recreated many times. Extremely advanced magic, just like the storms and the oddly warm climate here.

MANDIKA: One person magically recreated?

DEREK: Yes, to form an army. This Kajice is clearly highly adept in the dark arts.

FLAXLEY: But not too bright, it seems. If *I* was going to clone someone to make an army, I'd have picked someone more my size and with a fair degree of sword skill. Those guards of hers make Lefiat look tough.

(Lefiat growled.)

LEFIAT: I knew my name was gonna come up.

FLAXLEY: Yes, well, never mind that. Be they cloned or inbred, it makes no difference really. Right now we have to concentrate on one thing. Getting into that castle.

(He nodded sternly then looked to Kritz.)

FLAXLEY: Delve into my pack for me, would you, darling? I need that grappling hook!

KRITZ: Sure!

(With that, she stepped up behind him and started to fiddle in his pack.)

KRITZ: Time to go to work, mister grappling hook... there you are.

(She then pulled the iron hook, adorned with an extra long rope, from his pack and handed it to him.)

KRITZ: There you go, my love.

FLAXLEY: Thank you, sexy hips.

(He beamed.)

FLAXLEY: Now let's get this show on the road.

(Derek looked sceptical.)

DEREK: You know, a grappling hook is all very good in theory, Flaxley, but I doubt even *you* can throw it that high!

FLAXLEY: Oh, really? Just watch and see, Derek, old chap! Prepare to be impressed.

(With that, he paced closer to the edge of the moat and started to swing the hook round and round to gain momentum.)

FLAXLEY: Stay back, chaps!

(As the others watched with interest, he spied a row of turrets at the top of the wall and took aim.)

FLAXLEY: Here goes!

(With that, he spun the hook at a crazy speed then let out a loud groan as he released it from his grasp.)

FLAXLEY: Go on!!!

(With astonished eyes, they all watched as the grappling hook flew like a rocket towards the top of the wall.)

BONSON: Excellent power, Flaxley!

DEREK: Indeed! I stand corrected.

(They gasped in amazement at the strength behind the throw as the grappling hook continued upwards.)

KRITZ: It's definitely gonna make it!!!

(Everyone's faces bore awestruck expressions as the hook reached the same height as the top of the battlements.)

MANDIKA: Outstanding!

(Very much agape, they watched on in amazement as the grappling hook flew over the wall. Moments later, however, the awestruck expressions on everyone's faces slowly transformed into uncomfortable grimaces. Watching in dismay as both the hook and the entire rope cleared the wall, none of them dared to look at Flaxley or even utter a word. In motionless silence they all continued to stare up at the turrets for what seemed like an eternity. Lefiat scratched his head and Bonson rubbed his chin nervously when eventually, Flaxley leant to Kritz and broke the silence.)

FLAXLEY: Have we got another one?

(He received only a shake of the head by way of a reply as the others continued their display of inanimate silence. Unsurprisingly, it was Bonson who was first to break it with an exasperated sigh and a shrug of defeat.)

BONSON: Oh well, we tried, let's go home!

(Looking extremely urgent, Derek glanced from the battlements and into his eyes.)

DEREK: Never! I don't give up that easy!

(Before anyone could question him, he then ran at the moat and performed a huge leap across it until he reached the castle wall. Having clung to it like a spider, he then proceeded to climb.)

BONSON: Ah, four hands!

(As Derek swiftly scaled the wall then disappeared over the top of it, Flaxley became agitated to say the least.)

FLAXLEY: He can't do this on his own!

KRITZ: Well I'd like to see *you* scale a wall like that!

(For a few moments, Flaxley looked on in worried silence when Derek reappeared at the top of the wall, spinning the rope over his head as if he was going to cast a lasso.)

FLAXLEY: Ah, there he is!

(Derek then yelled down to them as he propelled the rope over his head at great speed.)

DEREK: I found the rope, chaps. I'm going to throw one end down, then I'll secure *this* end, okay?

(With that, he released the rope and it thudded down on the grass in front of the moat.)

FLAXLEY: Excellent, we're back in the game!

(Fearing the moat might be home to the same creepy creatures that made the sea such a

terrifying prospect, Lefiat immediately ran over and grabbed the end of the rope before it could slip into the water.)

LEFIAT: That was a close one?

FLAXLEY: Careful, Lefiat.

BONSON: Yes, don't pull on it!

(Looking most offended, Lefiat threw his arms out to the side and paced back towards Bonson, inadvertently pulling the other end of the rope out of Derek's grasp and back over the wall.)

LEFIAT: Why do you always assume I'm going to do something stupid?

(As the sound of the rope sliding down from over the turret and splashing into the moat behind him echoed in his ears, Lefiat froze in horror.)

LEFIAT: Did I just...

BONSON: Answer your own question? Yes, you did.

(Kritz spammed her forehead.)

KRITZ: He's such a cock, I mean really.

(With anger etched into his face, Flaxley flapped at him furiously.)

FLAXLEY: All you had to do was leave it alone until he'd secured the other end!!! That was all!!!

LEFIAT: I know, but Bonson annoyed me and I forgot I was holding it!

(Bonson scoffed sarcastically.)

BONSON: Yes, it's my fault you're an idiot, is it?

FLAXLEY: The question is, you tit, why were you holding it??? You just had to leave it alone. Your sole task was do nothing and you couldn't even do that right, you...

(As Flaxley proceeded to turn the air blue, Mandika covered her ears and glanced away. As she did so, she spotted an angry looking Derek climbing back down the wall. Immediately, she shuddered from head to foot then looked to Lefiat urgently.)

MANDIKA: Lefiat, you'd better hide before Derek reaches the ground!

(Sure enough, having splashed into the moat then swum back to get the rope, Derek was more than a little peeved.)

DEREK: Where is he?

FLAXLEY: Calm yourself, Derek, focus; you can deal with him later!

DEREK: And I will too!

(He retrieved one end of the rope then looked towards Flaxley.)

DEREK: Consider yourself lucky that Flaxley's big enough to hide behind, mistake boy!!!

(Lefiat peered round Flaxley's torso and offered him an apologetic smile.)

DEREK: Like I said, I'll deal with you later!

(With that, the angry Derek set about climbing the wall once again. Once he reached the top, he secured his end of the rope tight to a turret then gave everyone the thumbs up. With the means to climb now in place, Bonson bit his lip and mused out loud.)

BONSON: This isn't going to be easy for me.

(Flaxley looked to his aged friend and mused to himself.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz, you go first. Bonson, follow her.

KRITZ: Actually, if he goes before me I can help him.

FLAXLEY: Trust me Kritz, if he goes after you, you'll be helping him no end.

(Kritz looked baffled but decided to trust his judgment.)

KRITZ: Well, okay, if you're sure.

(With that, she grabbed the other end of the rope and leapt into the moat with it.)

LEFIAT: What's she doing?

FLAXLEY: She's climbing the rope, you pillock.

LEFIAT: But... why did she jump in the moat?

FLAXLEY: Just watch her, will you? You'll see.

(As the baffled Lefiat watched on, Kritz paddled to the wall, letting the rope run through her hands until it was taut, then proceeded to climb.)

FLAXLEY: See?

LEFIAT: No. I don't get it. I don't want to go in the moat; can't we just climb up from here?
(Mandika rolled her eyes.)

MANDIKA: No, you pillock. The rope needs to be taut before you can climb it.

BONSON: You see, unlike *you*, Lefiat, the rope *can* be taught.

(He chuckled to himself then headed after Kritz.)

LEFIAT: I'm so confused.

FLAXLEY: Do shut up, Lefiat.

(As it turned out, Flaxley's idea to send Kritz before Bonson was a master stroke. Despite being almost three times her age, he managed to keep apace with her with consummate ease. Having a perfect view of her backside gyrating in her tight leather skirt, he ascended the rope in a hypnotic state of lust, completely focussed on the glorious sight before him. Once Kritz reached the top, she swung her legs over the battlement then leant over them to give Bonson a helping hand. Focussed joyfully on her cleavage, he ascended the last few feet in no time at all, scaling the rope like a man a fraction of his age.)

As Derek, Kritz and Bonson stared down from the wall, Lefiat gulped to himself, knowing he'd be the next to go. Trembling all over, he watched the rope float towards him then gingerly fished it from the moat with his foot. Desperate not to make another mistake, he then nodded to himself determinedly.)

LEFIAT: Okay... no more mister useless man... I can do this.

(Realising what was coming, Flaxley placed a despairing hand on his forehead.)

FLAXLEY: Not like that you won't.

(Sure enough, determined not to go into the moat, Lefiat gripped the rope tight and attempted to pull himself up it from dry land. With a ferocious snarl on his face, he grabbed the rope tight, wrapped his legs around it then cried out in terror as it swung him straight into the moat. Terrified to the very core of his being, he immediately let go off the rope and thrashed about in the water in a blind panic. Watching him with a long suffering expression on his face, Flaxley sighed emptily.)

FLAXLEY: Wait there, Mandika, I'll save him.

(As he paced into the moat, Mandika sighed, shook her head and mumbled in despair.)

MANDIKA: Sir Lefiat of Guevina, knight of the realm.

(As she despaired, a peeved Flaxley swum under the panicking Lefiat and re-emerged from the water with him on his shoulders.)

LEFIAT: I'm scared, save me!!!

FLAXLEY: What do you think I'm bloody doing!!!

(Lefiat gasped for breath and tried to calm himself.)

FLAXLEY: Hold my forehead, I'll...

(Lefiat swiftly grabbed onto Flaxley's face.)

FLAXLEY: Get your fingers out of my nostrils!!!

LEFIAT: Sorry!!!

FLAXLEY: Now, hold on.

(Looking thoroughly infuriated, Flaxley then slowly floated his way over to the wall where Lefiat could climb the rope from properly.)

FLAXLEY: Now, go. And hurry up about it.

(Lefiat grabbed the rope and grimaced.)

LEFIAT: What if I fall?

FLAXLEY: If you fall...

(He looked enlightened.)

FLAXLEY: If you fall, Mandika will get hurt. I'm carrying her up after you.

(Lefiat looked extremely serious.)

LEFIAT: I can't hurt Mandika. I'm her knight.

(In that moment all his clumsiness and fear evaporated and he proceeded to climb faultlessly and without hesitation. His bizarre ability to be competent when he thought Mandika might be in danger, once again coming to the fore. Delighted to have finally got through to him, Flaxley returned to Mandika and bent down before her.)

FLAXLEY: On you get, Mandika.

MANDIKA: Actually Flaxley, I want to try climbing it by myself.

(They looked to one another blankly for a moment then started to laugh.)

FLAXLEY: Imagine that, eh?

MANDIKA: Yeah, like I'd ever do that.

(With that, she jumped on his back and wrapped her arms around his neck.)

MANDIKA: Ready.

(With that, Flaxley paddled into the moat, before climbing up the rope with a determined look on his face and a princess on his back. Upon reaching the top he swung his leg over the battlements and allowed her to climb off before leaping over and adjusting his chain mail.)

FLAXLEY: You have a tight grip for such small hands! You nearly strangled me!

MANDIKA: I was scared; I thought you were going to drop me!

FLAXLEY: Of course I wasn't.

LEFIAT: Yeah, he's not *me*.

(Bonson frowned.)

BONSON: I was going to say that!

LEFIAT: I know. Why do you think I...

FLAXLEY: Look, never mind that. We need to split up and find Zanne. I say we rendezvous back here in half an hour. Agreed?

DEREK: But what if none of us have found her?

FLAXLEY: Then we'll try again, obviously.

(With that, he about turned and glanced all around the area, taking a mental note of their surroundings. They were on top of a lengthy catwalk overlooking a large plaza some twelve feet below them. At either end of the catwalk there were doors leading into towers and beyond the plaza were a set of large wooden doors.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, I reckon we should go in pairs. Derek, take Bonson with you and head through that door to your right. Kritz, go with Mandika and take the door at the other end of the catwalk. Lefiat you're with me.

LEFIAT: And what door are we going through? There's only two.

FLAXLEY: You and I are taking a more scenic route, Lefiat.

LEFIAT: Eh?

DEREK: That's enough nattering. Let's just get going.

FLAXLEY: Indeed. Now be careful! Remember; keep your eyes peeled and your ears...

(He looked stumped.)

FLAXLEY: Why isn't there a phrase for that?

(He then shook his head forcefully.)

FLAXLEY: Doesn't matter. Good luck, chaps. Remember; watch your partners back, okay?

KRITZ: We will.

DEREK: Uh huh.

(Derek then looked to Bonson and nodded.)

DEREK: Come on Bonson, there's no time to lose!

BONSON: There's a lot of other things to lose though, like our heads for example!

DEREK: Then let's not get caught!

(Bonson sighed ruefully.)

BONSON: Excellent plan!

(He then shrugged nonchalantly and followed Derek through the door to their right.)

FLAXLEY: Okay. Let's do this. Good luck, ladies!

(Mandika glanced to Kritz uneasily for a moment then raised an enquiring eyebrow.)

MANDIKA: Wait. Why do me and Kritz have to go together, Flaxley? Surely you or Lefiat should be protecting me.

FLAXLEY: Well, to be honest, I figured two beautiful women together would be less likely to arouse suspicion.

MANDIKA: Less likely to arouse suspicion? In a town populated by one male villager and hundreds of clones of the same man, two beautiful women are going to stand out like Bonson at a hair convention.

(She then sighed heavily.)

MANDIKA: Why is he never around when I think of a good one?

FLAXLEY: Okay, I lied. Truth is, Mandika, you're the only one who isn't likely to get distracted by Kritz's cleavage.

LEFIAT: Thanks, Flaxley. Just lob me over the battlements why don't you?

KRITZ: Yeah and me.

(Mandika stared at Kritz's chest for a moment then groaned.)

MANDIKA: Fair enough, I guess I can't blame guys for staring when she's got them on display like that?

KRITZ: Excuse me?

MANDIKA: What? You have! You look like a market stall selling melons.

KRITZ: Melons? Hardly! Grapefruits, maybe.

MANDIKA: Whatever, let's get going shall we?

KRITZ: Or sticking with the theme of fruit, let's get growing.

(As soon as she finished speaking, she immediately hung her head in shame.)

KRITZ: I'm sorry.

MANDIKA: Fruit related puns are never acceptable, Kritzeveltia. Even when they're funny. Now come on, let's get you and those grapefruits of yours away from my boyfriend.

KRITZ: Fine, okay. Later, guys.

(With that, the ladies headed off towards the door to the left.)

FLAXLEY: Okay Lefiat, that leaves us, the two knights, we're bound to get results!

(Lefiat gave him a bitter frown.)

LEFIAT: Don't patronise me, Flaxley. Mandika might have fallen for your silly excuses, but I know the *exact* reason for these pairings. It's got nothing to do with Kritz's boobs, you just want to make sure I don't do anything stupid!

FLAXLEY: Nonsense. The real reason I wanted you to come with me is... well... you'll see... it's all part of your training, Lefiat.

LEFIAT: You stopped training me the same day you started.

FLAXLEY: Yes, and as a result, you're so bloody useless I don't feel safe trusting anyone else to stop you doing something stupid.

LEFIAT: So I was right!!!

(Flaxley looked to him then grinned innocently.)

FLAXLEY: See? Very perceptive of you. Nicely figured out. Good work.

LEFIAT: Really?

(He beamed.)

LEFIAT: Thanks, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: Right, let's get going.

LEFIAT: Okay. Which door?

FLAXLEY: Neither. You and I are going jump down to the plaza below and start out search from there.

LEFIAT: We are?

(With that, Lefiat peered over the edge of the catwalk into the plaza below and trembled in terror.)

LEFIAT: I aint jumping down there!

FLAXLEY: Of course you are!

LEFIAT: I aint! You can't make me!

(Next thing Lefiat knew, he was flying head first over the edge of the catwalk.)

LEFIAT: I hate you, Flaxley!!!

(Landing with a tremendous thud, he rolled over three times then sat up and looked up at the ledge above with a tortured expression on his face.)

LEFIAT: That was mean!!!

FLAXLEY: Stop complaining, you're down, aren't you?

LEFIAT: Well, yeah, but...

FLAXLEY: Then put a sock in it.

(With that, he jumped down and landed in a crouched position by Lefiat's feet.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, let's head for those doors over there.

(He pointed over to the other side of the plaza.)

FLAXLEY: Remember, be careful, concentrate, and most importantly, don't touch anything!

(Pouting bitterly, Lefiat shook his head sorrowfully then proceeded to follow Flaxley as he crept, head bowed, across the plaza towards the doors on the other side.)

(Ten minutes after setting out in search of Zanne, the all girl duo of Mandika and Kritz found themselves heading forth down a dank, uninviting corridor. The walls were made from grey stone with torches affixed to them every thirty feet or so, creating just enough light for them to see where they were going. Silently, they crept forth listening hard for guards. A bag of nerves, Mandika walked directly behind Kritz shivering and peering over her shoulder with wide-eyes.)

MANDIKA: This is creepy!

KRITZ: Don't be a wimp, Mandika!

MANDIKA: Don't mock me, Kritz. It's okay for you; you're a rough and tumble sort! You probably enjoy adventures. Me, I'm refined and well... better than that.

(Kritz scowled as she edged forth.)

KRITZ: Cheek.

MANDIKA: Don't be angry, I didn't mean it in a *bad* way!

(Choosing not to argue, Kritz just rolled her eyes and said nothing, when she felt an odd tickling sensation in the palm of her hand.)

KRITZ: Mandika?

MANDIKA: Yeah?

KRITZ: You're holding my hand, aren't you?

(Immediately letting go, Mandika whimpered in a small voice.)

MANDIKA: No!

(Having never seen Mandika so scared before, Kritz stood up straight and offered her a kind smile.)

KRITZ: Look, relax, Mandika. We're gonna be fine, but you can hold my hand if you want to.

(She nodded.)

KRITZ: I tell you what, if it'll make you feel any easier, we can talk as while we walk, okay?

MANDIKA: Um... okay, but quietly!

KRITZ: Well, yeah... obviously!

(With that, they resumed slowly pacing down the corridor; hand in hand, conversing in hushed voices as they did so.)

KRITZ: So, the king's not making things easy for you and Lefiat then?

MANDIKA: We already had this conversation, Kritz. I ended up naked on a public beach. We're not going *there* again.

KRITZ: But... I just wanted to ask you something.

(Mandika gave her a distrusting glance.)

MANDIKA: Such as?

KRITZ: Well... you're a pretty girl, Mandika. You're clean, intelligent, well spoken... so I was curious... what on earth do you see in Lefiat?

(Mandika scowled at her for a moment then shrugged.)

MANDIKA: He'd do anything for me. Anything. He has a good heart.

(She nodded.)

MANDIKA: And most importantly, I feel safe with him.

KRITZ: Right... and that's all, is it? I mean, he doesn't make your heart skip when you look at him or anything?

MANDIKA: No, but then he doesn't make my stomach churn either. Not anymore.

(She scoffed then glanced away indignantly.)

MANDIKA: Besides, looks aren't everything, Kritz.

KRITZ: Of course not.

MANDIKA: What good points Lefiat has are enough for me.

KRITZ: Good points?

(Mandika glared at her coldly.)

MANDIKA: Yes, good points! A good heart, he makes feeling safe and all that. I admit, he may not be man of the century but let's be honest, your Flaxley isn't perfect either.

KRITZ: No?

MANDIKA: No! I admit, he's handsome, he has a great body and he can hold a conversation, but that isn't everything!

KRITZ: It'll do for me!

MANDIKA: And Lefiat will do for me! When you compare them, they're not so different!

(Kritz couldn't believe what she was hearing.)

KRITZ: Come again???

MANDIKA: Well, apart from looks, a body, charisma and intelligence, what's Flaxley got that Lefiat hasn't?

(Kritz gave a wry smile and turned to whisper in Mandika's ear. As she listened her eyes bulged and she cried out at the top of her voice.)

MANDIKA: That's over a foot long!!!

KRITZ: Keep your voice down!!!

MANDIKA: You must have a hole as big as a barn door!!!

KRITZ: Mandika!!! Quiet, you'll alert the guards!

(Unfortunately for her, her warnings fell on deaf ears and it was already too late. Mandika's yells had already attracted the attention of two guards patrolling in an adjacent corridor.

Eager to investigate the source of the commotion, they raced around the corner to find an irate Kritz desperately trying to gag the bewildered Mandika.)

KRITZ: Shush! Be quiet, for pity's sake!!!

MANDIKA: If you went on top, you'd impale yourself !

(Much to Kritz and Mandika's dismay, a booming voice then rose up from behind them.)

GUARD: Stop right there!

(Freezing on the spot, they grimaced at one another then slowly craned the necks back to see two heavily armed men standing before them.)

MANDIKA: Whoops.

KRITZ: Nice one, Mandika.

(She then rubbed her fists together in readiness to start beating them.)

KRITZ: Don't worry; I'll make short work of these two.

(Just then, another ten guards raced around the corner and joined them. Mandika's yelling, it seemed, had carried quite a distance and just how many guards had heard her was anyone's guess.)

KRITZ: Aw, crap. They're just gonna keep coming aren't they?

(She shrugged.)

KRITZ: Better get comfy then, babe. This might take a while!

(Never one to shy away from a conflict, she then came out fighting. Leaping into the fray with a high kick she sent the first guard flying then performed a spinning punch to knock another one to the ground.)

KRITZ: This is fun!

(As two more guards attempted to run her through with their swords, she responded with perfectly timed blocks before countering and sending them both sprawling.)

KRITZ: Easy! Who's next?

(Enjoying herself immensely, she then punched another guard to the ground when a voice called out from behind her, causing her to freeze in fear.)

GUARD: Stop or I'll slit her throat!

(Fearing the worst, she spun around in horror to see a guard with his sword at Mandika's neck.)

KRITZ: Hey, that's cheating! You're not allowed to sneak up from behind!

(Mandika was trembling and close to tears.)

MANDIKA: Don't piss them off, Kritz, please.

(At once, Kritz's heart sank and she immediately let her guard down.)

KRITZ: Okay, okay... I give up. Just don't hurt my friend!

(She then held out her hands for the guards to bind and furrowed her brow at Mandika.)

KRITZ: Why, Mandika? All you had to do was not scream your head off.

MANDIKA: You said he had fourteen inches! That's enough to make any girl scream.

KRITZ: Yeah, but... right... I can't argue with that.

(Bound and frustrated they were then taken to the east tower of the castle overlooking the village, where they were unceremoniously slung into a dark, filthy room with excrement on the floor.

As a guard slammed the door behind him, they both hung their heads and sighed. The room very much reflected their misery. With one tiny window in the far corner much of the room was in perfect darkness.)

KRITZ: Damn it!

MANDIKA: Sorry, Kritz!

KRITZ: No, don't blame yourself, babe. I shouldn't have told you about Flaxley's...

(Just then, an astonished voice rose up from the darkness.)

FLAXLEY: Darling?

(Much to her amazement, Flaxley emerged from the shadows and took her in his arms. Shocked but far from saddened to see him, she looked up at him and raised a baffled eyebrow.)

KRITZ: They caught *you*? How?

(Flaxley released a sigh as a small voice piped up from the blackness near the window.)

LEFIAT: I said I was sorry. Everyone makes mistakes, you know.

(Flaxley snarled, gritted his teeth and turned his head to yell over his shoulder.)

FLAXLEY: I told you to stand there and be silent! Is that being silent?

MANDIKA: What happened?

LEFIAT: Leave me alone!

(Obviously embarrassed, Lefiat stayed by the window and whimpered.)

MANDIKA: Or should I say what did he do?

(Flaxley groaned and shook a contemptuous head.)

FLAXLEY: There we were heading down this thin passageway when we saw these twenty or so guards in an alcove to our right. Not a problem, however. They were playing cards, you see, and I knew that if we managed to keep silent, they wouldn't even notice us. Simple. We merely kept tight to the wall and sneaked past them. Danger averted, you'd think. Wrong. A little further on we discovered that the passageway was in fact a dead end. So, anyway, I allowed myself the customary groan then turned round to sneak back again. And what did I see?

(He let go of Kritz then pointed aggressively to the silhouetted Lefiat.)

FLAXLEY: This tit, strolling round the corner to ask the guards for directions!!!

(Losing his temper, he flapped wildly and jumped up and down with rage.)

FLAXLEY: We'd just taken extreme care *not* to be seen by them, for heaven's sake. How could he *not* have figured out that we *didn't* want them to notice us??? How? How can anyone be *that* bloody stupid? He's supposed to be a knight, for pity's sake. What part of 'sneaking in unnoticed' could *possibly* have confused the idiot???

(He then hung his head despairingly.)

FLAXLEY: Just trying to think what must have been going through that halfwit's mind is giving me a headache. Honestly.

MANDIKA: Yeah, it will do that, Flaxley. I've given up trying to figure him out; it's just easier that way.

FLAXLEY: Yes, I should imagine it is. Anyway, unsurprisingly, they arrested him on sight and threatened to kill him if I didn't surrender!

KRITZ: They did that to *me*! They threatened to slit Mandika's throat if I didn't surrender. You've no choice *but* to surrender then, have you?

(Flaxley shuddered with rage and offered no reply.)

KRITZ: Have you?

FLAXLEY: I'm not going to lie to you, my love, I was sorely tempted to do us all a favour and let them have him!

(Having heard every word, Lefiat whimpered sorrowfully.)

LEFIAT: That's just mean!!!

(Clearly on the verge of exploding, Flaxley raised a furious fist and bellowed at him.)

FLAXLEY: Be silent, I said!!! I can't believe you got me captured!!! By puny weaklings of all things!!! If they didn't have a knife to your gizzard, I could have killed them all with my little toe!

(He growled.)

FLAXLEY: You're just lucky they didn't try to take my sword when they arrested us, because if they had, I *would* have let them have you.

(He sighed bitterly then relented his anger and stroked the hilt of his blade lovingly.)

FLAXLEY: Still, it begs the question, what sort of fool captures people and doesn't confiscate their weapons?

(Mandika trembled.)

MANDIKA: All-powerful witches who don't even consider weapons to be a threat! That's who.

(Kritz gave her a reassuring hug.)

KRITZ: Relax, Mandika. We'll be fine. I mean, it's not the first time you and I have been jailed together. We've escaped before and I'm sure we'll do it again, okay?

MANDIKA: I hope so.

(Just then, the door flew open and Bonson and Derek too, were thrown into the disgusting dank chamber.)

BONSON: That went well I thought!

(Derek growled.)

DEREK: Fucking disaster!

(With that, he reached into his pack and pulled out the torch that Daman had packed for them. Sighing heavily, he then pointed his fingers at the tip and mumbled.)

DEREK: Inferno!

(At once, torchlight illuminated half the room and Derek stopped dead to gape in amazement at what he was seeing.)

DEREK: Flaxley? Lefiat? Kritz? Mandika? You're *all* here!

FLAXLEY: It's an absolute disaster, old chap! They've caught us all!

(Derek glanced around at them and gave a relieved sigh.)

DEREK: Well... at least nobody seems hurt.

FLAXLEY: Well, yes, there is that, I suppose!

DEREK: How did they capture you all anyway?

(Not wishing to be part of any such a discussion, Lefiat frowned at him from the corner.)

LEFIAT: Leave me alone.

FLAXLEY: I won't warn you again, Lefiat! Silence!!!

(Derek read Flaxley's mind then sighed.)

DEREK: I see. Similar thing happened to me. They ambushed Bonson.

(Bonson sighed.)

BONSON: Just when I found the beer cellar too.

(Derek grimaced.)

DEREK: You could say he was distracted somewhat.

BONSON: The bastards grabbed me before I could even get a sniff of it.

(Flaxley shook his head then stood tall and nodded positively.)

FLAXLEY: Well, let's not worry about that anymore. What's done is done. Seeing as we're all here, right now we need to think of a plan to escape. Any ideas, Derek?

(Just then, a rustling sound emanated from a darkened corner of the cell. At once, they all turned and took up fighting stances.)

FLAXLEY: Who's there?

(As they squinted into the darkness, they saw a tattered sheet flick upwards and a three foot tall green alien struggle out from underneath it. Its hands were bound together with rope.)

DEREK: Is it... it's...

ZANNE: Derek?

(As the alien struggled to its feet, which were also bound together with rope, Derek walked over slowly with joy engraved into his features.)

DEREK: Zanne!

(Zanne was a spitting image of Derek, apart from having long hair, a pair of human shaped breasts and brown horns rather than green.)

DEREK: My darling, Zanne. It *is* you!

(Looking overwhelmed by the moment, Zanne stood and waited nervously as Derek slowly approached her. Moved by the moment, the others looked on smiling, feeling pleased for

Derek, and more than a little proud of their achievement in helping to bring them back together.)

MANDIKA: So wonderful.

(Upon reaching her, Derek swiftly untied her then they threw their arms around each other. Zanne was extremely emotional and struggled for words.)

ZANNE: Humans came... I hid... then I thought I heard your voice... I wasn't sure.

(She burst into tears as Derek held her tight.)

ZANNE: Then I heard your name. It *is* you, it *is* you!!! You found me!

DEREK: I came for you, my darling. I came to save you. I love you.

ZANNE: I love you too!!!

(Flaxley beamed with pride.)

FLAXLEY: This is what being a knight is all about!

BONSON: What, getting captured and thrown in jail? Odd career choice, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: No, you fool. Moments like this. We've brought Derek and...

(He looked lost and scratched his head.)

KRITZ: Zanne!

FLAXLEY: Zanne, quite. We've brought them back together, which is *beyond* excellent.

BONSON: If you say so. That doesn't alter the fact that we're stuck in jail though.

FLAXLEY: That's as maybe, but as far as I'm concerned the plan is right on course. The plan was always to find her then rescue her, well we've completed the first objective, now all we have to do is rescue her.

(Bonson gave him a sarcastic glance.)

BONSON: Oh, is that all? Well, let's do that then. I'll blast the wall down using my penis mounted cannon, shall I? Then we can all leap out and use our pixie wings to fly home.

(He rolled his eyes then looked to where Zanne and Derek were hugging. At once, his bitter demeanour melted away and a smile appeared on his face.)

BONSON: I admit, it does feel good that we've brought them back together, doesn't it?

MANDIKA: Yeah it does.

KRITZ: It's a real feel good moment.

(As everyone continued to smile warmly at them, the two aliens held their loving embrace then without warning, embarked on a passionate kiss, mouths open and enormous tongues entwining.)

KRITZ: But that isn't!!!

(As one, they all turned away in disgust.)

BONSON: It's a good thing we've already eaten!

(Derek's moment of passion, however, was then crudely interrupted by the door flying open and four guards rushing in with spears at the ready. Far from intimidated by the feeble guards, Flaxley sneered.)

FLAXLEY: Stand back, chaps!

(As he went to draw his sword, however, the most incredible looking blonde haired beauty strode regally through the door, wearing a long, low cut dress. At once, all the men's jaws dropped lustfully.)

BONSON: Simply divine... are you an angel or something?

(The woman, Kajice, flicked her hair and gave a single laugh.)

KAJICE: Ha, you must be mistaking me for someone else!

(Unlike their male counterparts, Kriz and Mandika were far from impressed.)

MANDIKA: What a slut!

KRITZ: Isn't she just!

(Snarling bitterly, she cast a glance at Flaxley, who like Lefiat and Bonson, was staring open mouthed in a daydream.)

KRITZ: I said isn't she just!!!

(She then stamped on his foot furiously.)

FLAXLEY: Ouch! Hey, what was that for?

KAJICE: Enough!!!

(At once, her screech ripped everyone from their lusty trances and they all stared at her hatefully.)

FLAXLEY: So, you must be Kajice.

LEFIAT: That's Kajice? Queen of all witches?

(He flinched then looked to Mandika uneasily.)

LEFIAT: Told you she'd be ugly!

(Not falling for his lie even for a moment, Mandika screwed up her face and spoke through the side of her mouth.)

MANDIKA: You wait 'til I get you home!

KAJICE: I said 'enough'!!!

(Resenting being talked down to by *anyone*, Mandika pouted and folded her arms.)

MANDIKA: Whatever, witch.

(With everyone's attention finally fixed upon her, Kajice sneered and looked across their faces.)

KAJICE: So, you are the one's who slaughtered my beloved Aleclaw, you are the people who defeated Melmera, and it is you who struck fear into Haru...

(She folded her arms and continued to scan all their faces.)

KAJICE: You will pay dearly for your impertinence!

KRITZ: Yeah, right. I aint listening to this!

(With that, Kritz sneered and charged at her. She barely even made it five feet, however, when Kajice casually held her hand out to her and blew her backwards, knocking her off of her feet using a mysterious force magic. As she thudded to the floor at Flaxley's feet, he swiftly stooped to help her up.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz, you okay?

(She shook her dazed head and mumbled.)

KRITZ: Yeah, I'm okay.

(He pulled her to her feet then glared at Kajice.)

FLAXLEY: What do you want from us???

(The evil witch smiled and hunched her shoulders playfully then pushed her head forward and spoke with a childish glee.)

KAJICE: What I want from you is simple. Entertainment! In two days, we shall sacrifice...

(She looked at Zanne and Derek then flicked her neck up.)

KAJICE: These two giant frogs. You will *all* have ringside seats for the sacrifice, of course. And when it is over...

(She cackled.)

KAJICE: I'm going to hang you all one by one!

(She then stepped towards Flaxley who was angrily staring back at her.)

KAJICE: Of course, I'll be having my wicked way with this one first!

BONSON: You have all the luck, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: You're welcome to her, Bonson!

BONSON: Yes... you say that now, but if Kritz wasn't here...

FLAXLEY: I'd never be unfaithful to my beloved!!!

(Bonson gave him a filthy look then looked down and mumbled.)

BONSON: No? What was Suma then?

KAJICE: Silence, fools!!! I have passed sentence! Feel free to spend your last days as you wish!

BONSON: I'd like to spend them at home!

(Kajice was not amused.)

KAJICE: Within this tower!!! Any more lip from you and I'll hang you now!

(Bonson immediately clammed up. As much as he found airing his thoughts difficult to resist, even he wasn't about to risk antagonising her any further.)

KAJICE: That's better!

(Kajice then spun around and flicked her hair.)

KAJICE: Goodbye peasants, I'll see you soon...

(She then looked back at Flaxley and licked her lips seductively.)

KAJICE: I'll see *you* very soon, cuteness.

FLAXLEY: Not happening, Kajice! I'd rather become a poofa, quite frankly!

KAJICE: Really? I have a spell for that actually!

(At once, he became extremely uncomfortable and gaped like a fish.)

KAJICE: That shut you up didn't it! Guards?

GUARD: Your highness?

KAJICE: Shut them in and keep at least fifty of you on guard. If there's any trouble, come and get me! Goodbye, my little play things!

(With that, she laughed her evil laugh then marched on high through the door. The guards then slammed it shut and locked it. Left staring at the door, everyone remained perfectly silent, until a defeated Lefiat hung his head and whimpered.)

LEFIAT: We're all gonna die! She's so mean.

BONSON: Mean? She's evil, you tit.

MANDIKA: I know, right? Can you believe it? She called *me* a peasant!

(As Mandika mused agonisingly over Kajice words, Flaxley stood tall and placed his hands on his hips.)

FLAXLEY: There's nothing for it, chaps. We have to escape!

MANDIKA: Obviously she was referring to you lot, but even so, she should have specified!

FLAXLEY: What?

MANDIKA: Nothing!

FLAXLEY: Right, we need a plan!

DEREK: Yes we do.

(He then sighed and nodded acceptingly.)

DEREK: But if all fails, at least we all get to die with our loved ones!

BONSON: Hey, I'm here too you know!

DEREK: I was including you. Nobody loves you as much as you do.

(Bonson nodded in full agreement.)

BONSON: That's true. Although the sex can be a little lonely, I'm very happy together.

FLAXLEY: Bonson, that was a stupid comment. And come to think of it, so was yours, Derek. I, for one, have no intention of dying just yet! As great as dying with Kritz will be I intend to live a full life with her first! Dying together can wait until we're old and pointless. Right now, we need an escape plan!

(Kritz mused to herself.)

KRITZ: If we do manage to escape, the guards are bound to notice and they'll alert Kajice... and I don't fancy the idea of facing her in battle to be honest. She'll kill us all horribly.

FLAXLEY: Another silly comment!

KRITZ: Excuse me?

FLAXLEY: Not trying to escape would be ridiculous. If we do that, she'll definitely kill us all horribly.

KRITZ: I know that! I was just saying... I don't fancy facing her in battle.

FLAXLEY: Yes, well, nor do I, but I'm certainly not got going to stay here and *let* her kill us

all without a fight.

(He then nodded sternly.)

FLAXLEY: Anyway, we can worry about Kajice if and when the need arises. Right now we need to concentrate our efforts on finding a way out of this cell somehow.

DEREK: Agreed!

(Flaxley looked to the door and bit his lip.)

FLAXLEY: Unless it's sealed magically, busting it down shouldn't be too difficult.

BONSON: And if it *is* sealed magically?

FLAXLEY: Then heaven knows how the hell we're going to get out.

(Just then, Zanne spoke up in a shy voice.)

ZANNE: Actually, there *is* a way. I was bound with rope otherwise I'd have simply climbed from the window! It seems Kajice's minions aren't that bright.

DEREK: I see. Clearly not. They didn't even confiscate our weapons.

ZANNE: They didn't bind you either.

DEREK: Exactly.

(Flaxley looked to Zanne and offered her a warm smile.)

FLAXLEY: Zanne, it's a pleasure to make your acquaintance.

ZANNE: The pleasure is all mine.

FLAXLEY: I wish we had more time for proper introductions but right now we need to concentrate our efforts on escaping! You said something about escaping through the window?

ZANNE: I did. And don't worry, there's no need for introductions. I know your names, and I know you all know mine; mind reading is a powerful thing.

(She smiled.)

ZANNE: I also know you're kindly humans and that you came here out of pure goodness, just to help your friend.

MANDIKA: I didn't!

ZANNE: Except her. Anyway, I can not thank you enough!

(Flaxley nodded, accepting her gratitude.)

FLAXLEY: You're welcome. Now what were you saying about the window?

ZANNE: Follow me!

(With that, she hurried across the room then leapt up to the tiny window and squeezed through it.)

ZANNE: See?

(She then climbed down the castle's outer wall and disappeared from sight.)

BONSON: That won't work, *we* can't fit through there!

FLAXLEY: Yeah, and even if we could we'd plummet to our deaths, it's a long way down!

(Derek glanced at them for a moment and sucked his teeth.)

DEREK: Yes, you're right!

(He then nodded knowingly and looked Flaxley in the eye.)

DEREK: Wait there, I've had an idea. I'll be back in a minute!

(With that, he jumped up on the window sill then disappeared out of the window as he proceeded to climb down after Zanne.)

KRITZ: Wait there? Where else does he think we're gonna go? The pub?

(Staring at the stone window sill, Flaxley furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: Hmm... I'm not happy about this, he'd better come back!

(Flaxley then nodded forcefully.)

FLAXLEY: I'm sure he will!

BONSON: He'd better. We came all this way just for *him* then he takes his woman and buggers off!

MANDIKA: Yeah, leaving us deep in the shit!

LEFIAT: You should have a little more faith in him, Derek would never do that!

(As the minutes ticked by with still no sign of Derek or Zanne, they all paced up and down feeling quite unsure what to believe. The dimly lit room seemed to get smaller and smaller by the second due to the increase in their uneasy pacing speed.)

KRITZ: Oh, come on Derek, don't do this to us!

(Just then they heard a noise by the window. As one, they all turned to face it and breathed a sigh of relief as Derek appeared in the gap.)

DEREK: I've made a slide thing; get your winter coats out!

FLAXLEY: You're back!

DEREK: Of course I am! You didn't think I'd bugger off and leave you here, did you?

(All except Lefiat scratched their heads and mumbled.)

MANDIKA: No way.

KRITZ: Not even for a moment.

(Bonson furrowed his brow.)

BONSON: Never mind that. Have you got a plan to get us out of here or not?

DEREK: Like I said, I made a slide, just climb through the window and put your coats over the rope to slide down!

(Everyone gave him an unimpressed look.)

DEREK: What's wrong?

BONSON: Idiot!

DEREK: Sorry?

FLAXLEY: What was the first part of your plan again?

DEREK: Well, you climb... through... the... window... oh!

(There was a unanimous groan.)

DEREK: Right... tiny window... I forgot about that!

MANDIKA: Thanks Derek, we owe you one!

(He could literally hear their scornful thoughts and they cut him deep.)

DEREK: I'm sorry. After all you've done for me, I've let you down!

FLAXLEY: Not necessarily!

(All eyes then turned to Flaxley.)

BONSON: At last a sensible plan!

FLAXLEY: We can use the slide, right?

(Bonson groaned.)

BONSON: I take back what I said. We can't fit through the window, you pillock.

(He scoffed and shook his head.)

BONSON: Seriously, don't *you* lose the plot too, Flaxley.

KRITZ: Let him finish!

FLAXLEY: Quite. The problem is the window. Well, if Derek uses his lightning to blast a hole out of the wall around the window, providing the hole is big enough, we'll be able to reach the slide. And if we're quick we should all make it down before the guards come!

(Everyone thought long and hard.)

KRITZ: It beats staying here!

DEREK: That'll work, good idea, Flaxley.

LEFIAT: I don't get it.

BONSON: Well, there's a shock.

FLAXLEY: Just watch what everyone else does and copy it, Lefiat.

(Lefiat nodded.)

LEFIAT: I think that'd be best, yeah.

(Flaxley looked to Derek.)

FLAXLEY: Let's do it. Get your winter coats out everyone; we're getting out of here.
(Derek watched as they all delved into their bags and pulled out their coats.)
DEREK: Right, is everyone ready?
KRITZ: Uh huh.
BONSON: I suppose so.
LEFIAT: I'm ready.
(Derek looked to Mandika and saw her trembling nervously.)
DEREK: Mandika?
(She gave him a nervous glance.)
MANDIKA: Yeah?
DEREK: Ready?
MANDIKA: I guess... I don't know. I don't like heights.
(Lefiat turned pale.)
LEFIAT: Heights? Hang on, nobody mentioned heights.
(He looked uncertain.)
LEFIAT: How high is it exactly?
DEREK: Well, put it this way, falling will result in certain death!
(He reeled back and trembled.)
LEFIAT: Forget it then!
DEREK: Staying here will also result in certain death though!
(Mandika dropped her head and her lips started to quiver.)
MANDIKA: I'm scared.
FLAXLEY: Be brave princess, your father will be proud of you for doing this!
MANDIKA: What do you mean? *Will* be? You mean he isn't already???

FLAXLEY: It's just a figure of speech, Mandika!
(She looked upset and spoke to Bonson.)
MANDIKA: Has my father said anything to you?
FLAXLEY: It was a figure of speech, Mandika!!!
(Bonson whispered to her.)
BONSON: Don't worry ma'am, I'll tell you what he said later!
(She looked ashamed.)
MANDIKA: Thanks, Bonson!
FLAXLEY: Bonson? Are you shit stirring again?
BONSON: I'd never do such a thing!
(Eager to get going, Derek nodded sternly.)
DEREK: Right, who's up for it?
KRITZ: It's do or die Derek, we all are!
LEFIAT: Hey, you don't speak for *me*!
MANDIKA: Why isn't daddy proud of me?
FLAXLEY: Shut up will you, princess? And Lefiat, if you don't come we'll have to leave you here to die!
LEFIAT: That's just mean!
FLAXLEY: No it isn't. We all have one simple choice to make, slide down the rope or be killed by Kajice. If you chose option two then that's up to you.
LEFIAT: Fine!
FLAXLEY: Excellent! Get prepared chaps!
(In a hurry everyone slung their packs onto their backs and stood prepared with their winter coats, ready to take the slide.)
FLAXLEY: Remember, as soon as he blows the hole around the window, we have to go as quickly as possible! The guards are bound to hear the explosion and come running.

(Everyone nodded and prepared to run.)

FLAXLEY: Okay Derek, do your stuff!

DEREK: Right!

(Nodding determinedly, he pointed his arm at the window area and firmed his stance.)

DEREK: Lightning!!!

(With a blinding flash, a powerful lightning bolt flew from his fingers, blasting a huge hole around the window area. Not even waiting for the smoke to clear, Kritz then leapt up onto the window sill, lobbed her coat over the rope and slid out of view.)

FLAXLEY: I'll hold the fort, go chaps!

(As Derek hurriedly climbed out the window and proceeded to climb down, Bonson rushed to the window and furrowed his brow.)

BONSON: Next time you want to go on a trip, Mandika, leave me out of it!

(With that, he slung his coat over the rope then he too proceeded to slide out of sight.)

FLAXLEY: Go princess! The guards will be here soon!

MANDIKA: I hate you, Flaxley!

(With that, she ran up to the window then took one look outside and screamed.)

MANDIKA: I can't!!!

FLAXLEY: For the sake of mankind!!! Lefiat, you go!

LEFIAT: Okay!

(With that, he too ran to the gaping hole in the wall.)

LEFIAT: Right...

FLAXLEY: Go, will you? Quit stalling!

(Trembling all over, Lefiat then stepped away from the hole having turned a distinct shade of pale.)

LEFIAT: I'm scared!

FLAXLEY: There's no time to...

(As he spoke, he heard the rustling of keys and overexcited guards yelling outside the door.)

FLAXLEY: They're here, now go!

LEFIAT: I don't want to!

FLAXLEY: Mandika!

MANDIKA: Leave me alone!

(Just then, the door flew open and dozens of guards burst into the cell. Without a moment's hesitation, Flaxley swiftly drew his sword and took them on, yelling as he did so.)

FLAXLEY: Get going, you're gonna get yourselves killed!!!

(He then proceeded to chop and slash at the guards.)

LEFIAT: After you!

MANDIKA: Don't tell me what to do, you go!

LEFIAT: No!

MANDIKA: That's an order!

LEFIAT: That's not fair!

MANDIKA: Do it!

(He grimaced and stood by the edge looking terrified.)

LEFIAT: I can't do it!!!

(In the meantime, Flaxley was being swarmed on by guards and was getting extremely irritated.)

FLAXLEY: Back, you evil swine!

GUARD: Attack him, come on!

(As more and more guards arrived to sling their blades at him, Flaxley gritted his teeth and growled in frustration.)

FLAXLEY: This is ridiculous! If Kajice wasn't likely to show up, I'd enjoy chopping you

fools into mincemeat, but if she comes...

(He furrowed his brow then yelled over his shoulder.)

FLAXLEY: Go! Before the witch shows up!!!

LEFIAT: But I hate heights, Flaxley!

MANDIKA: It's too high!!!

(At the point where the other end of the rope slide met the safety of a lush patch of greenery, Derek, Zanne, Bonson and Kritz stared up at the hole in the tower wall fearing the worst.)

KRITZ: Something terrible has happened, I can feel it!

BONSON: Yes, that something terrible being Lefiat and Mandika, no doubt!

(Sure enough Lefiat was still cowering at the top, stubbornly refusing to take the slide.)

LEFIAT: I can't do it!!!

MANDIKA: Wimp!

LEFIAT: Nor can you!

FLAXLEY: For fuck sake, go will you?

(As more and more guards poured in, Flaxley realised he have to take evasive action. There seemed to be an endless stream of guards that would take forever to beat and it was extremely likely that Kajice was already well on her way. Knowing he had to act swiftly, he snarled and threw a glance at the panicking Mandika.)

FLAXLEY: If I drop you, it's your own damned fault!!!

(With that, he slashed at another wave of guards then turned and ran for the window, putting his sword away as he went.)

FLAXLEY: Metal gloves, don't fail me now!

(With that, he grabbed Mandika under one arm and leapt out of the window with her. His outstretched hand grabbed the rope tight and they started to slide away from the window. Mandika screamed in terror as she saw the ground below and grabbed tighter to Flaxley.)

MANDIKA: No!!! I hate you Flaxley, I hate you, I hate you...

(She continued in that vein all the way down the slide, screeching and trashing about in a terrified panic. She was making the task of sliding down the rope twice as hard but even when his hand started to burn with the friction, Flaxley refused to let her go and endured the pain.)

FLAXLEY: Ow, ouch, fuck, shit, ooh, argh!

(Mandika then stopped panicking and whimpered.)

MANDIKA: What about Lefiat? He'll be killed!

(Flaxley quickly forgot about his pain and was overcome with guilt at having left him behind.)

FLAXLEY: Sorry, Lefiat, I had no choice... argh, ooh, ouch!

MANDIKA: My poor Lefiat.

(They needn't have worried however. Having been left alone by the window with a hoard of sword wielding guards charging towards him, Lefiat had released a girly scream and quickly forgotten all about his fear of heights. His fear of being chopped into little pieces had taken over and he'd leapt out after them and was gaining fast.)

LEFIAT: Argh!!!

(At the bottom of the slide, Bonson, Derek, Kritz and Zanne stared up at the rope with horrified looks on their faces.)

DEREK: They've got to stop that screaming!

BONSON: Quite frankly I'm surprised at Flaxley.

KRITZ: Hey, that's not fair! He's screaming in agony, the other two are screaming in terror; very different things.

ZANNE: She's right.

DEREK: He's still screaming. Every guard in the entire village must have heard it!

KRITZ: Maybe, but right now that's the least of their problems.

(She hunched her shoulders and cringed.)

KRITZ: I'm more worried about the fact that any second now Lefiat's gonna crash into Flaxley and Mandika!

(As they neared the end of the slide, Mandika was in tears and Flaxley was in agony.)

FLAXLEY: Not far now ma'am, there's the others!

MANDIKA: What are they yelling?

FLAXLEY: Um... look out? Look out for what?

(No sooner than he'd finished speaking, he heard Lefiat screaming behind him.)

LEFIAT: Argh, look out!!!

FLAXLEY: What the...

(Sliding at quite a pace, Lefiat smashed into Flaxley's back causing him to lose his grip on the rope.)

LEFIAT: Sorry!!!

(As he slid onwards to a safe landing, Flaxley and Mandika crashed fifteen feet to the turf below, landing with a tremendous thud. Almost feeling their pain, Kritz winced and sucked her teeth.)

KRITZ: Ooh, that had to hurt!

(Fearing one of them may have received a serious injury, Bonson, Derek, Kritz and Zanne then raced over to where the two of them lay in a heap on the grass.)

DEREK: Are you okay?

KRITZ: Is anyone hurt?

ZANNE: Are you alright?

(Much to their relief, they both sat up looking no more than a little dazed.)

MANDIKA: I bet my hair's a right mess now!

KRITZ: Flaxley, you okay, my love?

(Flaxley smiled to her and shook his paining hand.)

FLAXLEY: I'm going to kill him, my love. I mean *really* kill him.

(Feeling more than a little embarrassed, Lefiat raced over to them apologising profusely.)

LEFIAT: Sorry about that, you two! It all happened so fast...

(Having thought Lefiat was dead a few moments ago, Mandika's face lit up.)

MANDIKA: Lefiat!!! You're alive!!!

(Flaxley, however, had other ideas.)

FLAXLEY: Lefiat!!! You're dead!!!

(He leapt to his feet in a fit of rage, eager to batter the hapless Lefiat when Zanne yelled out in a distressed voice.)

ZANNE: Guards! Hundreds of them!

(They looked across to the castle entrance and sure enough, hundreds of guards were charging over the drawbridge thirsty for their blood.)

BONSON: Here we go again!

FLAXLEY: I'll get you later, mistake boy!!!

(Immediately, they all took to their heels, running for their lives through the dark streets of Desha village.)

KRITZ: Seriously, darling, are you okay? That was a nasty fall.

FLAXLEY: The fall was fine but my hand feels like it's on fire!

KRITZ: I'm not surprised, when you were sliding down that rope, I could have sworn I saw sparks.

BONSON: Hurry chaps, they've caught us once, let's not let them do it again!

DEREK: Yes, and if we *have* to fight, let's do it together! No bright ideas about splitting into pairs, this time.

BONSON: We couldn't anyway, there's seven of us. Unless you and Zanne only count as half a person.

DEREK: You know what I mean. We fight well together as a group.

FLAXLEY: I agree. Splitting up seemed a good idea at the time but in hindsight, it was always going to be our downfall!

LEFIAT: It was *your* idea!

FLAXLEY: That's it, I'm going to kill him!

(Lefiat shrieked then proceeded to run twice as fast.)

FLAXLEY: Mandika, you'd better keep him well away from me in future!

MANDIKA: I was scared too, why aren't you mad at *me*?

FLAXLEY: Well, I expected it from you, you're a girl!

KRITZ: And what am I then???

FLAXLEY: Um... you're a woman!

KRITZ: Oh, that's alright then!

FLAXLEY: Besides, I'm not mad at him for being scared, I'm mad at him for being a complete and utter...

KRITZ: We get the picture, my love.

(As they charged forth at great speed through the main thoroughfare of Desha village, with hundreds of guards in hot pursuit, Derek started to get flustered.)

DEREK: Which way is it? Where are we heading?

FLAXLEY: Relax, Derek. Anywhere will do for now.

DEREK: Anywhere? What sort of plan is that???

FLAXLEY: It's...

(He looked horrified and slowed to a halt. At once, the others all joined him in stopping and looking distraught. Hundred of guards were charging down the road towards them, all heavily armed and ready for battle. With hundreds more racing up from behind them, they were well and truly trapped.)

BONSON: Bollocks.

(Flaxley looked both ways at the two groups of guards and scowled.)

FLAXLEY: We're completely hemmed in.

KRITZ: But how the hell did they get ahead of us so quickly???

DEREK: Maybe it has something to do with all that screaming you lot were doing on the rope slide. They probably heard it from all over the village and came running.

FLAXLEY: Or maybe there's two roads out of the castle and they've simply headed us off, maybe they took a shortcut, maybe they grew wings and flew here, it's doesn't matter. The fact is, there's guards ahead of us and guards behind us. They got us trapped and there's only one way out of it.

(Mandika looked up and down the street as their enemies closed in from both ways and looked to Flaxley imploringly.)

MANDIKA: And? How do we get out of it?

(Flaxley ripped his sword from its sheath and snarled.)

FLAXLEY: Simple! We fight!

BONSON: A stupid question if ever there was one.

MANDIKA: Oh, shut up, you.

(Derek sighed and fixed his fighting stance.)

DEREK: I guess it was inevitable!

(Lefiat drew his sword.)

LEFIAT: I'll protect you, princess!

(Mandika smiled. Flaxley, however, did not)

FLAXLEY: Question is, Lefiat who's gonna protect *you* from *me* when this is over?

(As Lefiat hung his head, Zanne scratched hers in bewilderment.)

ZANNE: Your words don't match your thoughts. You're just looking forward to going home and getting away from him, you've got no intention of harming him at all.

(Derek nodded.)

DEREK: It's a human thing; they do that all the time. They think one thing and say another depending on what mood they're in.

(Flaxley was far from amused by Derek's assessment and made his feelings known.)

FLAXLEY: I'm going to punch you in a minute, Derek.

(Derek looked to Zanne.)

DEREK: See?

(Zanne nodded.)

ZANNE: Yeah, curious.

DEREK: Now if you're done making idle threats, Flaxley, we've got a fight to win.

(He swiftly dived to the ground to avoid Flaxley's left hook then sat up.)

DEREK: Of course, he's not always bluffing.

FLAXLEY: You're so lucky you can mind read.

(He helped Derek to his feet then refocused on the incoming enemies. Having got them hemmed in, the guards on both sides of them had slowed to a walk and approached with a chilling casualness.)

MANDIKA: I don't like this.

BONSON: Being penned in by an entire army isn't my cup of tea either.

(Flaxley mused to himself as he watched the guards slowly approach.)

FLAXLEY: We're heavily outnumbered here, chaps!

KRITZ: True, but if they're anything like the ones I fought in the castle, they're really weak!

DEREK: They don't have magic either!

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: In that case, with our combined might and magic power, this ought to be a doddle.

(He looked to his comrades and nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Let's do it. All out attack.

(He glared at Lefiat.)

FLAXLEY: If anything happens to Mandika, you'll be coming home in a box.

LEFIAT: A box?

BONSON: He means a coffin.

FLAXLEY: I mean it, Lefiat. No more clumsy halfwit, time to do the job King Falbury pays you to do.

(He nodded sternly.)

FLAXLEY: Right, you ready to overpower these pathetic losers?

KRITZ: Ready? I'm sick of waiting! In fact...

(With that, she charged at the guards in front of her and chaos erupted.)

FLAXLEY: Not yet, you silly moo!!! Tactics, tactics!!!

(As Kajice's guards charged at them from both sides in a determined effort to slaughter them all, Flaxley sunk into a battle stance and tightened his grip on his blade. With his allies all forced into action, either blasting foes with magic, lashing out at them or defending themselves from attack, he then had to yell his battle plan at the top of his lungs, just to be heard.)

FLAXLEY: Bonson, Mandika, Derek... um, Derek's wife...

ZANNE: Zanne!

FLAXLEY: Yeah! Use your magic to keep them at bay, don't let us get swamped.

DEREK: Got it!!!

(He then looked to Kritz.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz...

(Watching as she piled into a large group of guards with a huge smile on her face, he couldn't help but grin.)

FLAXLEY: Never change.

(Although Flaxley hadn't had any time to think his battle strategy through, it very much proved to be a good one. With Derek, Zanne and Bonson's magic to stop too many foes advancing at once, Flaxley was free to slash, chop and decapitate at leisure, while Kritz joyfully broke their necks. All the while, Lefiat stood guard over Mandika as she fired her glacier magic beneath the enemy's feet.)

FLAXLEY: Lefiat, get slashing!

LEFIAT: I know my duty, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: What?

LEFIAT: Like you told me I should, I'm doing what the king pays me to do. My duty is to guard Mandika and follow *her* orders, not yours!

FLAXLEY: Why you...

(As Flaxley raised his free fist to punch him, Mandika swiftly intervened.)

MANDIKA: Go on sweetheart, do as he says, get slashing. I'll ice them, you dice them!

LEFIAT: As *you* asked, ma'am!

(Bonson yelled to him as he fired his inferno magic into the rampaging hoard.)

BONSON: Professionalism, Lefiat? That's excellent!

(He then rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: Taking your battle tactics from Mandika, however, that's plain stupid.

(As the fight raged on, it didn't take long for Flaxley to figure out that something wasn't quite right. These armour clad men he was mowing down were poorly skilled and immensely weak. Although well prepared and eager to fight, they clearly weren't well-trained guards.)

FLAXLEY: What's going on? Culling unarmed civilians would be more of a challenge than this!

BONSON: I hope you're not speaking from experience, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: You know damn well I'm not.

(As he continued to slaughter men in their droves with extreme ease, he looked around at his colleagues and raised a curious eyebrow. Despite being horribly outnumbered, none of them were even remotely in danger of getting hurt.)

FLAXLEY: This is too easy, I don't like it.

(With every passing moment he started to feel increasingly uncomfortable. This battle didn't feel right, it didn't look right and it didn't sound right. The clash of metal usually associated with battle was eerily absent. The only metallic sounds being those of the guards' armour as they hit the ground. And yet, despite their obvious shortcomings, these weakest of men were wholeheartedly unrelenting in their determination to keep attacking.)

FLAXLEY: Something isn't right here, Bonson.

BONSON: I know! These guys are insane! Anyone else would have retreated by now!

DEREK: It's true! They've been incinerated, frozen, electrocuted and torn limb from limb, I don't understand!

BONSON: Maybe they're more scared of what Kajice will do to them if they *don't* fight than they are of us.

FLAXLEY: I don't think that's it, Bonson! They don't look scared at all.

(Kritz smiled at him and threw a limp, playful wrist in his direction.)

KRITZ: Don't overanalyse it, darling. Enjoy it for what it is. I haven't had this much fun in ages!

(She then gleefully carried on with her violence.)

KRITZ: Whoa, three knockouts in a single punch.

(She beamed.)

KRITZ: When I'm good, I'm great, when I'm bad, I'm awesome!!!

MANDIKA: You, Kritzeveltia, are twisted!

(Largely thanks to the awesome power of Derek and Zanne's magic, it wasn't long before all the guards on one side of the fight were either dead or unconscious. Now all that remained was the one hundred or so on the other side of the fight.)

With all the enemies now on one side, Flaxley allowed himself a satisfied smile. Without having to check his back every few seconds, he was confident they'd finish them all off in a matter of minutes. That was, however, far too long for Derek's liking.)

DEREK: Get back everyone. I'm going to finish them all off in one go.

(He nodded to Zanne and she immediately raised her hands in front of herself to create an energy shield, preventing the guards from moving forward.)

DEREK: Come on, get back everyone!!! Time for the grand finale!

(Noticing the guards we're all restrained by a mystical force, Bonson, Flaxley, Mandika and Lefiat all stepped back from the fray wearing curious expressions.)

FLAXLEY: What are you doing, Derek?

DEREK: I'm...

ZANNE: Derek, I can't hold this shield much longer!!!

DEREK: My bad...

(He held his fist in readiness to cast his magic then threw his hands up in defeat.)

DEREK: Flaxley, do something about her!

(Oblivious to the shield restricting the guard's advances, Kritz was still punching and kicking away at them with a song in her heart.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz!!! Over here!!! Quickly!!!

(Hearing nothing but the joyous music of her fists hitting faces, Kritz ignored him and continued to create her violent symphony. Knowing she'd happily keep punching them all day long if he didn't do something, Flaxley sighed and raced over to her urgently.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz, stop it now. Come on. Step back.

(He grabbed her arm and tried to pull away only for her to pull herself free and continue punching.)

KRITZ: Just five more minutes.

(Flaxley groaned under his breath then shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: Fine, then we'll do it then hard way.

(With that, he stepped behind her and picked her up via the midriff.)

KRITZ: No!!!

(He then walked backwards with her, as she kicked and screamed in severe distress.)

KRITZ: Put me down!!! Flaxley!!! Let me go!!! I haven't finished!!!

FLAXLEY: Stop it, you maniac!!!

(With Kritz clear of the danger zone, Derek nodded to Zanne.)

DEREK: Here goes!

ZANNE: Hurry!!!

DEREK: Right!

(With that, he cast his hand forward and hollered.)

DEREK: Tremor!!!

(Everyone watched in amazement as the ground beneath the guards shook violently then collapsed in on itself with a tremendous rumble. As if a trap door had opened beneath them, all the guards disappeared into the earth in a fraction of second. Trapped in a ditch, their battle was now over.)

DEREK: Now that's magic!

(For a good few seconds nobody said a word. They'd never seen anything like it and could only gape in awe. Even Kritz was silent. First to break the silence, a stunned Flaxley put Kritz down then looked to Derek and gestured towards the hole in the earth.)

FLAXLEY: Are they alive?

(Bonson snarled.)

BONSON: Not for long they won't be!

(He started to march purposefully over to the hole, flexing his magic-casting arm.)

DEREK: Some of them might have survived, but they're very much trapped!

FLAXLEY: In that case, Bonson, let them be! Killing for the sake of it is in complete violation of the knight's code.

BONSON: I'm not a knight. Killing arseholes like them is fully in keeping with *my* code.

FLAXLEY: Bonson!!!

(Sensing real anger in Flaxley's voice, Bonson immediately about turned.)

BONSON: Fine.

(He paced over to Flaxley and gestured towards a snowy peak way out of town on the horizon.)

BONSON: If we're done here then we might as well bugger off home.

DEREK: I won't argue with that.

LEFIAT: Nor me.

FLAXLEY: Indeed. We need to get the hell out of here before Kajice comes and butchers us all horribly.

KRITZ: Oh god, yes. She's mean enough already, when she finds out we killed her entire army...

FLAXLEY: Exactly!

(He looked into his comrades eyes and spoke in a demanding tone.)

FLAXLEY: We've got to get out of here, right now. Come on.

(With that, everyone immediately took to their heels and raced off up the road.)

LEFIAT: Will someone tell me why we're running?

FLAXLEY: To get as far away from Kajice as possible, obviously.

LEFIAT: Aw crap! I forgot about Kajice!!!

(Suddenly having to double her efforts to keep up with the fleeing Lefiat, Mandika panicked.)

MANDIKA: What are we gonna do? Where are we gonna go?

DEREK: Wherever we go, she's bound to find us.

FLAXLEY: Head back to the barn; she didn't find us there earlier. We can plan our next move once we get there.

(Looking thoroughly fed up as he bounded forth, Bonson sighed bitterly.)

BONSON: All this running is going to be the death of me!

(He mused outwardly.)

BONSON: Or in this case, *not* running would be the death me. I'm buggered either way.

FLAXLEY: Hang in there, Bonson, once we reach the barn you can rest up for a bit while we decide what to do next.

(Just then a loud cry of girly laughter filled the air, and with a blinding flash, Kajice appeared before them. Looking mortified, Flaxley skidded to a halt and threw his arms out to help stop Kritz and Bonson. Scared witless, Mandika almost fell backwards as she came to a terrified halt. Luckily for her, Zanne and Derek were on hand to catch her before she could fall.

Oblivious to Kajice's evil presence, Lefiat raced on looking left then right for danger and ran straight into her before flying back as if he'd hit a trampoline.)

LEFIAT: Ow! Eh? Oh no!

(He jumped to his feet and ran to stand behind Flaxley.)

LEFIAT: Guys, it's Kajice!!!

(Bonson gave him a belittling glance.)

BONSON: We know!

(There was a cold, eerie stand off for a few moments as both parties poured their detestation onto one another with hate filled eyes. Kajice then levitated three feet above the ground and threw her arms out to the side dramatically. As if that wasn't daunting enough, bright lights then started to encircle her and she cast back her head, bringing forth a deep, demonic chant from the sky above. Feeling extremely intimidated by her flamboyant display, the allies could only watch her with trepidation.)

BONSON: Does anyone else feel a tad daunted? The sky's talking!

(Watching carefully, Flaxley tried to gee him up.)

FLAXLEY: Worry not, Bonson. It's probably for show. After all, her minions were beyond pathetic!

BONSON: That's true!

(Just then, the bright light around Kajice went out and the chanting died. She then brought her head down and stared down at everyone from her lofty position.)

KAJICE: Right. Let's see who's here shall we?

(With merely the point of a finger she set fire to the nearest house to illuminate the area.)

KAJICE: Ah, that's much better!

(Her condescending tone bore an aura of confidence which unnerved them all greatly.)

BONSON: I can't see us overpowering *her*, to be honest!

FLAXLEY: Really? She seems a little *over*-confident to me!

BONSON: She can afford to be!

(As Mandika shivered with fear, Kajice then snarled down at the six nervous allies before her.)

KAJICE: Going somewhere? Only I don't recall giving you permission to leave your cell.

MANDIKA: N-no, we weren't going anywhere! I promise.

(Never one to show fear in the face of his enemy, Flaxley tipped back his head, and spoke with authority in his voice.)

FLAXLEY: Actually, we were! We've rescued Zanne and now we're going to return her to her people!

(Kajice laughed hysterically as she continued to hover in the air.)

KAJICE: If only you knew how stupid you sound!

BONSON: I have a fair idea!

KAJICE: The dark spirits who guide me have spoken. You are the ones who have thwarted my every step to world domination. I do not know what brought you to me, perhaps it was fate, but I always dreamt this day would come!

DEREK: Thwarted your every step?

FLAXLEY: Never mind that, we defeated your army with ease, Kajice. What's to stop us despatching *you* in the same way?

KAJICE: Fools!!! Do you know nothing of what you have done?

(Mandika slowly backed away as the others looked to Kajice wearing nervous expressions.)

KAJICE: My great plan to unite the three keys of the creators was a stones throw from completion, then you, you exact few, stole it away!!!

(She then became animated, gesturing angrily with her arms as she projected her bitter tongue. As a precaution everyone swiftly adopted a battle stance, albeit a nervous one.)

KAJICE: I acquired the help of two great witches in my quest for the missing key, the key of peace. Jacquit and Suzbit, remember them?

(She threw a pointing finger at Lefiat, frightening him half to death.)

LEFIAT: Eh? What? Never heard of 'em! I didn't smash their staffs and kill 'em!

MANDIKA: Yeah... um... and we didn't see him do it either!

BONSON: And I'm a 10 year old girl!

(He rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: Couldn't tell a lie if their lives depended on it!

(Kajice slowly raised her hand from Lefiat's direction and pointed it harshly at Flaxley.)

FLAXLEY: What?

KAJICE: Once the key was lost by Jacquit and Suzbit, I employed a crazy warlord to search every town until he found it! Remember Dim Lee???

(She stared right through him.)

FLAXLEY: Sorry Kajice, but I didn't actually kill him. That moment of triumph was down to my friend...

BONSON: Lies!!! *You* did it, *you*, no one else, *you*!!!

FLAXLEY: What?

KAJICE: Enough!!!

(With a face like thunder, she spoke through gritted teeth. Her hatred made quite clear by the sound of her voice.)

KAJICE: You fools thought Jacquit and Suzbit wanted the key of peace for themselves! You were wrong! You actually believed that Dim Lee wanted a new pagoda, again, wrong! All three of them were in *my* employ and now I see you have come for *me*!

(She started shaking like an erupting volcano.)

FLAXLEY: Brace yourselves!

KAJICE: They couldn't kill you, but I, Kajice will prove what people have always said, if you want something done right... do it yourself!!!

(With that, she started to rotate in the air like a spinning top, randomly blasting out inferno magic from her outstretched arms. At once, everyone threw themselves onto the ground, except Mandika who took off back down the road as fast as her legs would carry her.)

LEFIAT: Mandika? Come back!!!

(As Lefiat went to race after her, Flaxley grabbed his ankle and tripped him up.)

FLAXLEY: Stay low, Lefiat!

LEFIAT: But...

(As Mandika disappeared around the corner, Lefiat whimpered.)

LEFIAT: I should have gone with her!

FLAXLEY: No, she'll be fine, Lefiat. There's no guards left to capture her after all.

LEFIAT: But...

FLAXLEY: And the further she is from Kajice the better, right?

LEFIAT: Yeah... but I should still have gone with her. I'm supposed to defend her at all times.

FLAXLEY: And by helping defeat Kajice you will be. After all, if she kills us lot, Mandika's next.

(Absorbing Flaxley's words, Lefiat snarled and stared angrily at Kajice.)

LEFIAT: I'll never that happen!

(Having watched Mandika race away as he lay flat on the ground, Bonson looked to Derek.)

BONSON: Mandika had the right idea, actually. We should have legged it!

DEREK: With *her* on our tail? We'd stand no chance!

BONSON: Compared to what? Staying *here* and having no chance?

KRITZ: Look if we just stay low, well be okay! She's blasting fireballs way over our heads!

(No sooner than she'd spoke, however, Kajice lowered the angle of her arms and her fireballs doubled in number.)

BONSON: Had to say it, didn't you???

FLAXLEY: Careful!!!

(Almost as if they'd been cast into the fiery pits of hell, fireballs smacked against the turf at various points around them one after the other. To make matters worse, Kajice was spinning so fast no-one could predict where. Immediately, everyone leapt to their feet and proceeded to dance around on the balls of their feet, desperately hoping to avoid a burning.)

LEFIAT: We're all gonna die!!!

DEREK: Stop panicking and watch the fireballs, Lefiat!!!

(As Flaxley arched his back to avoid being hit and Zanne performed a majestic leap over one, Kritz snarled to herself.)

KRITZ: Sorry guys!

(With that, she quickly ran in front of her allies, soaking them with her H2O magic, then doing it to herself.)

BONSON: You cow!

(He raised his magic arm at her only for Flaxley to slap it down.)

FLAXLEY: Good thinking Kritz, it'll offer us *some* protection at least!

BONSON: Oh, of course, I do apologise!

(For several minutes, they continued to somehow avoid her fiery onslaught, when Lefiat yelped out in anguish.)

LEFIAT: Argh, I'm on fire!!!

(Sure enough, a fireball had set alight to his backpack.)

LEFIAT: I'm gonna die!

DEREK: Take it off!!!

(In a blinding hurry, he ripped the pack from his back then jumped up and down on it.)

LEFIAT: That was close!

(Fearing it was only a matter of time before somebody got hurt, Kritz looked to Flaxley urgently.)

KRITZ: Flaxley, darling...

(She ducked to avoid a flying fireball then jumped to her feet again.)

KRITZ: We need a plan. Now!!!

(As flames continued to crash all about them, Flaxley nodded then snarled venomously.)

FLAXLEY: I'll do what I do best!

(With that, he raised his sword aloft and charged at Kajice furiously.)

FLAXLEY: You asked for it, witch features!!!

(As he swung his sword at her, however, Kajice abruptly stopped spinning and caught the blade in her hand.)

FLAXLEY: How the?

(Everyone looked on in dismay as she raised the sword and lifted him up off of his feet.)

KAJICE: How such weak fools defeated Jacquit, Suzbit and Dim Lee, I will never know!

(With that, she threw him, sword and all, over her shoulder.)

KAJICE: Good riddance to bad rubbish, I say!

FLAXLEY: Argh!!!

(Flailing his arms wildly, he hit the ground hard, some fifteen feet away, landing with his entire weight on his already paining hand.)

FLAXLEY: Fuck, fuck, fuck!!!

(He removed his glove to reveal a badly burnt and swollen hand.)

FLAXLEY: Damn it, this really isn't helping!

(He shook his hand to try to quell the pain then grabbed his sword and hurriedly re-joined his comrades. Having seen what Kajice was capable of, they were looking none too confident.

Kajice, however, was enjoying herself immensely.)

KAJICE: This is fun!

(She pointed at Lefiat.)

KAJICE: You with the stupid face, let's see you dance!
(With that, she raised her arm and proceeded to fire lightning at his feet, making him leap up and down in distress.)
LEFIAT: Argh, help, stop it, mummy!!!
(Furious to say the least, Flaxley bellowed at her.)
FLAXLEY: Stop this charade!!!
(Looking nonchalant, Kajice lowered her wrist then grinned at Flaxley in a cheesy manner.)
FLAXLEY: You do not fight fair!
KAJICE: There's *seven* of you!
(He mused for a moment then dismissed her comment.)
FLAXLEY: That's mere detail!
KAJICE: Silence!!! If it's a real battle you want, try this for size!
(With that, she fired a bolt of lightning straight into Kritz.)
FLAXLEY: No!!!
(Devastated to the core of his being, he raced over to Kritz and caught her body before it hit the floor.)
KAJICE: Shame, she was such a pretty girl too!
(The evil witch laughed as the broken Flaxley knelt sorrowfully with his beloved Kritz in his arms.)
FLAXLEY: Our hopes, our dreams... dashed!
KRITZ: Don't talk bollocks!
FLAXLEY: What?
(Much to his amazement her face was smiling back at him.)
FLAXLEY: You survived?
KRITZ: I don't get it either!
(He helped her struggle to her feet then turned to face Kajice furiously.)
FLAXLEY: You've gone too far!
KAJICE: Nonsense, I'm just warming up!
(She then floated down to the ground.)
KAJICE: Now for some *real* fun!
(With that, she started to fire off more lightning at peoples feet, laughing as they dived around in desperation. Being punch drunk from the powerful blast she'd just received, Kritz especially provided her with much in the way of amusement.)

(In the meantime, while the others battled for their lives, a terrified Mandika stopped running only to discover she'd inadvertently ran back to the castle. She'd been so terrified, she hadn't even noticed where she was heading. She just wanted to get away. Having done so, she breathed a sigh of relief then felt a strange aching in her heart.)
MANDIKA: Ow, what's that pain?
(She thought to herself about how she'd abandoned the others, leaving them to fight while she saved herself and was immediately overcome with guilt.)
MANDIKA: Kritz is right, I *am* a bitch!
(She looked ashamedly to the floor.)
MANDIKA: There must be something I can do...
(As she wallowed in self pity, she looked up at the castle. In that moment, a ponderous expression crossed her brow)
MANDIKA: No guards? No Kajice? The castle's empty. I wonder... there must be something we can use in there!
(With hope of redeeming herself filling her heart, she then scampered across the drawbridge

and into the castle.)

(Outside in the darkened village at this time Kajice was still liberally torturing everyone with her magic. Derek's bag had been burnt to a crisp and Lefiat's sword encased in ice. With absolutely no hope of defeating her, all they could do was run around desperately and hope they didn't get hit.)

ZANNE: Is there nothing we can do?

DEREK: I can try!

(Derek stopped and fired a bolt of lightning at Kajice.)

KAJICE: Oh, how futile!

(She merely held out her hand and reflected it at Zanne.)

DEREK: Shit!!!

(He just managed to bundle her out of the way in time.)

LEFIAT: What shall I do? I've lost my sword and Mandika's gone! What shall I do???

BONSON: How the hell should I know?

FLAXLEY: What magic do you have, Derek?

DEREK: Nothing of any use! She deflects it!

BONSON: Well, we have to try something!

(He fumbled in his bag and pulled out the hammer he'd found in the barn.)

FLAXLEY: Don't do anything stupid, Bonson!

BONSON: You can't expect me not to do *anything*, Flaxley! And don't call me "stupid Bonson."

(With that, the normally battle shy senior citizen charged at Kajice with his hammer aloft.)

ZANNE: He's so brave!

FLAXLEY: Bonson, no, don't do it!

(Fed up with watching Kajice attack time and time again and receive nothing in the way of retaliation, Bonson ignored him and continued his charge, only for Kajice to flick out her hand at him.)

KAJICE: Nice try, grandad!

(At once, he flew backwards as if he'd run into a force 10 storm and crashed to the ground, hitting his head on some rocks.)

FLAXLEY: Bonson!

(He tried to reach his aged friend only to be blown off his feet by a lightning bolt landing just in front of him.)

FLAXLEY: Damn it!

(Derek, however, made it to Bonson unscathed.)

DEREK: Bonson? Are you okay?

(With a choked voice, and fading eyes, Bonson spoke softly.)

BONSON: Tell Flaxley... I did my best!

(He then closed his eyes.)

BONSON: Just let me rest now!

(Derek laid down his head gently then looked up at Kajice.)

DEREK: You'll pay for this!!!

(He went to charge straight for her, but instead of going forwards he floated upwards, his legs ran like the clappers but he went nowhere.)

DEREK: Put me down, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: And let her do the same to you? No way!

(He stopped running on air and sighed ruefully.)

DEREK: Fine. You're right!

(Suddenly, the magical onslaught came to an abrupt halt. Hoping against hope that Kajice had exhausted her powers, Flaxley put Derek down then stepped forward arrogantly.)

FLAXLEY: Ha, had enough, eh? Do you give up?

(Kajice ignored his stupid question and once again levitated above the ground.)

FLAXLEY: Now's my chance!

(With that, he charged at her, determined to impale her on his sword, but just as she'd done to Bonson, she blew him over with the flick of a wrist.)

FLAXLEY: Stop doing that!

KAJICE: Why? Aren't you enjoying yourselves?

(She grinned.)

KAJICE: I certainly am! You blow over so easily!

(She looked over to where Kritz was staggering, still seeing double and unsure of where she was.)

KAJICE: Watch!

(With that, she thrust an open hand in Kritz's direction, blowing her already unstable legs from beneath her.)

KAJICE: Ha, ha, don't tell me that wasn't fun!

(Flaxley watched as Kritz sat up and scratched her head in a confused state.)

FLAXLEY: You evil bitch!!!

KAJICE: Enough!!!

(With an unnerving seriousness etched on her face, she then spoke in a bitter tone.)

KAJICE: As much as I've enjoyed teasing you feeble humans... and giant frogs, I came here to do a job, you will now die!

(Fearing their number was up, they all watched with heavy hearts as she levitated into the air and slowly began to raise her arms and chant again.)

LEFIAT: Call me defeatist, but that can't be good.

(Just then, Mandika came racing over to them looking desperate and confused.)

MANDIKA: Guys!!!

LEFIAT: You're alive!

FLAXLEY: Mandika? You couldn't have come back at a worse time!!! Run, girl!

MANDIKA: But... it said to use this.

(With that, she held a large, blue, crystal sphere in his direction.)

FLAXLEY: *Who* said to use this? And what is it?

MANDIKA: I dunno... the voice said...

(Just then, Kajice stopped chanting and a deeply disturbed expression engulfed her face.)

KAJICE: No!!! Give me that!!!

(In a desperate panic, she then flew at Mandika in an attempt to take the object back.

Absolutely terrified, Mandika screamed then jumped on top of it.)

MANDIKA: Go away!!!

FLAXLEY: Mandika, be careful!

(Looking utterly mortified, Kajice cast wind magic at Flaxley to blow him away from Mandika then landed next to her head. At once they all feared for Mandika's life, but amazingly, the evil witch did nothing. Much to their bewilderment, Kajice simply stood over Mandika nervously, desperate to get the crystal ball back but clearly terrified of damaging it in the process. Making the most of the lull in fighting, Flaxley picked himself up from where he'd landed then raced to Derek.)

FLAXLEY: Derek, this is bad. Bonson's out for the count and Kritz can barely stand. Now Mandika's in mortal danger.

DEREK: I can see that, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: We have to do something.

(Derek read Flaxley's mind and nodded.)

DEREK: I agree with your thoughts entirely, Flaxley. While she's distracted by the ball, we might be able to take her by surprise. I'm just worried Mandika might get hurt. Kajice is too close to her for comfort.

ZANNE: Yes, but if we don't do anything, Mandika's going to get hurt anyway.

FLAXLEY: Exactly.

LEFIAT: Look, if you've got a plan, count me in. She's *my* charge.

(Flaxley looked to Lefiat and nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Fair enough. How do you fancy attacking Kajice from the front while I try to sneak up on her from behind?

LEFIAT: Why, I don't fancy that one bit actually. In fact, you can piss right off.

(He then looked to where Kajice was pacing nervously around Mandika as she clung onto the sphere for dear life. Not about to leave Mandika in such a terrifying position, he stood tall and nodded defiantly.)

LEFIAT: *I'm* her knight! I'll save her my own way.

(Flaxley was furious.)

FLAXLEY: We've no time for your half-witted shenanigans, Lefiat!!!

LEFIAT: I'm a professional knight, Flaxley. I know my duty! Watch and learn.

FLAXLEY: Learn? Learn???

(Convinced Flaxley was about to kill Lefiat, Zanne reacted swiftly and cast a restraining spell on him.)

ZANNE: He was actually going to do it that time, wasn't he?

DEREK: No doubt about it, my love.

(With Flaxley magically restrained from taking any kind of forward steps, Lefiat marched confidently towards where Mandika lay sprawled out on the ball and spoke in a rare, self-assured tone.)

LEFIAT: Kajice. I must insist you...

(Furious with his audacity, Kajice turned to him and bellowed.)

KAJICE: Fool!

(With that, she lashed out her arm and fired off a pulse of wind magic at him, sending him sprawling backwards, unconscious to the floor. As Derek rushed to tend to him, Mandika screamed.)

MANDIKA: You're horrible!!! Go away!!!

(Desperate to pacify the terrified princess with a view to conning her into giving her the sphere back, Kajice forced a smile and put on a friendly voice.)

KAJICE: Please, I'm sorry! If you let me have the ball, I'll let you go!

(Consumed with fear, Mandika turned her head slightly and whimpered.)

MANDIKA: Really?

FLAXLEY: Don't listen to her, princess!

KAJICE: Silence!!!

(She then turned at speed towards Flaxley and cast inferno magic at him. Under the influence of the restraint magic, he just managed to dive out of the way in time.)

FLAXLEY: Remove that magic, will you?

ZANNE: Only if you promise not to kill the halfwit.

FLAXLEY: Fine. I don't like it but fine.

(Having seen the whole thing, Mandika cried out in anguish.)

MANDIKA: Leave us alone!!! I hate witches!!!

(Kajice gaped and held out her palms towards her in the hope of pacifying her.)

KAJICE: Sorry, sorry... I'm just tense! Please... just let me have the ball.

(Having being brought back to consciousness by Derek, Lefiat climbed to his feet feeling

more than a little wobbly. Despite his aches and pains, however, he staggered straight back towards Mandika.)

DEREK: Lefiat, don't!!! Trying to negotiate with *her* is even stupider than asking enemy guards for directions.

(Lefiat glared back at him.)

LEFIAT: I know what I'm doing. I'm a knight, remember?

(He then looked to Mandika as he staggered forth.)

LEFIAT: Mandika, I'm coming.

(Shuddering, Mandika contorted her neck to look at him with terrified eyes.)

MANDIKA: I'm scared, Lefiat!

(Without averting her worried gaze from Mandika's back, Kajice simply cast her palm in Lefiat's direction and blew him unconscious to the floor once again. Derek rolled his eyes and looked to the heavens.)

DEREK: I'm not reviving him again if that's what he's gonna do!

(Having just witnessed Lefiat get blown off his feet, Mandika's blood started to boil. At once all her fear evaporated to be replaced by undiluted fury.)

MANDIKA: That's my boyfriend!!!

(She then leapt to her feet and threw the sphere at Kajice in a fit of rage.)

MANDIKA: You sick bitch!!!

(Kajice's eyes popped out of her head as the ball flew towards her. For the split second it was in the air, her heart stopped and her skin turned absolutely pale. She then visibly breathed a sigh of relief as she gathered it into her stomach.)

KAJICE: Ha, fools!!! This was the key to defeating me and you didn't even realise it!!!

(As she looked up with menace in her eyes, however, she fumbled the ball.)

KAJICE: Oh no! Shit!!!

(Sensing an opportunity, Flaxley's eyes lit up.)

FLAXLEY: The key to defeating you, is it?

(He then snarled determinedly.)

FLAXLEY: In that case, it's worth a try.

(As Kajice struggled to regain control of the ball, he quickly cast his dented and battered glove into her already congested arms. Looking tortured, she flailed her arms around, desperate to keep a hold of the ball at all costs. Unfortunately for her, however, Flaxley's glove worked like a charm. Thrown by a second, unexpected object, she lost concentration for a brief moment and the ball spilled through her fingers then and rolled down her legs and bounced on the ground before rolling away across the grass.)

KAJICE: No!!!

FLAXLEY: Yes!!!

(At once, they both ran for the ball as it rolled towards where Bonson was lying barely conscious.)

FLAXLEY: Must get the ball!

(Kajice saw him as she scrambled for the ball and thrust him back with a powerful blast of her wind magic.)

FLAXLEY: Damn!

KAJICE: Ha!

(She laughed as the ball settled near Bonson.)

KAJICE: Buffoon!

(Just as she reached for the ball, however, Bonson lifted his weary head.)

BONSON: If you're gonna fight over it, no-ones having it!

(With that, he raised his hand with the hammer still in his palm and proceeded to smash the sphere into tiny fragments.)

KAJICE: No!!!!

(Kajice immediately stood bolt upright wearing an expression of total horror as the sky began to rumble. Reacting to the noise, Flaxley swiftly looked up and his jaw dropped in awe at the sight of a thousand multi coloured lights circling around in the sky above them. Bewildered by it all, he then looked to Kajice. Seeing the ultra powerful witch struck dumb with terror at the phenomena, he immediately started to feel more than a little unnerved. Sensing it wouldn't be wise to stick around; he paced away backwards and gestured to his equally stunned allies to do the same. Sharing his sense of foreboding, Derek, Zanne and Mandika dragged the dazed trio of Bonson, Kritz and Lefiat away unable to take their eyes off the light show above their heads. Overwhelmed with fear, Kajice made no attempt to stop them as she walked in circles looking upwards, seemingly begging to the sky through tearful eyes. Ignoring her obvious distress, the allies continued to back away with their eyes transfixed on the aerial display above them. Pacing backwards in a slow trance, they only made it fifteen feet from Kajice when a loud fizzing sound echoed across the sky. A split second later, a thick bolt of fork lightning crashed down directly onto Kajice's head. Instinctively, they all dived to the ground and clung onto one another for dear life.)

DEREK: What the...

(They could barely watch as the sounds kept coming accompanied by extra strong bursts of various magic types. Time after time, they averting their gaze as Kajice was pelted with inferno, glacier, lightning and several other types of magic they'd never even seen before. Yet time after time, they looked back again unable to drag their eyes away from the horror. Huddled on the ground they remained there either too afraid or too fascinated to drag themselves away. For several minutes not a word was spoken until a tearful Mandika broke the awestruck silence. Being driven insane by Kajice's harrowing screams she covered her ears and cried out.)

MANDIKA: Make it stop!

(Much to her considerable distress, it wasn't until another full ten minutes more had passed that the magic stopped abruptly and silence filled the air. The multi coloured lights then faded away and birdsong returned to the village. Having feared it may never end they all looked up at the sky with trepidation then across at Kajice. Burnt to a crisp with melting skin, she crashed to the ground and lay in a heap on the floor convulsing.)

FLAXLEY: What in the name of all that's holy did that???

(As everyone stared on in amazement, Flaxley leapt to his feet and flapped in bewilderment.)

FLAXLEY: Seriously!!! What the hell???

(He looked to the baffled Bonson.)

FLAXLEY: What the fuck was that???

(Bonson could only shrug back at him.)

BONSON: I don't know.

FLAXLEY: One minute she's spanking our arses good and proper... the next...

(He looked a great deal more at ease and a smile appeared on his face.)

FLAXLEY: And the next... she's in a world of pain and we've won.

(Looking somewhat smug, he then approached Kajice's quivering remains.)

FLAXLEY: What the hell could have caused such a thing though?

(A dazed and bruised Lefiat followed him over to her looking utterly confused.)

LEFIAT: Dunno, but... she aint getting up from *that*!

FLAXLEY: Bloody right, there's not enough left of her *to* get up.

LEFIAT: Shame, she was such a pretty girl too!

(The two of them then giggled like schoolboys, when Kajice's head suddenly twitched.)

LEFIAT: She's alive!

(Kajice then spoke in a dying whisper.)

KAJICE: Please...

(A small wooden staff rolled from her dress and Flaxley bent to pick it up.)

FLAXLEY: Her staff.

(He smiled then threw it to Lefiat.)

FLAXLEY: You know what to do!

(Failing to catch it, Lefiat watched as the staff bounced off his chest then fell to the turf.)

LEFIAT: Careful, Flaxley.

(Flaxley rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Just smash the thing!

(Lefiat grinned at him sheepishly then scooped the staff up off the ground.)

LEFIAT: With pleasure!

(As Lefiat turned and approached a rock to smash the staff, Flaxley smiled to himself.)

FLAXLEY: Even *he* can't fuck that task up!

(As soon as he finished speaking, however, Lefiat tripped over his own foot sending himself flying to the ground and the staff flying up into the air.)

FLAXLEY: I stand corrected!

(As Flaxley despaired of him, however, the staff plummeted back down and crashed down on Lefiat's iron helmet, smashing to pieces.)

FLAXLEY: Hmm, unorthodox but effective I suppose!

(He then turned to where Kajice's disgusting mess of a body had been and found only dust. Kajice was dead.)

(Despite their incredible victory against all the odds, the seven weary heroes were in a far from celebratory mood. Rather than dancing for joy and congratulating one another on a job well done, they all sat quietly gathering their thoughts as they tried to recover from what had been an exhausting battle. Sitting slumped against her beloved husband; Kritz could barely keep her eyes open. Having been on the receiving end of a lightning blast that by rights should have killed her stone dead, she was still extremely dazed. Having briefly thought he'd lost her, Flaxley held her tight and tried to block out thoughts of how he'd ever cope without her. Having recovered from his two knockout blows, Lefiat sat ashen-faced comforting the trembling Mandika. She'd seen death and misery before but nothing like the suffering she'd just witnessed. She couldn't get the image of Kajice being melted and fried alive out of her head. Her bloodcurdling screams might just haunt her forever. For Derek and Zanne, it was very much a bittersweet moment. They were reunited and their hearts felt joyous, and yet that joy was tinged with sadness. Derek's friends had almost lost their lives in their quest to help him and he was riddled with guilt, a feeling Zanne couldn't help but empathise with. Sitting alone, with no loved one to hold onto, Bonson cut a sorry looking figure as he slumped against a rock. Sapped of all his energy, he typified their mood as he sat there staring dejectedly at the ground. The mission may have been a success, but the reality of nearly losing their friends lives cut like a knife.

Any sense of euphoria over their victory was entirely absent. They'd come extremely close to death and all they felt was relief. They'd been on the brink of annihilation when Kajice had been destroyed by a force beyond their control. She hadn't been defeated by their might; she'd simply been taken out of the fight before she'd had a chance to kill them all. It didn't feel like a victory, it felt like a bewildering fluke and they were lucky to be alive. Had they taken the fight to Kajice and defeated her with their own skill and cunning, right now they'd be punching the air and toasting their greatness. Such well-earned victories would always leave triumphant battlers high on a rush of adrenaline and for several moments they'd bask in

a feeling of invincibility. This was not the case for the exhausted party who'd set out from Tifaeris only a few short days ago. This victory didn't feel like an achievement and they were merely thankful that their lifeless corpses weren't strewn about Desha village waiting to rot.

As they continued to run a post mortem of events in their minds, still trying to fathom exactly what had happened to Kajice and why, Lefiat sighed and finally broke the silence. Climbing gingerly to his feet, he forced a smile and asked the question that nobody else cared to.)

LEFIAT: Shouldn't we get going?

(He received no answer. Unsurprised by the lack of action, he helped the nervous Mandika to her feet and looked out towards the coastline. Immediately, his jaw dropped and he did a double take at the sight before him.)

LEFIAT: Holy crap, look!

(Fearing the worst, everyone leapt to their feet then threw their heads in the direction Lefiat was staring in. At once, they joined him in gaping in awe at the sight.)

DEREK: Oh my!!!

(They couldn't believe their eyes. The storms that had encircled the island were no longer there. The rampaging tempest had disappeared and there was only a clear night sky and calm seas as far as the eye could see.)

MANDIKA: It's incredible!

KRITZ: It's impossible!

BONSON: It's beautiful!

(As the others stared out to sea, Lefiat turned to face the other way and bit his lip.)

LEFIAT: I don't like the sea, Mandika.

(He then bounced with joy and pointed ahead of himself.)

LEFIAT: Hey, look this side, an' all!

(They all about turned and once again their jaws dropped. The glacier they'd struggled across to get there had melted away, leaving behind lush foliage with flora dotted around the meadows. Bonson was dumbfounded.)

BONSON: Wow, she had some pretty damn powerful magic going on, Kajice!

FLAXLEY: You're not kidding!

BONSON: That right, I'm not kidding. How perceptive of you.

(Flaxley just glared at him coldly.)

FLAXLEY: Don't be flippant, Bonson. Always with the smarmy reply. Can't just say nothing, can you?

MANDIKA: He really can't! As soon as you speak, you can be guaranteed his voice will pop up with some derogatory comment.

BONSON: Derogatory yet witty, Mandika.

MANDIKA: Well, *you* might think so.

BONSON: Oh, I do. I've said it before and I'll say it again, I'm a hoot.

(They all glared at him coldly for a moment then Flaxley glanced to Mandika.)

FLAXLEY: Actually, Mandika, speaking of voices, what were you trying to tell me about that crystal ball?

(Mandika looked to him uneasily then scratched her head.)

MANDIKA: I'm not entirely sure, Flaxley. I went in the castle and there was this room... well, I saw the ball and ignored it, but this voice inside my head told me to take it to you.

(She glanced away and shrugged.)

MANDIKA: You probably think I imagined it, but I swear... the voice was as clear as anything. And really insistent. Almost like a nagging old man, it was.

BONSON: Why did you look at me when you said that?

MANDIKA: I didn't.

BONSON: No? My bad, I just assumed.

(Flaxley looked to Mandika and sighed.)

FLAXLEY: It does sound insane, Mandika, but I believe you. We've seen too many weird things to dismiss *any* bizarre occurrence. And we *already* knew higher forces were at work in this world...

BONSON: Neo-gods like I'm going to be.

(Flaxley ignored his conceited comment and continued.)

FLAXLEY: And after what we've just seen, who could doubt it? Kajice was just destroyed before our very eyes! By the bloody sky of all things!!! I mean what the hell is that all about?

DEREK: It's beyond our comprehension, whatever it was.

FLAXLEY: Absolutely. I mean let's look at it. First, Lefiat says the wrong code to come back to our time but gets here anyway...

BONSON: That was sheer rotten luck.

FLAXLEY: Then Mandika is told to bring that crystal ball to us by a mysterious voice, Bonson smashes it and our enemy dies. Just... dies. Gets killed by the sky! What the ball had to do with it, I don't know, but whoever told Mandika to bring it to us certainly did. Smash, dead.

KRITZ: It certainly explains why Kajice was so keen to get it back.

MANDIKA: And why she was so careful not to hurt me just in case I broke it.

FLAXLEY: Yes, but that's *all* it explains. I mean, we were just here. It's like our only contribution to the fight was to keep Kajice busy while fates conspired to kill her! Now if that isn't all down to mysterious forces working behind the scenes then I don't know what is.

MANDIKA: Do you think Daman Siria and that council of the wise had anything to do with it?

DEREK: Definitely.

KRITZ: I reckon so.

FLAXLEY: More than likely. But then again, maybe it was a force beyond even *them*. Maybe we'll never know.

BONSON: Quite, as mere mortals you probably never will. I, however...

FLAXLEY: Oh, do shut up, Bonson.

(Bonson looked most put out.)

BONSON: No, *you* shut up!

(As Flaxley glared at him angrily, Bonson scratched his head and glanced away.)

BONSON: So, Kajice, eh? Powerful old girl.

MANDIKA: And nasty with it.

BONSON: Nice breasts though!

MANDIKA: Trust you!

BONSON: Her behind was something to behold too!

MANDIKA: We get the point!

BONSON: Jealous? You should be, no man alive could resist a beauty like that.

(He rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: Except Flaxley, apparently.

MANDIKA: I'm not jealous. I may not be a sex queen like her, but I can still get any man I want.

(He glanced at her boyfriend, Lefiat.)

BONSON: Are you sure about that?

MANDIKA: Shut it!!!

(As Bonson chuckled to himself, Flaxley rolled his eyes and reached for Kritz's hand.)

FLAXLEY: Let's go before you upset anyone else!

BONSON: Quite. Silly girl!

FLAXLEY: Not her, you!

BONSON: Me?

(Feeling slightly offended he started to walk off then just stopped dead in his tracks and bent down as if to pick something up off the ground.)

BONSON: What have we here?

MANDIKA: Now's my chance!

(With that, she ran up and kicked his backside as hard as she could with her pointed shoe.)

BONSON: Hey!!!

(Totally thrown off balance, he fell forwards and landed on his head.)

FLAXLEY: Mandika!

(He gave her a severely disappointed glance as he tried not to laugh. Looking thoroughly appalled by Mandika's behaviour, Bonson leapt to his feet.)

BONSON: That's it, I'm telling your father about them guards!!!

LEFIAT: Guards? What guards, Mandika?

MANDIKA: He's lying!!!

(Lefiat nodded, accepting her words.)

LEFIAT: Yeah, figures.

BONSON: Hey!!!

(He sneered at Mandika coldly.)

BONSON: Not that I'd really tell your father about the guards, he'd never believe me. I will say this though; you're a thug, Mandika. That was an appalling way to behave.

MANDIKA: Oh, get over yourself. You bent over and I couldn't resist it!

BONSON: Yes, I've heard that about you!

MANDIKA: Hey! That's...

(She paused and scratched her head.)

MANDIKA: That made no sense!

(She shook away her thoughts and scowled at him.)

MANDIKA: Whatever. You were being mean to me; you're always being mean to me.

Yeah, I booted you up the bum but as far as I'm concerned, that just makes us even!!!

BONSON: Even? We're not even slightly even! You went too far. That was physical abuse; I've never sunk *that* low.

(She gave him a cocky smile.)

MANDIKA: What are you going to do then, hit me back? I don't think so.

(He snarled and looked away.)

BONSON: I'll find a way.

MANDIKA: I doubt it.

DEREK: Why did you bend over anyway, Bonson?

(Bonson's angry expression evaporated and he grinned from ear to ear.)

BONSON: A-ha!

(He held up two gold keys.)

LEFIAT: Keys?

BONSON: No, they're cuddyfinkle droppings! Of course they're keys! And not just any keys either.

FLAXLEY: Indeed. They're solid gold. Where did you find them?

(Bonson rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: Where I bent down obviously! They were among all that broken glass down there?

(He pointed to what remained of the shattered sphere and beamed arrogantly.)

BONSON: And it seems obvious to me, that they were *inside* the crystal sphere when I smashed it! This is no co-incidence, oh no. They weren't laying there when I happened to smash it, they were most definitely inside it.

(Everybody looked questioningly upon him.)

DEREK: What makes you say that?

(He gave them all his smarmiest look.)

BONSON: This, my friends, is why Daman Siria picked *me* to be a wise man...

KRITZ: He's off!

BONSON: It's perfectly obvious to me that Kajice's defeat came courtesy of one of these keys here!

(Much to his amazement, everyone looked totally confused.)

BONSON: Not following, no? Keys? As in 'the three'.

(With no sign of his comrades catching on any time soon, he shook his head and sighed.)

BONSON: Maybe it's because you're all tired. Let me put it another way. These keys aren't special just because they're gold.

(As everyone continued to stare through him in bewilderment, he rolled his eyes and groaned.)

BONSON: Good grief. Fine, let me spell it out to you. Kajice was attacked by a torrent of magic, right?

LEFIAT: Yeah!

BONSON: Where do you think the magic came from?

LEFIAT: Um...

BONSON: Not you!

KRITZ: Um... Tifaeris?

(He sighed.)

BONSON: I take that back, Lefiat!

LEFIAT: I was gonna say Tifaeris!

BONSON: No, idiots, I'll put it *yet* another way!

(He spoke slowly and deliberately.)

BONSON: That crystal sphere! The reason she was so keen to protect it was because it was restraining these keys!

FLAXLEY: You mean?

BONSON: Yes, finally, one of these keys is in fact...

(He puffed out his chest with pride.)

BONSON: The key of justice!

(As he continued to wallow in what he considered glory, the others gasped.)

BONSON: Yes, I know, I'm an absolute font of knowledge, aren't I?

(He beamed then continued his explanation.)

BONSON: See, with the key of justice, for anyone you strike down out of pure spite, you receive the same attack! No-one gets away with murder when this baby's around! By restraining it, Kajice received all her justice at once!

(All the faces before him bore a look of understanding.)

BONSON: At last! It's bloody hard work explaining anything to you lot!

(Looking most enlightened, Flaxley nodded sternly.)

FLAXLEY: So *that* was their plan, was it?

MANDIKA: Whose plan?

FLAXLEY: The higher forces we were talking about. While we kept Kajice busy they got you to collect the one thing that could defeat her, the crystal ball.

MANDIKA: I guess so... but I was only able to do that because I ran away from the fight.

(She then looked uncertain.)

MANDIKA: Having said that, running into a castle to get away from its owner wasn't a very sensible thing to do, yet I felt an overwhelming urge to go in there. And then there was that voice telling me to take the ball...

(She trembled and grabbed hold of Lefiat's arm.)

MANDIKA: I bet those higher forces made me run away from the fight... not that I wasn't going to anyway.

(She whimpered.)

MANDIKA: I don't like it. There must be an unseen force out there making me do things against my will.

BONSON: That would explain your choice of boyfriend.

LEFIAT: I was just thinking that.

BONSON: Anyway, Flaxley. I'd say your assessment is spot on. A higher force guided us here knowing that smashing that crystal ball was the way to unleash the key of justice on Kajice. And they made it so.

(Kritz nodded in astonishment.)

KRITZ: That was a *lot* of justice she received too! Imagine how many people she must have killed to get that much retribution.

DEREK: Several hundreds I reckon. Easily.

(As the others paused to contemplate the sheer scale of Kajice's evil, Lefiat looked to Bonson enquiringly.)

LEFIAT: So, what about the key of liberty then, Bonson? What does that do?

(Bonson seemed quite agitated for a second then pointed to the grasslands outside of town.)

BONSON: Um... is that the time? That's enough education for one day, let's go!

(He then turned and headed for the meadow.)

FLAXLEY: Hey, wise man?

BONSON: What?

FLAXLEY: *We're* going to take one of those boats we spotted in the harbour. See you when you get back. We figured it'd be easier to simply sail home!

KRITZ: Bye, Bonson.

FLAXLEY: Good luck with the corridor of time.

(With a red face he about turned.)

BONSON: Well, how was I to know?

(As the others walked ahead, he followed sheepishly, grumbling under his breath.)

BONSON: Stupid bloody Flaxley, mincing about with his gold chain and silly helmet. Thinks he knows everything.

(As one of the boats edged out of Desha Village harbour several minutes later, its seven weary passengers made no secret of their relief at not having to return home via the future. There'd be no long marches or struggles against future police officers with projectile weapons. Instead, with a little help from Flaxley's navigation skills they'd be able to sit back and let a combination of wind and time take care of the rest. With the boat heading for the open sea, spirits had improved no end. The mission was complete and as soon as they'd dropped Derek and Zanne off at north Skiro to fix their spacecraft, they'd all be free to head home.

Feeling shattered and exhausted, everyone rested on the front deck, except Flaxley and Kritz who had to pilot the ship. Once they were satisfied the boat was finally heading in the right direction, however, they too strolled out onto the moonlit deck to rest up for a while. Sapped of energy, they joined the others in lounging on the front deck with their backs against the

cabin wall.)

FLAXLEY: At last, a little time to relax!

LEFIAT: Then who's sailing the ship?

MANDIKA: Relax love, let them take five!

LEFIAT: As you wish, Man... ma'am!

(Flaxley looked to Kritz wearing a relieved expression.)

FLAXLEY: You know, my love, when Kajice hit you with that lightning, I thought you were a goner for a minute.

(Kritz returned his relieved expression.)

KRITZ: So did I. That was an extremely powerful blast she hit me with!

BONSON: Indeed it was, you jammy cow.

LEFIAT: So, how come it didn't kill you then?

KRITZ: Firstly, Bonson, you wrinkled old git... I am not a cow! Okay?

(Bonson shrugged.)

KRITZ: Secondly, how the hell should *I* know how it didn't kill me, Lefiat?

(Bonson looked at her indignantly then looked away again.)

BONSON: Actually, I might be able to shed some light on that. And if you'd have been a bit nicer to me, I'd have put a suggestion to you!

(Grinning from ear to ear, Kritz looked at Flaxley and spoke quietly.)

KRITZ: Say nothing; if he thinks he's had an idea, he'll be dying to tell us!

(Flaxley gave her a wry smile and neither of them said a word. Within a matter of seconds, sure enough, Bonson began to look agitated.)

BONSON: Fine, I'll tell you...

(Flaxley and Kritz shared a crafty grin.)

BONSON: It may well have something to do with the material your boots are made from, Daman did mention an electric defying quality in some future products once.

KRITZ: Really?

(She yawned deliberately.)

BONSON: Fine, *be* like that. I won't bother explaining any further!

(He folded his arms angrily then laid back with his eyes shut.)

BONSON: I won't be changing my mind either!

(She ignored him and winked at Flaxley.)

BONSON: I mean it!

KRITZ: Okay!

(He sat up angrily.)

BONSON: You young people today, you really make me seethe!

(Much to Kritz's amusement, he climbed to his feet and walked away grumbling to himself.)

FLAXLEY: Darling, that was harsh!

KRITZ: Maybe, but it was funny. And long overdue!

FLAXLEY: I can't argue with you there!

(Just then, Derek climbed to his feet and helped Zanne to hers.)

DEREK: Listen, chaps, I have something to say to you all!

(He stepped before them, holding Zanne's hand with a serious expression on his little green face. At once, everybody sat up and paid attention.)

DEREK: I just wanted to say thank you, that's all. None of you had to do this, but you put your lives at risk all the same, as a favour to me!

FLAXLEY: It's what friends do, Derek!

(Seemingly choked, Derek continued.)

DEREK: Well, now it's over and Zanne is free. And it's all thanks to you... my friends. I'll never forget any of you. Once back on Tryme 17, I'll make sure the world knows what you

did for me!

(Mandika's eyes immediately welled up.)

MANDIKA: That was lovely, Derek! Where's my handkerchief?

(Lefiat wiped his own tears then passed it to her.)

LEFIAT: Sorry.

(Seeing the saddened expressions on everyone's faces, including Derek's, Zanne, put her hand on her husband's shoulder and gave him warm smile.)

ZANNE: Derek, my saviour, I feel your heavy heart. The truth is, when you were first lost on this planet, nobody wanted to come for you... nobody. They laughed at me when I said *I* would. That's the depth of their caring!

(She took a deep breath.)

ZANNE: It pains me to scoff at our planet with its incredible technology and scientific advances, but this is the reality... despite you being native to Tryme 17, nobody cared when you disappeared! Yet in your few years here, you've made friends who'd risk their lives for you. I feel your hankering to stay here on this planet, and like you, I see no reason for returning to Tryme 17 when everything we could ever need is right here!

(Derek turned to her and smiled in delight, a look to which she reciprocated with a romantic glint in her eye. Feeling really quite moved by it all, the others watched on with joy on their faces.)

MANDIKA: Ah!

KRITZ: That's so sweet!

(As the two aliens became lost in one another's eyes and started to draw near each other to kiss, however, they all changed their tune.)

LEFIAT: Uh-oh!

MANDIKA: Now, now, steady on!

FLAXLEY: No, Derek, no... no!!!

(As the inevitable kiss commenced, they all turned away and shuddered from head to toe.)

FLAXLEY: Darling, I think we ought to go back to the cabin! Um... to change course or something. Anything!

KRITZ: Um... yeah actually. If they're not going back to Tryme 17, there's no point going to north Skiro to get the spacecraft, we might as well set course for Tifaeris instead.

FLAXLEY: We can set course for the darkest pits of Hades for all I care, just get me out of here!

KRITZ: Tifaeris it is then, let's go.

ALL: I'll come with you!!!

(Leaving the two aliens to enjoy their reunion, the others then scarpered to the helm.)

(It wasn't long before the sails of the ship were flying high and the boat was fixed on a course for Tifaeris. Trying to get the gruesome image of the Derek's public display of alien affection out of their heads, everyone had returned to relaxing on the deck. Lefiat and Mandika lay flat on their backs discussing the beauty of the stars while Kritz sat between Derek and Zanne to stave off any further vulgarity. Bonson in the meantime, was leaning against the railings at the side of the ship watching Flaxley affixing the two keys to his battered metal glove with some string he'd found in the cabin.)

FLAXLEY: So, Daman reckons the ocean is the best place to put the keys, does he?

BONSON: I swear on my superior intellect!

FLAXLEY: Right, okay!

BONSON: Well, at least he didn't say throwing the key of *peace* in the ocean was a *bad* idea.

FLAXLEY: That's true!

BONSON: Besides, it's obviously the safest place to put them!

FLAXLEY: Again, that's true.

BONSON: Unless they get discovered by an evil crustacean!

FLAXLEY: What?

BONSON: Could you imagine? The lobster of doom?

FLAXLEY: Missing ale, Bonson?

BONSON: You've no imagination, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: No, Imagination you say? Well, let me correct you there, old chap. You know what I often find myself wondering?

BONSON: What it'd be like to have boobies?

FLAXLEY: What? No!

BONSON: What then?

(Flaxley paused and held up his metal glove, allowing the two keys to dangle from it.)

FLAXLEY: That ought to do it.

(He then lobbed the glove into the deep ocean and watched it sink beneath the water.)

FLAXLEY: Remind me to buy new gloves when we get home...

(He looked to Bonson and smiled.)

FLAXLEY: Sorry, where were we?

BONSON: I said you had no imagination, and you said you'd correct me.

FLAXLEY: Right, of course. Well, it's nothing as extreme as your lobster of doom, but something's been bothering me that I can't stop thinking about.

(Bonson scoffed.)

BONSON: Thinking about stuff that's bothering you isn't the same as having imagination, Flaxley.

(Flaxley sighed coldly and raised an angry eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: Let me finish or I'll summon the holy buffalo of the gods and order it to cast penis shrivelling magic on you! Is that imaginative enough for you?

BONSON: That's much better, yes. Well done.

(He nodded.)

BONSON: Now what's this thing that's been bothering you?

(Flaxley looked to him wearing a troubled expression.)

FLAXLEY: I keep wondering, why does all this crap keep happening to *us*? Kajice alluded to something but I can't quite put the pieces together. Jacquit, Suzbit, Dim Lee and Kajice... it's all related somehow but I can't quite figure out how.

BONSON: Well from what I could gather, Jacquit, Suzbit and Dim Lee were all part of Kajice's attempt to unite the three keys for herself.

FLAXLEY: Well, yeah she said as much herself but what I want to know is, where do *we* fit in? How come we keep being in the wrong place at the wrong time? After the key of peace incident, Dim Lee came to *us*, co-incidence? Then lo and behold Derek's wife is taken and we end up being led to the other two keys. Surely that can't be a co-incidence either, can it? (Just then, there was a flash of pale green light and Daman Siria appeared standing behind them.)

DAMAN: Perhaps I can answer your question?

(Flaxley and Bonson immediately spun around.)

BONSON: Daman? Didn't expect to see you here!

(He looked sheepish.)

BONSON: I don't suppose you brought any ale with you, did you?

(Flaxley eyed the mystic old man's face and mused outwardly.)

FLAXLEY: You look different, Daman... you look...

DAMAN: Healthy? As if a weight has been lifted from my shoulders?

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Yes. That's precisely it.

(Daman smiled.)

DAMAN: Well, that's exactly how I feel. I've been working on something for quite some time now and my work is almost done. I just have one loose end to tie up.

BONSON: Which is?

(Daman gave him a warm smile.)

DAMAN: Which is why I'm here, Bonson.

(Bonson scowled at him.)

BONSON: Could you be more specific?

DAMAN: Look, could you gather everyone together? I have something important to tell you all.

(Flaxley nodded and headed across the deck.)

BONSON: So anyway, about that ale...

(Within a minute of Daman making his request, Flaxley had gathered everyone together to grant Daman his audience. Having dozed off while stargazing, Mandika was far from happy about being woken and glared at him through angry, bloodshot eyes. Derek and Zanne on the other hand, were delighted to have an excuse to get away from the passion killing Kritz. As they all stood before the mystic gentleman awaiting him to speak, one thing was obvious. Whatever he was going to say was going to be big news. Despite having a serious air about him, his face looked relaxed almost as if he'd been living life in darkness and had just taken his first steps out into the light. Something life changing had clearly affected him and they couldn't wait to find out what it was.)

BONSON: Well, Daman? Don't keep us in suspense.

(Daman smiled and looked around at the many pairs of eyes staring his way.)

DAMAN: Ladies, Gentlemen... what I have to tell you is huge. How you'll react I don't know, but this might take a while so I suggest you all sit down!

(Exhausted to the extreme, they needed no second invitation to rest their legs and all dropped down to the deck to make themselves comfortable. Once he was satisfied they were all ready to hear him out, Daman cleared his throat then began.)

DAMAN: Well, chaps. You were right. As you suspected there were indeed higher forces at work on this mission.

KRITZ: How do *you* know we suspected that?

DAMAN: Because, as you also suspected, that higher force was myself and the rest of the council of the wise. We watched and guided you all way.

(Bonson beamed.)

BONSON: Then you wouldn't have been surprised to see it was *me* who figured out what happened.

MANDIKA: You conceited...

FLAXLEY: Never mind arguing you two. Daman, continue.

(Daman nodded.)

DAMAN: You see, your mission was *always* to smash the crystal sphere and unleash the key of justice on Kajice; we just needed to create the opportunity for you to do so. And so, well... we oversaw the whole thing.

(Much to Daman's discomfort, everyone immediately looked somewhat peeved.)

BONSON: But, you said you wouldn't be able to see us on Skiro because of Kajice's magic.

(Daman nodded.)

DAMAN: Yes, I did...

FLAXLEY: And if all you wanted us to do was smash that crystal ball, why didn't you just

bloody tell us that?

BONSON: Yes, why lie?

DAMAN: Please, calm down, there's a good reason for everything.

KRITZ: There'd better be.

DAMAN: There is. Kajice, as you saw, was in contact with dark spirits. Those dark spirits are capable of reading your minds and memories. She prayed to them and they told her all about Jacquit, Suzbit and Dim Lee, remember?

LEFIAT: Yeah, that freaked me out actually.

DAMAN: Well, if you'd known that her crystal sphere was the key to killing her, the spirits would have told her that too. Trust me, if she'd thought for one moment that you *knew* how to kill her, she'd have fried you all immediately. Therefore I let you think the council of the wise couldn't help you and that you were alone and clueless how to beat her.

(He nodded.)

DAMAN: You see, with her cloned guards dead and Kajice distracted by the fight, Mandika was free to collect the sphere. We influenced you every step of the way, Mandika.

MANDIKA: I'm not happy about that actually!

DAMAN: We studied Kajice for quite some time. When she sent her clones to fight, they *all* went. We knew you'd kill them all, and we were prepared to help should you look like you were struggling.

(He nodded.)

DAMAN: We also knew that Kajice would come for you once her guards failed, for once abandoning her crystal sphere.

BONSON: That was an insane gamble! She might just have killed us all then gone back, caught Mandika in the act and killed her too.

DAMAN: No, Bonson, like I said, we studied Kajice. She didn't doubt for a second that she'd kill you all, and being evil she liked to milk the moment. We knew she'd played cat and mouse with you, and we knew it'd give Mandika time to collect the sphere.

(Flaxley looked somewhat stumped.)

FLAXLEY: Wouldn't it just have been easier to tell Mandika to smash the sphere as soon as she found it rather than bringing it to me?

(Daman looked to Mandika and sighed.)

DAMAN: That's exactly what we told her to do. Our words were "Smash the sphere, Mandika."

(Mandika blushed and looked away.)

MANDIKA: Leave me alone.

DAMAN: Well, she panicked.

MANDIKA: Your voice freaked me out.

DAMAN: Yes, so you panicked, grabbed the ball then ran out of the door screaming for Flaxley.

MANDIKA: Well... Flaxley usually knows what to do when I'm scared.

DAMAN: Well, it worked out anyway. Not exactly how I envisaged it would, but these things seldom ever do. Even getting all six of you to go was bloody hard work this time.

FLAXLEY: This time?

BONSON: This time?

KRITZ: You mean you've done this to us before???

(Daman grimaced.)

DAMAN: Well, put it this way, it's no co-incidence that you've been together three times, and every time something big has happened!

(Bonson glared at Lefiat.)

BONSON: Yes, I already told him about that. He's a bloody jinx!

LEFIAT: Hey!

DAMAN: No, no! Not Lefiat, we the council of the wise are responsible. Everything that happened when you retrieved the key of peace, defeated Dim Lee, and now rescued the keys of liberty and justice, was planned long before you were born!

(At once everyone stared into Daman's eyes, seemingly in a state of shock.)

DAMAN: We guided and protected you all the way when you retrieved the key of peace.

Lefiat was always destined to lose it and you were always destined to get it back and kill the two evil witches.

(Bonson scoffed.)

BONSON: Destiny or not, I'm not about to forgive him any time soon.

DAMAN: But you must.

BONSON: But I won't. You know what I'm like!

DAMAN: No, Bonson. That whole episode was about killing the witches and we needed to use the key of peace to lure them out. So we guided Lefiat to do what he did.

BONSON: Well, you say that. I think we'll just have to agree to disagree on that one.

DAMAN: But it was just a means to an end, Bonson. Everything that happened when you went after the key of peace, fought Dim Lee and killed Kajice was destiny. It was nobody's choice or accident. It was destiny. Your lives, all *six* of you, have been guided by the council of the wise, to help you achieve those destinies. It has nothing to do with Lefiat being foolhardy.

(Daman paused in uncertainty for a moment then shook his head.)

DAMAN: This won't make any sense unless I explain the three keys from the beginning.

BONSON: Do that then. We're not going anywhere.

FLAXLEY: Indeed.

(Daman looked to them all then nodded.)

DAMAN: Okay, well, here goes...

(He took a deep breath then began.)

DAMAN: Killing Kajice was *always* the primary objective. She was the ultimate evil, you see. She had big plans for this world and they weren't nice. She had to be stopped.

(He nodded.)

DAMAN: This is why we created the three keys in the first place, you see. Artefacts to put an end to war, slavery and murder, the three things Kajice loved most.

(He sighed.)

DAMAN: Things didn't quite go to plan, however. It wasn't long before evil got wind of the keys' existence. The witches were onto us. Led by Kajice they undertook a crusade to gather the three keys with a view to either restraining them or, indeed with the key of peace, turning it evil.

(He sighed.)

DAMAN: I'll spare you the details but pretty soon, the keys of liberty and justice fell into Kajice's grasp.

(He looked down into everyone's watching eyes and shrugged.)

DAMAN: She used magic the likes of which are long lost to this world to create a sphere powerful enough to restrain the two keys. Now she was free to kidnap and murder to her hearts content as she hunted for the key of peace.

(Kritz raised her hand.)

KRITZ: I don't get it. When you say the sphere was powerful... well, Bonson destroyed it with a simple hammer!

BONSON: He means the *magic* used on it to seal the keys was powerful, obviously.

KRITZ: Oh. Gotcha.

DAMAN: Anyway, as I was saying, now she needed the key of peace to complete the set.

Being able to manipulate mankind into going into war was something of an obsession of hers, you see. And so, she found a way to cleanse the key of its purity so she could use it for own ends. She had a temple built around an ancient mystical shrine, known to you and I as 'the house of keys'. That shrine, you see, holds the power to drained charmed objects, turning them from pure to neutral. And as you know, once it was neutral and in the hands of an evil doer, the key itself would become a tool for evil.

(He puffed out.)

DAMAN: Well she claimed the shrine for her own and made it a bugger to get to, as you well remember.

(He shook his head then continued.)

DAMAN: Anyway, I digress. To cut a long story short, the three keys we'd created for the good of mankind had failed miserably. Two were useless and the third, although it worked, had become the prime target for Kajice in her bid to wreak havoc on the world.

(He nodded sternly.)

DAMAN: Anyway, it was this point we decided to send the key of the peace to the one city where magic types such as Kajice couldn't weave their evil spells. Guevina. As magic doesn't work within its city walls, we convinced the king to give the key sanctuary.

Thankfully, with our guidance, despite several attempts by evil types to steal it away, it remained safe there for centuries to come.

(Bonson looked uncertain.)

BONSON: I'd hardly say it was safe there. I mean, if it hadn't been for Sir Midgar, witches would have had they key away years ago. He got it back from a thief well outside Guevina, you told me.

(He sighed.)

BONSON: That was over twenty years ago. I had hair back then.

DAMAN: Bonson, that was one of *many* cases where evil made an attempt on the key. In Sir Midgar's case, Jacquit and Suzbit paid a poor scullery maid to steal it and bring it to them.

Sir Midgar caught her near East Edea and just managed to get the key back into Guevina before he was slain. Point being, the key may have left the city, but it was returned and remained safe until a few years ago when, well I don't have to tell *you* what happened then.

(All eyes turned to a shrinking Lefiat.)

LEFIAT: Leave me alone. He just said it was my *destiny* to lose it! You can't blame me for my destiny!!!

BONSON: I can and I will!!!

(Eager to get their attention back, Daman stood tall and expressed a pride in what he was saying.)

DAMAN: Anyway, with the key of peace now relatively safe in Guevina, we, the council of the wise, decided it was time to take action and stop Kajice for good. Being a bunch of old mages with only the powers of teleportation, wisdom, illusions and healing, however, taking on powerful, physical beings such as witches was impossible. So, we worked on a plan to help mankind end her reign of evil.

(He paused for breath.)

DAMAN: It took a while to perfect the preliminaries, but this is where you people came in.

(At once everyone seemed to lean forward with extra interest.)

DAMAN: Once we'd perfected our plan, we set you all on a path that would eventually lead to Kajice's downfall. We orchestrated everything you went through with the key of peace.

Lefiat losing it, you four from Guevina meeting Kritz and Derek, the whole thing. Even Lefiat's uncharacteristic moment of bravery when he killed Jacquit and Suzbit. It was all orchestrated by us. Again, it didn't run exactly how we planned it to, but the end justified the means.

(He nodded.)

DAMAN: As for Dim Lee... well, with Jacquit and Suzbit gone, Kajice needed a new ally. And so, last year, she sent *him* to search and destroy every town and city on the continent in search of the key of peace. Although he disguised his search as something very different, that was his ultimate goal. He chose to start with Trepe village, a settlement he'd been bullying for years. Of course, the key of peace was already in the sea by then but he didn't know that. As Kajice's most powerful ally, however, he could have wreaked havoc on the world in search of a key he'd never find. We couldn't allow such a thing. So, once again, we arranged the circumstances of his defeat by giving you the means and the knowledge of how to kill him.

BONSON: Giving us the means? So, basically you're saying, you ensured that I grew up to be a genius, just so I'd realise how to kill Dim Lee?

DAMAN: I'm happy to let you see it that way, yes.

BONSON: Excellent, so am I.

LEFIAT: Sounds to me like he implanted the idea in your head.

BONSON: Bollocks. He just made me a genius, the rest was all me!

DAMAN: And as you know, this latest fight against Kajice was also part of our plan. All told you took out her two most powerful minions, a warlord working in her name and ultimately, the great evil herself.

(He then sighed inwardly.)

DAMAN: All things a bunch of frail old mages like ourselves could never have done without you.

(Daman clapped his hands together.)

DAMAN: So, there you have it. Everything you've done has all been orchestrated for the good of mankind. You six wonderful souls.

(There was stunned silence for a moment then Flaxley scratched his head.)

FLAXLEY: Well that answers my question.

KRITZ: What question?

FLAXLEY: The reason we happen upon disaster when the six of us get together is all down to the council of the wise.

(Bonson glared at Lefiat and made him flinch.)

BONSON: I still prefer my theory.

(He shook his head then looked directly at Daman with an unimpressed look on his face.)

BONSON: For so called wise men, you lot are pretty stupid!

(Daman looked most offended.)

DAMAN: What do you mean?

BONSON: If you had half a brain, you'd have attached those three keys to a key of theft and none of this would have happened.

(All eyes turned to Bonson.)

BONSON: It's true! Who'd nick a key of theft?

(Kritz laughed out loud.)

KRITZ: He's right.

DAMAN: Indeed. I never thought of that.

(Bonson gave a conceited grin.)

BONSON: And that my friends, is why the council of wise need *me* in their number!

(At this point, Daman looked sheepish and scratched behind his ear.)

DAMAN: On that note, I must leave you now, my friends!

FLAXLEY: Wait, there's still so much you haven't told us!

DEREK: Yes, you say you guided us all, but where do *I* fit in? I'm not even *of* this planet!

DAMAN: The council of the wise is universal my friend! Everything that's happened, just

like your friends here, has simply been your destiny.

FLAXLEY: So what happens now, Daman? Is it over?

DAMAN: Flaxley, put it this way...

(He smiled.)

DAMAN: Since your births, your personalities have been shaped and moulded by us. Every thought, every deed, every incident was pre-arranged by us. Derek crashing on this planet, losing the key of peace, the Trepe slaughter in Tifaeris when you were young... we orchestrated it all to mould your personalities into what they are today. We even rectified your mistakes for you. Like when Lefiat chanted the wrong code in the future, it was us who brought him back to you. We watched you every step of the way and recovered every mishap, implanted every great idea and awoke you to every danger. No major decision you've ever made has been your own choice. We orchestrated everything you are. It was all part of the master plan. Well, from hereon in, there is *no* master plan. The keys are safe and our work is done. So you ask me if it's over? Yes. Very much so. With the three keys free to work their wonderful magic on this glorious universe, for the first time in your lives, you're all *truly* free!

(Expecting his words to be greeted with glowing smiles, Daman's face dropped. Rather than beaming expressions, only the coldest of hateful glares were coming his way.)

DAMAN: Right, I see... you feel manipulated, don't you?

FLAXLEY: Of course we bloody do. You just *said* you manipulated everything we've ever done in our entire lives!

BONSON: Every thought and every bloody deed, you said!

DEREK: So, we've been nothing but *your* slaves all our lives???

MANDIKA: That means everything about us is fake!

FLAXLEY: And you had my entire family slain as part of the process!

KRITZ: And mine!

LEFIAT: Worst of all you deliberately made me... me! Why???

BONSON: And why would you give me a bald head and a miserable life on purpose???

MANDIKA: And knowing full well that most men prefer blondes, why did you make me a brunette???

(They all gave her a sideways glance.)

MANDIKA: What? I haven't got much else to complain about and I was feeling left out.

Fake or not, I'm still a wealthy princess.

DAMAN: No, you misunderstand. Mandika you were always going to be a princess, we just made your *personality* what it is today.

BONSON: Really? I always blamed the king for raising her poorly

MANDIKA: Hey!

DAMAN: And besides, you're free now. You should be overjoyed. No more interference from higher forces, whatever you choose to do will be of your own volition.

(Lefiat sighed in defeat then held his hand out to Mandika for her to shake it.)

LEFIAT: I knew it was too good to last. Thanks for letting know the touch of a woman, Mandika.

MANDIKA: Lefiat, I don't love you because Daman made me do it...

(She then looked to Daman uneasily.)

MANDIKA: Do I?

DAMAN: Of course not.

LEFIAT: Really? Then why the f...

DAMAN: Look, seriously. Stop griping about being manipulated and start celebrating your freedom. This is a huge day for you all.

(Swiftly beginning to realise that their angry hostility wasn't about to subside any time soon,

Daman scratched his head nervously and held out his palm.)

DAMAN: Fine! I'll leave you to it then. Just pass me the keys and I'll get out of your hair.
(Looking thoroughly unimpressed, Bonson raised an irritated eyebrow.)

BONSON: Keys?

(Looking shiftily, Daman nodded and held out his hand further.)

DAMAN: Yes, the keys of justice and liberty... please!

(Flaxley gave him an inquisitive sideways glance.)

FLAXLEY: So, you didn't want us to throw them in the sea... like the key of peace?

(Looking horrified, Daman shook his head vehemently.)

DAMAN: Tell me you didn't. The key of justice is particularly corrosive; the salt water would dissolve it in no time.

(As Daman's hair stood on end, Flaxley and Bonson looked to each other uneasily.

Unwilling to take any blame for anything, no matter how responsible, Bonson puffed out his cheeks.)

BONSON: Flaxley, Flaxley, Flaxley, what have you done?

FLAXLEY: What? Hey! You said Daman wanted them thrown in the sea!

BONSON: Well that's not the way *I* remember the conversation going!

(With that, he turned on his heel and paced away showing great agility for a man his age.

Left to face the music, Flaxley could only offer Daman an empty shrug.)

DAMAN: Fool. The keys are gone forever. Without the sceptre of the gods we can never make new ones and that's been missing for centuries!!!

LEFIAT: Sceptre of the gods?

DAMAN: The device we used to make the keys...

(He shook his head then flapped wildly.)

DAMAN: That's not important. Those keys are irreplaceable and now they've gone forever. You fools!!!

(He took a deep breath to calm himself then frowned at Flaxley.)

DAMAN: All you had to do was keep the keys on you. Was that so hard?

KRITZ: It's not *his* fault! If you didn't want him to do it, you should have manipulated him better!

FLAXLEY: Yeah! What?

KRITZ: I'm saying, if they've controlled us all our lives then why didn't they make you *not* throw the keys overboard?

DEREK: That's a good point, actually.

DAMAN: If you must know, your mission was over so I stopped watching you for like five minutes! Five minutes!!! And in that short time you've managed to bugger up everything we've worked so hard towards!

(Flaxley was livid.)

FLAXLEY: Hey!!! You just admitted that you and your cronies have put us lot through hell all our lives, and yet you have the audacity to get shitty at us 'cause we make one tiny mistake?

(Daman retorted angrily.)

DAMAN: One tiny mistake? You just ensured that this will be a world without liberty and justice for ever more, and you call *that* a tiny mistake??? You've ruined everything we worked centuries towards!!! How am I going to explain that to the other wise men???

(Flaxley shook his head and forced a stifled laugh.)

FLAXLEY: Right now, Daman, I really couldn't give a shit about your problems. You've brought us nothing but misery and lies!

DAMAN: Apart from the odd mistruth and telling Bonson he was going to join the council of the wise, I never lied about anything.

(Having overheard from where he was skulking in the corner, Bonson screeched in dismay.)

BONSON: What???

(Ignoring Bonson's devastated cry, Flaxley snarled at Daman.)

FLAXLEY: You never told us the truth either!

DAMAN: We told you what you needed to know, there's a big difference between that and lying!

FLAXLEY: Bullshit. It's all been a lie. Everything we are is a lie!!!

(Daman sighed and shook his head.)

DAMAN: Think what you like, you're free to do that now, I suppose.

FLAXLEY: Yes, I am. And right now I think I need to teach you some humility.

(And with that, Flaxley drew his sword and grinned insanely at Daman. Very much feeling the humility, the mystic wise man stepped back and winced.)

DAMAN: Perhaps I've overstayed my welcome! Don't worry; you'll never see me again.

(And just like that, he disappeared, leaving behind a scene of confusion, dismay and discord.

They'd set out to rescue Zanne and their objective had been achieved successfully, but the revelation that they'd been controlled by a higher force all their lives sent everyone into silent shock. Daman's worries over the keys weren't even a consideration, this revelation was huge. All they could do was wallow in silent contemplation as his words echoed around inside their heads. They'd always believed they had free will and thoughts of anything to the contrary were hard to make sense of. How could everything they'd ever decided to do not have been their own decision? How could every opinion and ideal they held dear be anything but their own? How could they even know who they were? What would it mean for the future? Without being guided to think and act a certain way would they become different people? They all had a million questions and absolutely no answers. Everything they'd ever been certain about might now prove to be a lie and it was hard to take.

Rationalising the revelations was impossible. Every thought melded into another one until the questions became as lost as the answers. Bewildered beyond comprehension, they all sat upon the deck trying desperately to figure out what it would mean to be truly free. Having been told he was to become immortal only to find out it was all lie, Bonson was particularly devastated. A full hour half an hour passed and still nobody said a word until a flummoxed Lefiat aired the thought that'd had been bugging him the most.)

LEFIAT: If they made me what I am to go on missions, why did they make me so useless?

(Bonson shrugged emptily.)

BONSON: That's obvious Lefiat, if you hadn't hidden like a coward that time, we'd never have beaten Jacquit and Suzbit! I always thought that was ironic.

KRITZ: So we were just puppets? All our lives we've been nothing but puppets?

BONSON: Yes, but look what you've been given, you're all young, yet have the life experience of a person twice your age! You have everything to look forward to!

MANDIKA: He's right; I'm going to be queen of Guevina!

LEFIAT: And I'm gonna be king!

BONSON: May the gods have mercy on Guevina!

LEFIAT: Hey!

MANDIKA: Anyway, who says you'll be king?

LEFIAT: Well... if we got married...

(Amazingly, in that moment, she forgot all her woes and her face lit up.)

MANDIKA: I accept!!!

(She leapt into his arms.)

LEFIAT: Oh, okay then!

(He too washed his cares away and beamed.)

FLAXLEY: Congratulations, just don't expect me to go.

LEFIAT: Eh???

MANDIKA: But you have to.

(Flaxley scowled.)

FLAXLEY: The hell I do. If you think I'm ever setting foot in Guevina again you can forget it.

LEFIAT: What? Why?

FLAXLEY: I'll tell you why! That book I stole from the future...

KRITZ: The one that annoyed you so much?

FLAXLEY: Yes, it was about you and I, Lefiat! In Tifaeris I'm a folk hero, I've gone down in history as a great knight!

LEFIAT: You are a great knight!

FLAXLEY: Well, in Guevina, they seem to think I'm you! I've gone down in history as the bloke who lost the key of peace, burnt down the west wing of Guevina castle and to top it all off, it says you retired as a knight, aged 30, too upset to continue after you accidentally killed me!!!

LEFIAT: No I didn't!

FLAXLEY: It hasn't happened yet!

LEFIAT: Well, the book's wrong Flaxley, you and I both know what really happened, that's what really matters! I can only dream of reaching your level!

BONSON: Besides, Flaxley, if the book has you two confused, surely it's *you* who kills *him*. (He smiled the happiest of smiles.)

BONSON: I always liked you, Flaxley. Now I know why.

MANDIKA: Shut it, Bonson.

(She gave Flaxley a warm smile.)

MANDIKA: Look, please come. You're like family to me. And I'm saying that of my own free will. My words, not Daman's or some other wise man.

(She stepped closer and gave him a hug.)

MANDIKA: Even if you were manipulated, you've always been there for me. It's always meant a lot to me to have you in my life and with free will, I still feel the same.

(A wide smile then enveloped Flaxley's face.)

FLAXLEY: Fine, maybe I will go to the wedding then. For *you*. Maybe you can wear *that* dress.

MANDIKA: No way, this is going in the fire as soon we get back.

FLAXLEY: Well, that's your call, but you know...

(He stepped from Mandika's hug and took a deep breath of fresh sea air.)

FLAXLEY: Mandika, you just put everything into perspective.

MANDIKA: I did?

FLAXLEY: Yeah? So what if we were manipulated? It may not have been my choice to become one but I'm still a knight and I couldn't be happier.

(Derek nodded excitedly.)

DEREK: Yeah, life is pretty good. That doesn't have to change.

(He hugged Zanne.)

DEREK: Thanks to Daman, I've met all you guys and I'm sitting here with my beautiful wife.

LEFIAT: I'm certainly not going to complain. I mean, despite being an ugly, stickman with a dangerously low IQ, I'm dating a fit bird with her own castle. Imagine how my life would have turned out if I *hadn't* been manipulated?

(Everyone shuddered and sucked their teeth.)

LEFIAT: Exactly!

MANDIKA: And Lefiat, I still love you even *with* free will. If anything I should *thank*

Daman for bringing you to the castle that day.

(Bonson snarled.)

BONSON: Yes, thanks a bloody lot, Daman.

(Flaxley chuckled then looked to Kritz and smiled.)

FLAXLEY: Best thing is...

(Knowing what he was about to say, she burst into tears and raced into his arms.)

KRITZ: I love you!!!

(He beamed.)

FLAXLEY: She knows. I don't have to say anything else.

(Still hugging him with all her heart, she stamped on his foot and growled.)

KRITZ: Yes, you do.

(He grimaced with pain and rushed out his words before she could do it again.)

FLAXLEY: I love you too, Kritz.

(Among those on the deck at this time, there was an overwhelming air of optimism. The future looked bright, and it was a future they were free to sculpt for themselves.

Best of all, they'd very quickly come to the realisation that Daman's revelation has changed nothing. Everything they'd loved before, they still held dear now. Being free of his manipulation hadn't altered a thing. There was no discovery of a sudden disdain for something they'd been tricked into liking for their entire lives. They were the same people with the same likes and dislikes they'd always been; with or without his manipulation. It simply didn't matter whether Daman had sown the seed for their personality traits or not. Those traits had become them. It didn't matter one iota *why* Mandika was in love with a guy like Lefiat; the simple fact of the matter was that she loved him. Whether it was Daman's doing or not was neither here nor there. Life could simply continue on the same.

Embracing this truth, the dark clouds overhead lifted and spirits soared. For Flaxley, Lefiat, Kritz, Mandika, Zanne and Derek, life felt pretty good at this moment. The same could not be said for Bonson, however. For him there didn't seem to be much to get enthusiastic about. As he watched his friends talk excitedly about the future, he forced a weak smile and then sighed miserably.)

FLAXLEY: You okay, Bonson?

(Bonson looked to him and gave an empty shrug.)

BONSON: I'm glad to see you're all so happy; really I am, but what about me?

DEREK: What's up, my friend?

BONSON: I'm sixty years old; surely it's too late for me to start now. My whole life has been a bloody farce! I was so looking forward to joining the council of the wise too. I thought I was going to ascend to a higher plain of existence for heaven's sake... now I've got nothing. I'm just a worthless old man again.

MANDIKA: Rubbish, *I* still need you!

(He gave her a doubting glance.)

BONSON: What for?

MANDIKA: Well, after I was so mean to Kritz and Lefiat about their literacy, I felt kind of bad, so... I want you to help me to convince the king to improve education standards in Guevina. He'll listen to you, he respects what *you* say!

(Having been complimented, Bonson's pride was partially restored and he pulled a conceited smile.)

BONSON: That's because I talk such good sense!

(And so, with their spirits lifted, the ship sailed on into the night. It would still be many hours before they reached Tifaeris but having managed to rationalise the positives from their

situation, the journey would now be a much happier one.)

Tifaeris, daybreak...

(As dawn broke on the following morning and the ship finally arrived in Tifaeris, it's seven crew members emerged onto the land looking thoroughly drained. Deprived of sleep and aching all over, they headed directly from the ship to Flaxley and Kritz's house without a word. Not even remarking on how great it felt to be back, as soon as the front door was open, they all ghosted inside and headed for their respective bedrooms. Flaxley and Kritz in the main bedroom, Bonson, Lefiat and Mandika in the guestroom and Derek and Zanne in the unfinished third bedroom.

Following the sound of several doors slamming it went very silent very quickly. Two minutes later, however, the silence was split by the loud sound of female groans of pleasure that resonated through all the rooms. Having tolerated it for barely a minute, Bonson sat up and swung his legs over the side of his bed.)

BONSON: I don't bloody believe this!!!

(Tired and rubbing his eyes, he emerged from the guest room and headed out into the living room. With a face like thunder, he then sat himself at the table and growled out loud.)

BONSON: Bloody hell Flaxley, don't you ever sleep???

FLAXLEY: How can I with that racket going on?

(Somewhat startled, he looked up and saw Flaxley, Kritz, Lefiat and Mandika covering their ears on the sofa.)

BONSON: Then who?

(It then hit him like a thunderbolt.)

BONSON: That's obscene!!!

(Having eventually managed to grab themselves a well-earned and much needed sleep, there was only one thing left for the returning heroes to do. Celebrate. Feeling refreshed after a wash and a change of clothes, just after sunset that evening, they all headed out onto the porch of the house to eat, drink and celebrate a new beginning. Being in extremely high spirits it wasn't long before the ale was flowing and the air was filled with excited chat and laughter. Mingling together on the porch, they were the very picture of merriment. Bonson had even managed to set aside his devastation at finding out he was destined to remain mortal and was thoroughly enjoying himself.)

DEREK: So? What do you think?

ZANNE: I like it, Tifaeris is beautiful!

FLAXLEY: I knew you wouldn't go back to Tryme 17, you know?

DEREK: How?

FLAXLEY: Well, there was a reason that no-one in the future found a three foot tall green alien frightening... your descendants are probably common place!

DEREK: Really? I never noticed, I was too busy worrying about Zanne!

ZANNE: Ah, you're sweet!

(They went to kiss.)

FLAXLEY: Stop that, there are children in town!

BONSON: And even if there weren't, just don't!

(With that, he slammed his empty tankard down on the table and exhaled.)

BONSON: Kritz, more ale!!!

KRITZ: You know where the barrel is, you lazy old sod.

BONSON: But, I'm old and tired.

KRITZ: You'll be bruised and unconscious in a minute.

BONSON: That's no way to address and senior citizen.

(Unnerved by her scowl, he sighed and headed for the barrel.)

BONSON: Fine, I'll get it myself.

(Upon reaching the barrel, which was all off three feet away from him in the first place, he started to pour himself a drink as he listened in on Lefiat's conversation.)

LEFIAT: So, when Mandika mentioned a holiday I couldn't wait to go.

ZANNE: Sounds awful.

LEFIAT: It is. Bury this, go here, go over there, the king works me like a donkey. He's probably got my next mission lined up already!

MANDIKA: He has actually. He already said, he wants you to find out what happened to all of Guevina's dogs when we return!

(Derek shivered and a chill ran down his back. Finding his behaviour odd, Zanne looked at him curiously then read his mind and burst out laughing.)

ZANNE: Well, that's one mystery that won't take long to solve!

(Derek shuffled uneasily.)

DEREK: Don't tell 'em!

FLAXLEY: Don't tell us what?

DEREK: Nothing!

ZANNE: Oh, go on, it's funny!

DEREK: Not for me, it isn't!

ZANNE: If you don't tell 'em, I will, Derek! It's funny.

(He gave her a filthy look then sighed in defeat.)

DEREK: Very well!

(He took a deep breath and hung his head.)

DEREK: It was me! Dogs like me you see!

(Lefiat nodded sympathetically.)

LEFIAT: Yeah, and me!

DEREK: No, I mean, they *really* like me!

LEFIAT: Eh?

DEREK: They try to mate with me!

(He looked up to see several faces struggling not to crack.)

DEREK: You wouldn't like it!!!

(Bonson could hold it no longer and laughed hysterically, triggering all except Mandika into fits of laughter.)

MANDIKA: So... what then? You killed them all?

DEREK: Um... they didn't go to waste!

(He rubbed his stomach.)

MANDIKA: You animal!!!

LEFIAT: That's the last time *you* wander Guevina at night! He-he!

MANDIKA: What is it with you and eating people's pets, eh?

DEREK: Grow up, you lot!

(Just then, little Phisele raced from a house across the street and charged excitedly up to Kritz.)

PHISELE: Yay, you're back.

KRITZ: Hey, littlun.

(Phisele smiled up at her then glanced at Derek and Zanne uneasily. As her young mind ticked over, she raised a pondering eyebrow for a moment then beamed excitedly.)

PHISELE: Cool. The alien's got someone new to play with.

KRITZ: Um... yeah, you could say that.

PHISELE: I won't have to hide my toys anymore.

(She then held out her arms for Kritz to pick her up. Obliging, Kritz stooped then lifted her in her arms.)

ZANNE: Getting in practice?

KRITZ: What?

ZANNE: For the twins!

KRITZ: Eh? What twins?

ZANNE: You didn't know?

(Zanne clammed up and looked away nervously.)

KRITZ: Seriously, what twins?

(Derek smiled.)

DEREK: A rare talent we have on Tryme 17, Kritz!

LEFIAT: But you're not on Tryme 17!

BONSON: He'll never change!

KRITZ: Shut up, I wanna know what she meant!

(Zanne said nothing.)

DEREK: Go on love, tell her. Trust me!

ZANNE: Well... okay...

(She looked into Kritz's eyes.)

ZANNE: Female Leramites from Tryme 17 have senses the male doesn't have, you see? I can tell when you're sick, or if you're injured or indeed if, like *you* are...

(She smiled.)

ZANNE: Expecting twins!

(Kritz stared at her, unmoved for a second or two then started to gape.)

KRITZ: You mean?

ZANNE: Yup, you're pregnant!

(They ignored the loud thud of Flaxley fainting behind them and swarmed to congratulate her.)

BONSON: Well done, Kritzeveltia. To help us celebrate, I'll fetch a bigger tankard!

MANDIKA: Any excuse!

BONSON: You know me too well, princess!

(With that, he turned and fell over Flaxley.)

BONSON: What?

(He jumped to his feet and chuckled playfully.)

BONSON: Taking the news well, I see!

(Feeling quite the fool, Flaxley clambered to his feet and barged everyone out of the way to hug Kritz.)

MANDIKA: Do you mind?

DEREK: Careful, Flaxley.

(Upon reaching her, he threw his arms around her with joy.)

KRITZ: I'm so happy!

FLAXLEY: As am I, my love.

(He beamed.)

FLAXLEY: With any luck, it'll be twin boys. Two sons to raise in my image.

(Zanne smiled to him warmly.)

ZANNE: I can tell you their genders too, if you like.

FLAXLEY: If I like? Of course, I like! So is it? Twin boys?

ZANNE: Nope!

(Flaxley looked to her emptily for a moment then glanced adoringly at Kritz.)

FLAXLEY: Twin girls, eh? They'll be beautiful like their mother, no doubt.

ZANNE: Wrong again.

(Flaxley looked most confused for a moment then glared at Derek furiously.)

FLAXLEY: Twin aliens???

DEREK: No, you tit!

KRITZ: One of each, obviously!

ZANNE: Yeah, what *she* said. One boy and one girl.

(Flaxley looked enlightened then patted Derek on the head apologetically.)

FLAXLEY: Right, of course. Perfect. The best of both worlds. Sorry about that, Derek.

DEREK: Idiot!

KRITZ: Wow. A boy and a girl. This is so amazing. I'm so lucky.

(As tears of joy rolled down her cheek, Flaxley held her upper arms tight and gazed lovingly into her eyes.)

FLAXLEY: You just keep making me happier and happier, don't you? I really love you, Kritz.

KRITZ: I love you too.

(She sighed joyously.)

KRITZ: I'm so happy I could scream.

FLAXLEY: Me too... can't believe I fainted though.

(He then looked enlightened and nodded knowingly.)

FLAXLEY: So *that's* why you've been over-reacting at stuff lately, you're pregnant. You know, it never even occurred to me.

KRITZ: Me either.

(She beamed.)

KRITZ: Twins, Flaxley. Twins.

(Watching from the other side of the balcony, Mandika turned and smiled to Lefiat.)

MANDIKA: If she's expecting twins, her days of dressing like a tart are seriously numbered!

(Having overheard her, a dark look engulfed Bonson's brow. With a fiendish glint in his eye, he paced over to her and shook his head.)

BONSON: You know, Mandika, you may have a point actually!

MANDIKA: What?

BONSON: Now Kritz is pregnant, she can't go around in skimpy miniskirts and tiny tops. I mean once her belly starts to swell up, people will laugh at her, poor thing.

(Mandika shrugged.)

MANDIKA: That's *her* problem.

BONSON: Really? You mean you don't care?

MANDIKA: Well why should I? It's her business.

(Bonson shook his head disdainfully.)

BONSON: And there I was thinking you two were friends now.

MANDIKA: Well, we are... kind of.

BONSON: I overheard her earlier, you know. She was telling Flaxley's how she's going to do your hair in that special way to like for the trip home tomorrow. Because you're her best friend is what she said.

(Mandika felt her hair and smiled.)

MANDIKA: Really?

BONSON: Absolutely.

(He then sighed.)

BONSON: I guess that's a one way friendship though, isn't it? I mean, you don't even care if she makes a fool of herself and people laugh at her. That's typical of you. You're a bad friend.

(Hurt by his words, Mandika pouted at him sorrowfully.)

MANDIKA: No, I'm not.

BONSON: No? Mandika, being someone's best friend isn't all ponytails and hairbrushes, you know? As her best friend it's *your* responsibility to take care of her. To warn her if she's about to make a fool of herself.

(He then glanced away nonchalantly.)

BONSON: You won't though. *You* only care about yourself. *You* don't care if people are cruelly mocking the poor girl. Like I said, you're a bad friend.

(Mandika pouted.)

MANDIKA: That's mean.

BONSON: No, it's the truth. If you cared about her, you'd warn her. You'd walk straight up to her and tell her she can't dress like a tart anymore. That's what *I'd* do if she was *my* best friend.

MANDIKA: No way, I can't tell her that, she'd smash my face in!

BONSON: Like Flaxley would ever let that happen. Look, trust me, Flaxley will calm her down, then once you've taken the time to explain yourself to her, she'll be eternally grateful.

(He beamed.)

BONSON: She'll see how much you care about her and she'll love and respect you forever.

(Mandika looked thoughtful for a moment and bit her lip.)

MANDIKA: That does make sense I suppose. I mean, I wouldn't want people laughing behind her back, I do care about her. I'm not the bad friend you make me out to be.

BONSON: Then do the right thing, Mandika. Be a friend and tell her. I've no doubt whatsoever she'll appreciate your kindness and you'll end up being best friends for life.

MANDIKA: Well... okay.

(With that, Mandika paced over to Kritz then tapped her softly on the shoulder. As she did so, Bonson stepped up to Flaxley and tapped *him* on the shoulder, making him look away from Kritz.)

FLAXLEY: What is it, Bonson?

(As Bonson grinned at him, Kritz turned and smiled at Mandika.)

KRITZ: What is it, babe?

MANDIKA: Kritz, don't take this wrong way or anything, but as your best friend it's my duty to tell you, you have to stop dressing like a tart or everyone is going laugh at you!

(Bonson then beamed with delight as Mandika shot back past him on the end of Kritz's furious fist. Distracted by Bonson, Flaxley for once, hadn't had the chance to leap in and restrain her.)

BONSON: Ha! Now we're even! Boot my arse indeed! An eye for an eye, a physical assault for a... well, you get the picture.

(Having seen red, Kritz charged at Mandika only for Flaxley to grab her and drag her back.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz, don't!!!

KRITZ: She's had it this time, I'm gonna break her face!!!

(As Bonson chuckled and walked away innocently, Derek turned to Zanne and frowned.)

DEREK: Are you sure you don't want to go back to Tryme 17?

(Too bewildered to reply, Zanne said nothing and allowed Derek to lead her inside.)

DEREK: I think it's safe to say the party's over, my love.

(As the two of them sneaked off to the bedroom, the argument outside continued to rage.

Flaxley was desperately trying to restrain Kritz while a raging Mandika screamed insults at her, making her twice as furious. Lefiat for his part bounced uneasily between Mandika and Flaxley looking stuck for what to do. He knew he had to do something but didn't want to antagonise Mandika and certainly didn't want to infuriate Flaxley. Leaning against the wall innocently watching on, Bonson couldn't help but chuckle.)

BONSON: You chaps never fail to amuse me.

(As he continued to watch on gleefully, Mandika stopped hurling insults and stood tall with a snarl on her face.)

MANDIKA: That's done it! I've had enough of this!!!

KRITZ: You've had enough when I decide to stop hitting you!!!

FLAXLEY: Kritz, calm down. You need to take it easy in your condition.

KRITZ: My condition? My condition is livid!

(Lefiat continued to bounce from side to side and whimpered.)

LEFIAT: What do I do? I'm so confused!!!

MANDIKA: *I'm* not confused! I know exactly what to do! Come on, Lefiat. Let's get the others and go back to Guevina.

(She then poked her tongue out at Kritz.)

MANDIKA: Where the civilised people live. You lot don't deserve the pleasure of my company.

(Kritz then stopped struggling and looked to Flaxley with puppy dog eyes.)

KRITZ: Please let me punch her.

(Flaxley looked into her eyes and calmly smiled.)

FLAXLEY: Darling, we're going to have twins. You're pregnant, remember?

(Her eyes glazed over and she exhaled merrily.)

KRITZ: That's true.

(She then smiled at Mandika lovingly.)

KRITZ: Sorry about the punch, babe. Love ya.

(She then floated inside the house on cloud nine.)

FLAXLEY: There. Problem solved.

(Mandika stamped her foot, clearly disagreeing.)

MANDIKA: No it's not. I'm going home. Lefiat, go fetch my carriage.

(Lefiat looked to her and froze.)

LEFIAT: But... even if I knew where Daman left it... I don't know how.

MANDIKA: Then learn!

(Flaxley rolled his eyes and stepped towards her.)

FLAXLEY: Calm down, princess. You're angry now, but things will seem better in the morning.

(He then placed an arm around her and started to lead her inside.)

FLAXLEY: In the meantime let's make you a nice cup of coffee.

(She seethed for a few moments then spoke up in a small voice.)

MANDIKA: I could use a nice coffee, actually.

FLAXLEY: Of course, you could.

(As he led her into the house, Bonson looked to Lefiat and sneered.)

BONSON: You heard the girl, go and get the carriage.

(Lefiat looked uncertain and bit his lip.)

LEFIAT: She's doesn't still want me to do that, does she?

BONSON: She sounded pretty adamant to me.

(As Lefiat hung a sorrowful head, Mandika's voice bellowed out from the house.)

MANDIKA: Lefiat, get in here and give me a cuddle!!!

(As the colour returned to his cheeks, Lefiat raced into the house beaming from ear to ear.)

LEFIAT: Coming.

(Left on his own, Bonson took a soothing deep breath then stepped to the edge of the porch to admire the view.)

BONSON: Lovely place.

(From the corner of his eye he then noticed something that made his heart sing. He'd been left alone on the porch with the beer barrel all to himself. Overcome with joy, he punched

the air and looked skywards.)

BONSON: There really are gods after all.

(Looking delighted, he held his tankard to the nozzle and pulled the lever. With a splutter, the nozzle coughed up a ball of froth and only a single drop of beer followed it. Looking flustered he yanked at the lever several times but nothing else came out. Going red-faced with rage, after several more tries he let go of the nozzle and dropped his tankard before shaking his fists and glaring at the sky.)

BONSON: There *are* gods... and they're complete...

(And so, the quest for Zanne was complete. Amongst the Tryme17 community that would one day grow to thrive on this planet, the story of how Zanne was saved by the great Derek and a band of caring humans would live on as folklore, passed down from generation to generation. It was a tale of an entire species, liberated by the kindness of the few brave souls who risked their lives in... The Quest for Zanne.)

THE END.

Futile Fantasy Three - The Quest for Zanne. The storyline and all characters are a creation of the artist; the artist reserves the rights to this story and everything within.

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Original Draft Completed 30/08/01.

Revised Draft Completed 20/03/07.

Final Draft Completed 02/09/10.

Ultimate Draft Completed 05/06/13.