

Kingdom of Demons
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Introduction

In Ireland in the late 1200's, a castle sits consisting of many brave knights with heroic tales. They protect Castle Brave Rock, which is ruled by King Markus, a very well liked king by all who know him. But, when the castle is threatened by an evil horde of demons, led by King Krimus, it finds itself in search of a new hero.

A peasant that is only known by the name of Warrick, has always dreamed of being a knight. Through a contest of champions, he finally gets his chance to prove himself worthy of such an honor. But, Warrick soon finds himself battling a large dragon, a jealous knight and the horde of King Krimus, as he proves himself worthy of the title -Hero of Castle Brave Rock.

Chapter One

On the grasslands of Ireland, a 15-foot wide moat encloses Castle Brave Rock. It was built in the late 1200's, taking two years to complete. Countless lives were lost during its construction. On one occasion a large ship named the Sarah Bell, was carrying several logs from Norway. The logs were of strong Norwegian oak and were to be used for the massive drawbridge, when it was sunk during a powerful storm. A search party was sent to find survivors but, all that was found was the wheel that steered the ship floating on some debris. To this day the massive wheel of the Sarah Bell hangs in one of the castles many exquisite corridors.

The castle is a huge structure, built stone by beautiful stone. The stones are mostly made of gray granite shipped from England, while a few are made of black quarry rock retrieved from a castle in Scotland. The outside walls extend up many feet, with a lookout tower on each corner. These towers are occupied continuously by the kings' guards, to warn of approaching danger. Numerous turrets with small windows compliment the towers, over looking a spectacular view of the kingdom. Each of these turrets is an extension of the castle's many rooms.

The castle grounds are full of servants tending to the castle's needs. Some of these servants are descendants of those that helped in the assembly of the castle many years ago. Beside the massive drawbridge is a stable, where squires are busy looking after the knights' horses. There the exquisite animals are fed, watered and brushed to preserve their immaculate condition.

On the other side of the drawbridge is an arena where the knights joust and compete with their swords. Surrounding the arena like atmosphere is wooden benches leading up to a royal grandstand. It is here where the king and others, of royal blood, view competitions of the bravest of knights. A short distance from the castle is a village of peasants. The village is made of small huts, beside a flowing stream of clear cool water. The village is full of busy peasants of various skills, to accommodate the needs of all that visit. Beyond the village is a thick forest, that goes on for miles. This forest is full of wild game, which is often hunted by the peasants. The forest is said to hold secrets of many mystical creatures.

All is ruled by King Markus III, who is very well loved by all his people. He is the direct descendant of King Anthony, who moved here from England after a land dispute with King Peter. King Marcus rules much like his father Marcus II, with a firm hand and warm heart. His father died when Marcus was fifteen, after being betrayed by those he trusted most. Sir Raleigh, a once trusted knight of the kingdom, was secretly in love with Marcus's mother Queen Anna. When his father found them in bed together, he had Sir

Raleigh executed for what he described as acts of treason.

Saddened by the loss of her lover, the Queen stabbed the king in the lung while he slept. She was beheaded shortly after, leaving Marcus sole heir to the throne. Marcus is a large man with a short graybeard. He wears a long beautiful robe and a gold crown of sapphire's and ruby's. As he walks through the castle, large stone walls make up the massive corridors throughout the inside. On the giant walls, he displays flags his knights have recovered from brave battles defending the kingdom. The flags settle dashing from iron rods, each with a different story to tell. He is also a collector of weapons of battle, which he proudly hangs masterfully. They range anywhere from ancient weapons of battles long ago, to suits of armor that stand magnificently down the long corridor.

As the king makes his way down the well-lit corridor, he enters a huge room of shields and swords. In the middle of the room, is a large oak table he uses to counsel his valiant knights. When King Markus walks in the room, all the knights stand there to honor him. Among them is Sir William, a very firm leader of all the kings' army. Although his tactics are a bit harsh at times, the king respects him as his most trusted knight. Sir William is a large, strong looking man, with dark hair and mustache. Covering his body is black armor with a long black cape. On his chest is the king's crest, which he wears proudly. Sir William was somewhat adopted by the king, after his father was killed in a battle against the Scots 30 years ago.

Next to Willaim is Sir Gregory, the oldest in the group and responsible for training the new knights. Gregory once took an arrow meant for William, in a fierce battle against the knights of France. His hair is fire red, with a long beard. His son would have been 21 yrs. old today, but he was lost as well as Gregory's wife to a fire. His relationship with the kingdom started as a squire, but in a short few years proved himself worthy of knighthood. The remaining knights around the table we're picked up here and there. All of these men serve the king loyally.

As the king takes his seat at the table, then and only then do the knights sit. As the knights remain quiet, they notice the troublesome look on the kings' face.

"My brave knights. I have assembled you this day, to discuss a disturbing report. It has been said that at night, strange cloaked creatures invade our woods and take all peasants that dare to enter. Together we have fought long battles in far away places, but this time it sounds like the battle is coming to us. Sir William what do you know of these rumors?" he asks.

"Your majesty. I too have heard speak of such creatures of the night, but I've yet to see one with my own eyes" replies Sir William.

"Just the same, I would like you to look into this matter, to keep the village safe" the king says.

"Of course your majesty. I'll take 30 of my best knights and camp in the woods tonight as peasants. If these things do exist, they will taste cold steel!" William says to the excitement of the others.

"Of that I have no doubt, Sir William. Now, knights of Brave Rock be off and be safe." With the kings' final word, the men rise from the table and exit the room.

As the knights ready their horses, the peasant village is busy with the day's work. Some of them spend their day working the crops, while others gather water from a nearby stream. Children play without a care around small hut like structures, that the villagers use for living quarters. By one of the huts is a small covered work area, occupied by the new black smith. He is a tall, well-built, and handsome man with long brown hair, known only as Warrick. Sweat runs down his strong arms while he pounds on a piece of steel. As he takes the steel over to the fire for more heat, he hears the sound of horse hooves coming from the castle.

Out in the distance he notices the peasants start to part the way for the approaching knights. He watches in awe as the knights ride by. Ever since he was a small lad, he had dreamed one day of becoming a knight himself. As Sir William rides by, he glares at the newcomer for only an instant, before continuing on his way. Warrick returns to his work as a voice is heard behind him.

"Don't worry my boy, you'll get your chance someday" a white bearded villager says to him.

The man speaking was his new friend Ethan, whom has lived in the village all his life. "But for now keep working lad, keep-working" Ethan says as he smiles at the man. The young man smiles back, as he pulls a handle for more flame to his steel. "I suppose your right, old man" he says as he takes one last look at the knights. Then he returns to his pounding, as the old man walks away and laughs.

As the knights ride on toward the woods, Sir William catches up to Sir Gregory. "Tell me Gregory, what do you know of the new comer in the village?" he asks with suspicion. "You're a knight William, why worry about a lonely blacksmith?" his friend replies. "Worry my friend? You know I worry about no man. I'm just curious" he finishes. "The man was found in the woods about half dead. The old man from the village took him back to his hut. He treated large cuts on his back, and gave him a job when he was healthy" he explains. To this day he has told no one of what happened. Now c'mon man, we've work to do!" he yells as he rides on.

William follows the others into the woods and forgets the blacksmith, as he has more important things to deal with. After about an hour ride, they stop at a big clearing. They grabbed old clothes from their saddlebags and placed them over their armor to appear to be peasants. Thinking it would be safer for the horses, they continued on foot into the woods.

About 300 feet away from the clearing, the woods started getting very dark. Large trees came together and almost formed a bridge over the men.

"Looks like a good place to set a trap" he says as he looks around. "Have the men put the weapons out of sight and we'll stop here" William tells his old friend. As darkness approaches, they build a large fire and place a large pig above it. "If there is something out here, it will surely be tempted by the smell of cooking meat" William says pleasingly.

With the horses a safe distance away, they take their weapons and hide them nearby. He sends a few knights deeper into the woods to serve as lookouts, while the others finish preparing the camp. When all is done, Sir Gregory approaches William.

"The camp is ready William, but a foe that we have not seen worries me" he admits. "I hope that women and ale has not softened the thoughts of a knight with fear, my friend" William says with a grin. "Perhaps you wish to test an old man" Gregory replies while smiling back. The two men laugh at one another and then find a seat on a nearby log to rest.

The men continue to wait as darkness settles around them. Just as some of them start to dose off, they hear a disturbance in the distance. William springs to his feet and looks around the camp. "Where's the lookouts?" he asks, as another strange sound is heard.

Things turn deathly still for a moment, as the men pull their weapons out from under a pile of brush. Suddenly the woods come alive with cloaked demons with short handled axes. The ends are double bladed and very sharp as the demons charge the knights.

"This is it men!" yells Sir William. "Lets show these dogs how knights of the Brave Rock feel about intruders in our kingdom!"

Bravely, the knights charge back at the approaching beasts. But, they soon find their swords are no match for the steel of the creatures' axes, as they are broken in two. Several men in front are taken, as William is approached by one of the intruders. His skill as a swordsman is impressive, as he battles with the cloaked figure. He notices some of the men being dragged into the woods, as he swings with all his might at the monster. But, the tip of his mighty sword is also broken, as he looks in disbelief. Swinging the remaining part of his sword, the power of the cloaked one is too much for him. Williams's sword is easily broken down to the handle, as he falls to the ground.

When the creature raises its mighty axe for one final blow, its cloak is pulled from its face to expose a horrifying sight. Its face is almost leather looking and muscular. Its eyes are white with no pupils and its

mouth is full of razor sharp teeth. Just when the brave knight thinks it's over for him, the demon gives out a hair-raising roar and disappears into the woods to join the others. As he starts to get up, William notices that all the demons were retreating as if summoned by something. Sir William stands back on his feet and stares at his broken sword.

"Gregory what hell-spawn is this, which my eyes have just witnessed. And why is the steel of my sword so brittle against their weapons?" he asks as Sir Gregory stares around the camp.

"I am without words my old friend. But where we once were many, now we are few" replies his friend.

William looks around, to see only seven of the men he arrived with remaining.

"Gather the horses!" he yells. "We'll chase these demon dogs down!" he yells. But they soon realized that their friends were no more, as there we're no sign of them anywhere. "Blast these creatures of the night!" William yells.

He looked into the dark, knowing his new foe has won the battle. After a moment to mourn his friends, he gives the order to return to the castle.

Chapter Two

As the king sits on his red velvet colored throne, he stares around a large room full of his castle guards. Servants bring him fruits, meat and ale as his voice rings out.

"Guards, send for the sorcerer!" he yells as he takes a big piece of meat.

The guard is gone only a short while and returns with a medium built man known to the kingdom as Kalavar the sorcerer. He is a gray haired man of great mystical powers, wearing a long dark cloak and walking with a tall wooden pole.

"How may I serve you, your majesty?" he says in a mysterious voice.

"Tell me sorcerer what do you see?" asks the king.

The sorcerer raises his long pole in the air and begins to chant in a foreign language. As he concentrates the room fills with reds, blues, and greens that circle the room. The lights mystify all in the room as they continue to bounce and circle the walls. Magically they slowly start coming together in a funnel shape, before coming to rest in his long nailed hand. He stares at the forming ball with great interest.

"What is it sorcerer? What is in the future of my kingdom?" the king asks impatiently.

"I see a long journey sire. One of great danger" he replies.

"Go on Kalavar, what else do you see?" the king asks.

"I see another king with a cold heart, and a fierce battle sire" he adds.

"Good I love a good fight" the king says excitedly.

Just then, Sir William returns from the battle in the woods.

"Ah Sir William. You bring me good news I hope" the king says.

"I wish I could my lord. But I fear our enemy is stronger than we thought" he says as he approaches the king.

"What enemy can be so strong, that my knights can't rid me of it?" the king asks with concern.

"King Krimus, Lord of the demons," replies the sorcerer.

"Kalavar our weapons were useless against them. Why?" William asks.

"King Krimus is very strong brave knight. His powers even exists in their weapons" replies the sorcerer.

"He speaks the truth your majesty, our swords we're like toys against these demons. How can I fight such a foe as this?" William asks in anger.

"How indeed Sir William. What say you, sorcerer?" the king asks.

"There is a way sire. But, it will take only the bravest of knights" replies the sorcerer. "Go on wizard" demands the king.

"The long journey I spoke of sire. Through the swamp of death and into the lair of the dragon. For inside the cave of the dragon, is said to be a metal of unmatched strength. With this metal sire, your knights will be invincible" explains Kalavar.

"Sire, if I may. We have lost many men in battle already. I have no worries of swamps or dragons, but the knights I lost today will need to be replaced" William says in concern. "Then get some rest my friend, for tomorrow we hold a contest of champions." the king says excitedly. With that, the knights left the king to his thoughts.

On the other side of the kingdom, a large horse drawn wagon slowly makes its way to its destination. The demons are a group of about twenty-five or so, each as vicious as the next. They travel without fear, considering the dangerous road they pass, for they know the creatures of the forest would not dare rise against King Krimus.

The woods slowly open up to a world of swamp like waters filled with large snakes and unthinkable beasts. Moss like plants hang from tall trees, as glowing red eyes can be seen all around. Six huge black horses travel further into the night, as they breathe smoke from their nostrils. Together they pull a big wooden cell containing the kings captured knights. Among them is Sir Wally, a respected member of the kings protectors. He is one of the smaller knights, but with a sword is one of the most skillful. As he looks around at the others, he notices a bit of fear in them.

"Be brave my friends, the others will come for us when the time is right" he says.

"Where do you think we're going?" asks one of the younger in the group.

Sir Wally looks at the young knight with a gleam of hope in his eye.

"Fear not young knight. Whatever our fate, we won't go down without a fight!"

With no clue of the demonic intentions of their captors, the men sit quietly and conserve their energy. After what seems like an endless ride, the wagon comes to a halt. The doors swing open, exposing a horrifying New World. Now uncloaked, the knights get their first look at their beastly enemy. They average six feet tall, with bodies are made of black, leather like skin. Their armor covers only their upper half, with pointy spikes across their shoulders. Just like the cloaked creatures Sir Walter observed in the woods, their eyes are mysteriously white with no pupils. Able to speak only a few words, they mostly grunt and growl as they truculently pull the men from the wagon.

As Sir Wally steps out, he immediately notices he is no longer in the woods. Instead, he looks around at large leafless trees and a huge, black, and mystical castle. Patrolling the grounds are two huge monsters. The monsters are around eight feet tall with glowing green eyes. They are very lizard like, with scaly skin and long tails. They have large round heads with tusk like fangs on each side of their mouths. In their hands are three-inch link chains about twelve feet long. From these chains they control black hell hounds with a spooky orange glow. The hounds growl at the men, snapping at them as they get closer to the satanic structure.

The castle moat is like boiling fire water, illuminating portions of the walls in red and orange. The castle speaks of horror, with tall black walls topped with gloomy turrets. As they approach the castle, the drawbridge slowly lowers to expose a world of screams and helpless cries. The castle walls are made of cavern like corridors. The corridors lead either up to the continuing screams or down to the pits of hell. With the screams weakening more with each step, the knights' direction is obvious.

After a long terrorizing walk, the men find themselves face to face with the hell-spawn of Castle Dread. Looking around the large cave like room, a chill runs down Sir Wally's spine. Down deep in the under ground of the castle, is hundreds of the demons like they fought in woods. In a corner of the room is a large dragon with ropes tied around its large fire breathing mouth.

Several of the white-eyed demons are taunting it with sticks driving it almost insane with anger, as it desperately tries to free itself. Then to the pleasure of the king, they begin to hack at the dragons' legs with their sharp axes. Even with its mouth tied shut, the dragons' screams can be heard throughout the room. As if getting bored by the event, the hell king holds up a red stone firing a bolt of death at the dragons' heart. The impact is so horribly painful, that not even the ropes binding its large mouth are strong enough to hold the dragons' screams of agony.

The creatures of Satan almost appear to be laughing at the dragon, as it falls with a crash to the ground. But the laughter soon turns to roars, as the beasts jump one by one on the dragon and start to feed. As Wally turns from the gruesome sight, his eyes fixate on the grinning face of his demonic host.

He is known as King Krimus, lord of the kingdom of demons. As he was born through the gates of hell, he rules a land of lifelessness and pain. His father was Zuel, a son of Satan himself. After a fierce battle with Marcus II and his sorcerer, Zuel was badly injured and died in the arms of his son. With his dying breath he passed the stone of death on to Krimus, making him swear revenge.

The stone is made of raw evil and possesses great power. When used, it contains the power of the dark side and has been passed down from beast to beast to put fear in the hearts of man. As the knights are brought before him, the stone mesmerizes the men as they stand in front of the hell god. Krimus is the most gruesome of all the demons. When standing he is eight feet tall with large powerful arms and legs. His body is also black and leather looking. He has a large head with pointy ears and long black hair that runs down his back. His eyes are coal black and his mouth is full of razor sharp teeth. His hands and feet are larger than the other demons, with three-inch claws that could go through your skin with incredible ease. Around his neck is the stone of death with a leering red glow. As the knights stare at the stone, fear overwhelms them and only the sound of the demon lord himself, can rescue them from its hypnotic trance.

"Welcome knights. Welcome to the last place you will ever see" his voice rings out.

"I am Krimus! King of Castle Dread and Lord of the devil horde. I have only one wish while your here. Die a painful death" he says in a disturbing voice.

"Why have you brought us here?" asks Sir Wally.

"Revenge knight! Revenge on your own king and his bastard sorcerer" he yells. "Revenge for what?" asks Wally.

"The death of my father Zuel!" he responds angrily.

"Years ago, he and his sorcerer invaded our land and killed my people. It was a fierce battle, one of malicious intent. Unknown to my father, they had a plan that would soon lead to his death. He died in my arms and made me swear his revenge on the coming of the new moon. That moon shines only four days away. It is then that I will taste the blood of your beloved king and take his daughter. I will have her as my bride and she will serve me for the rest of her life" he declares.

"My king will have none of this. He will fight you with his last breath!" the knight says eagerly.

"That is exactly what I'm hoping for knight. But if I were you I would worry about my own fate" the hell king says eerily.

"Do with us what you will demon, for we fear you not" Sir Wally replies.

"I remind you of where you are human! A few days in my dungeons and you will beg me to kill you myself!" Krimus yells as he leans forward in his chair.

"Gordo, take these pitiful humans away. Their words bore me."

With that the men are taken away, deep into the lair of the beasts. They are split into groups of three and chained to the cell walls like dogs. As he stands in hells hospitality, Sir Wally fears he will never see Brave Rock again.

Chapter Three

As night falls on the castle, a small figure makes its way to the village. Dressed as a peasant, the kings' daughter Princess Ilea, is going to see her sick friend Rosa Marie. Rosa Marie arrived here from Spain shortly after Ilea's mother died. She died in her sleep, when Ilea was ten years old. The princess was so devastated by the loss; she ran away from the castle and hid in the village.

Rosa Marie found her hiding in her hut, while the guards searched outside. Ilea asked her not to tell and assured her that she would return soon enough. A couple of days to get over her mother and the princess was ready to return. When the king found out where she had been, he was outraged. He wanted to have Rosa Marie punished, but when Ilea swore not to see her again, the king agreed to let her be. Unknown to him though, princess Ilea has been secretly visiting the woman by sneaking out at night. Over the years the two women have become quite close and Rosa has been like a mother to her. With all the goings on around the castle, Ilea hasn't been able to visit her. But, when she heard that Rosa was sick, nothing could stop her from going.

Now in the hut of Rosa Marie, the two women had a fine visit. They caught up on small talk and visited a couple of hours. After a much-needed visit, both women agreed it was time for Ilea to go. In fear that she would be caught, Ilea said her goodbyes after assuring herself that her friend would be okay. On her way back, as she was enjoying a walk by the stream, she noticed a shadow by a large oak tree.

As she got to the tree, she peeked around to notice a young man practicing his sword. She immediately noticed how handsome he was, as sweat ran down his muscular arms. His long brown hair swung from side to side, as he practiced. He was wearing a pair of light brown pants and a pair of deer skin shoes. Covering his massive upper body, was an unbuttoned white ruffle shirt that exposed his large tan chest. While Ilea made her way around the large oak for a better look, she tripped on a root in the ground and fell before him.

“Who’s there?” he asked startled.

He turned to see a beautiful young lady lying on the ground. Although she was a bit embarrassed, she was fine as he ran to her aid.

“Are you all right miss?” he asked as he helped her to her feet.

He noticed she was most beautiful, as the moon shined on her long black hair. He looked down to notice her garment had opened from the fall, exposing one of her firm breasts. Noticing he wasn’t looking at her face, she looked down as well, to a most embarrassing site.

“I will be just fine! Now kindly keep your eyes to yourself!” she said angrily covering herself.

“Well don’t be mad at me. I’m not the one spying on people” he replied back.

“I wasn’t spying. I was watching” she said, as her red face told the truth.

“Well surely you know with the dangers of late, someone as beautiful as you should not be out by herself” he said firmly.

“I can take care of myself, thank you!” she smarted back.

“Of that I have no doubt” Warrick said as he stared into her big green eyes.

For a moment they just stood there, fixated on one another. Captivated by her beauty, Warrick found himself leaning over to kiss her. The princess tried to move, but she found herself being mesmerized by his size and good looks. As he kissed her, his strong arms steadied her body, as her legs went soft from a most passionate kiss. Her lips were soft and refreshing as he pulled her closer. But suddenly, as if afraid to be found with him, she pulled away. Aroused by the large man, she quickly started a conversation to get her mind off her sinful thoughts.

“Are you preparing for the contest tomorrow” she asked as she caught her breath.

“And what do you know of such contests?” he asked.

“Well surely a man of your size isn’t going to miss an opportunity to prove himself in battle” she said with a smile.

“Will you be there to cheer for me if I do?”

“Perhaps. But I don’t even know your name” she admits.

“I am known as Warrick. I am the blacksmith from the village. I don’t recall seeing you before” he says suspiciously.

“I assure you, I have been around” she says trying not to give her identity away.

“My name is I,” but before she could finish a voice rings out in the night.

“Princess Ilea!” the voice yells.

In the distance, Sir Gregory and two of the palace guards approach them.

“Princess! You’re the princess?” Warrick yells.

“Yes! Now shut up and play along” she says nervously.

As the knight approached, he stared at them together in the night.

“All you all right princess?” he asked.

“I’m fine Sir Gregory. I was out walking alone, when I heard a noise and got scared. This gentleman was nice enough to escort me back to the castle. Please don’t tell my father I was out” she asks.

“Fear not princess. Your secret is safe” he says turning to the guards.

“Take the princess back to the castle and not a word to anyone” he commands the guards.

Sir Gregory watches as they disappear into the night, then he turns to Warrick.

"I guess I should be thanking you, young Warrick" he says to the blacksmiths' surprise. "How do you know my name Sir Gregory?" Warrick asks suspiciously.

"I speak often to Ethane. He talks highly of you lad" he says with a smile, as Warrick retrieves his sword.

"Preparing for the contest tomorrow?" the knight asks pleasantly.

"I thought about it, however my sword needs work" he admits.

"Worry not Warrick. For a man of your size should do well." Sir Gregory says.

With that he too disappears into the night. Warrick stands there a moment to soak up what just happened. After all he just kissed the princess. After a moment to collect himself, Warrick makes his way home.

The next day Warrick gets up early. He begins to reshape a set of armor he kept in his hut. As he tries each piece on, he slowly starts realize that they are still too small for his large body.

"Who am I kidding? I'm no knight" he says as he throws the armor aside.

"Your quite right my boy" Ethane says as he exits the hut.

"But their not looking for knights; their looking for competitors" he says as he places his hand on the young mans shoulder.

"You've waited your whole life for this moment. Although your sword may not be the best, your strength is unmatched by anyone!" Ethane says with excitement.

"All you need is a little confidence and I can help with that" he says turning back toward the hut.

Warrick watches his friend as he enters the hut. A few moments later, he returns with a set of armor fit for a king. The armor is pewter gray and kept in immaculate condition. The helmet is equally as impressive, with a full-face shield and a black tail made of horsehair. Warrick stares at the suit in amazement as Ethane hands it to him.

"Where did you get such a remarkable set of armor as this?" he asks with enthusiasm.

"I haven't told you everything about myself" he says as he turns and walks away.

"I once was a squire for a most impressive knight. Together we won many jousts inside those very castle walls. He was a large man, much like yourself. When he passed, I kept the armor in his honor. I think he would be proud to have you wear it" he says as he turns back toward him.

"Well! Don't just stand their man! Try it on!" Ethane yells with a smile.

Warrick tries the armor on for a perfect fit.

"It's almost like old times" Ethane says with a tear.

"It can be again" Warrick tells him.

"Come with me Ethane" he shouts with excitement.

"No dear boy, I've had all the excitement I care to endure. Besides, I'm much too old" he says as he sits on a bail of hay.

"Now be off boy, or they'll start without you" he says as points to the castle.

"Thank you Ethane. I'll make you proud" he says as he walks away.

"Of that I'm sure my boy. Of that I'm sure" Ethane says softly.

With that Warrick was off for the contest.

Chapter Four

The closer Warrick got to the arena in the castle, the louder the crowd got. He saw at least a hundred guards outside the castle, as he noticed the entertainment inside had already begun. As he walked through the castle gates, he quickly noticed that more guards were posted throughout the inside as well. Realizing how big the event was by all the security, he started getting very nervous. Looking around, he saw a large grand stand of royalty from all over the land. He had never laid his eyes on so many royal members, as they come to watch the big event. Their were royal members from Sweden, France, Italy and many other countrys sitting together to cheer on the competitors.

In the middle of them all, he saw princess Ilea sitting next to her father. She looked most beautiful wearing a satin beige dress with ruffles and her hair up in a twirl. But his attention was quickly back on the

crowd, as they roared in pleasure at the events in front of them. Warrick had never seen such a large group of people in one place. The cheers of the crowd overwhelmed him, as the kings' knights showed off their talents. On one side they were jousting. The sport that Ethane had spoke of. He watched as two knights on horseback waited as a big flag dropped before them. The horses charged towards one another, each on a side of a long wooden runway.

Everyone held their breath when the knights lowered their long lances and collided together. The crowd roared its approval when the knights' lances exploded into pieces, sending them both to the ground. As Warrick moved in for a closer look, he found himself almost being knocked down by a rider on a large horse. He looked up to see Sir William staring down at him.

"Where did you steal that armor from peasant?" William asked.

"I didn't steal it sir; it was a gift" he replied.

"No matter. It won't do you any good in here boy. This is a contest of men. So see that you and your gift don't get in the way!" yells the knight.

"Get in the way I shall sir. For I am here to compete" he replies back.

"Compete for what boy. There won't be a horseshoe making competition this day" William says to the laughter of others.

"You would do good to hold your tongue sir. Or this horseshoe maker will strike you from your horse!" Warrick replies angrily.

But before the knight could reply, trumpets roar to start the competition. He takes one more look at Warrick, before riding off.

When the trumpets stopped, King Marcus rose to speak.

"Welcome to Castle Brave Rock. As we once were enemies at war, we all gather in truce for a true test of champions. The rules are simple, defeat your opponent and become one of the last thirty. Those who make it will receive a bag of gold and the chance to embark on the biggest adventure of all time. Survive, and knighthood and the riches of the kingdom are yours. But be warned, for this adventure is for only the strongest and bravest in the land. So join me and let the contest begin."

The king finishes to the cheers of the crowd, as all the competitors prepare themselves. For they know, that knighthood under King Marcus is a true honor. For he is the richest and most powerful king in all the land.

The contest begins as Warrick does some finishing touches on his armor. As he ensures a tight fit, he looks in amazement at the fierce battle before him. He suddenly starts to doubt himself, when a tall man approaches him with a single blade ax.

"First time lad?" the man asks.

Warrick looks over to see a large man dressed in animal skin. The man is wearing very little armor and carries a large shield in his other hand.

"Is it that obvious?" Warrick answers back.

"I have seen many battles and contests such as this. You can tell the new ones by the way that they squirm there first time in armor" he says with a smile.

"I guess I am a bit nervous," he admits as he smiles back.

"I am Warrick. I live in the village outside the castle" he says as he shakes his new friends' hand.

"I am known as Titus. I come from a small village east of here. With the gold I win today, I will spare my village of poverty" he says proudly.

"You sound confident, Titus of the east" the young man replies.

"Confidence wins championships such as these, young Warrick. Although you could use a little yourself, a man your size should fair well. Now watch and learn my young friend, for my turn has come" he says as he walks away.

As Titus walks out into the view of the crowd, they begin to cheer their approval. From previous contests around the land, he has proven to be a most fierce competitor. He raises his mighty ax in the air, as they continue to honor him. But his tribute is short lived as his opponent captivates them with his amazing swordsmanship. He is a tall slender man dressed in an oriental garment, with black armor plates covering

his shoulders and chest. As if to intimidate Titus, he swings two swords simultaneously around his body before freezing them face down by his sides.

“Those fancy moves are most impressive tall one. Bring them over here so I can get a closer look.” Titus challenges.

The tall man starts to run at Titus, as his two swords swing once more. The swords are almost invisible as his speed captivates the crowd. But when he gets within range Titus bats the swords away with his ax, and clobbers him in the face with his shield. The tall man stands there a minute as if frozen, then falls to the ground with a crash. The crowd remains silent, until Titus raises his arms in the air and gives out a war yell. Almost on cue the arena erupts in both cheers and laughter, as Titus walks back toward Warrick. Warrick smiles his approval at the man when he walks up to him.

“What took you so long?” he says jokingly.

Titus looks at him with a puzzled look and then to the tall man lying on the ground. Then both men join in laughter.

Several hard fought battles continue, as Warrick waits his turn. His heart races from the roars of the crowd, as he wonders whom he might face. But, as one of the fighters is dragged away, he finds himself standing alone. He was so in awe at all the intense fighting, that he failed to notice that there were no more participants. As he starts to get embarrassed by the on looking crowd, the king speaks.

“Well it seems we have one last fighter and no opponent for him” he says as all eyes focus on Warrick.

“What is your name young warrior?” the king asks.

“I am known as Warrick your majesty. But I am no warrior” he admits.

The king looks at him with a puzzled look, as Sir William speaks from the seat behind him.

“He is the blacksmith sire. From the village.” William says.

“And with little business here” he adds.

The king looks at Warrick a moment and once again speaks.

“Tell me young Warwick. What is a blacksmith doing in a contest of champions?” he asks still puzzled.

“I come to compete, your majesty” he says proudly.

“Well my boy I have to admit, this is no place for a mere blacksmith” he says to Warrick’s disappointment.

“However, you are a big lad and if someone were to challenge you, I.”

But, before the king could finish a voice rang from the crowd.

“I will fight him!” replies the voice.

Everyone turns to where the voice came from, as Sir Gregory walks out of the crowd. He walks up beside a surprised Warrick and faces the king.

“Your majesty, with your permission” he says respectfully.

“By all means Sir Gregory! By all means!” the king says with excitement.

Gregory turns back toward Warrick, still standing with his mouth hung open. In all his wildest dreams he never thought his first fight would be with a knight, especially one with the reputation of Sir Gregory.

“What’s the matter boy, change your mind?” the knight asks in a voice only they can hear.

“Why no sir, but”

“But what boy!” Gregory asks.

“You’re a knight. I can’t fight you” Warrick says nervously.

“That I am Warrick. One that believes everyone deserves a chance. Now defend yourself boy, for the king watches!” he says raising his sword.

Warrick has only a moment to think before being struck in the shoulder by Gregory’s mighty sword. The force of the blow knocks him down to the ground, much to the delight of Sir William. Warrick looks at the crowd as they start to giggle at him, then his eyes focus on the princess. Captivated by her beauty he springs back to his feet, only to be struck down once again. The crowd laughs at him endlessly as he lies on the ground.

“Don’t let them get to you boy, fight me!” Gregory yells.

Warrick looks again at the princess, as he gets back to his feet. Her worried face suddenly fills his body

with a feeling he had not experienced. Warrick slowly rises to his feet and listens to the crowds' laughter. He looks angrily at the pleasing look on Sir William's face, as he has been truly belittled. Suddenly as if possessed by the war gods, his anger turns to rage. He then returns his attention back to Sir Gregory, as his strong hands grip his sword till his knuckles turn white. As Gregory closes for another attack, Warrick raises his sword and blocks a most powerful blow. The arena is suddenly filled with the sound of steel on steel, as the swords collide. Now face to face and chest to powerful chest, Warrick looks the brave knight in the eye.

"Now it's my turn!" he says as he pushes Gregory back.

From the young mans strength, the knight stumbles back in surprise. But, before he can regain his footing Warrick unleashes a fury of strikes. Gregory falls to the ground, as the crowd is quickly silenced.

Regaining his bearings, Gregory gets to his feet.

" You have a temper, young Warrick" he says with respect.

" But, you have much to learn" he says as he gracefully swings his sword.

Titus and the other fighters start to return to watch the intense battle, as the sound of steel rings through the arena. As Warrick entered the contest a nervous blacksmith, he now feels the compassion of a would be knight. Steel and muscle combine as sparks fly from their swords. The two men go back and forth, much to the roaring of the crowd. But as Warrick starts to show his inexperience, Sir Gregory gets the upper hand. As Warrick swings his sword to strike Gregory in the side, the skilled knight spins around him swiping at his legs. The young man crashes to the ground, only to find the tip of the knights' sword at his throat. Knowing he's been beat, he drops his sword in surrender. Sir Gregory looked down at the blacksmith, as sweat bled from his brow. Never before had he fought someone as strong as Warrick. As he reaches a hand to help the young man up, he lets out a little smile of his newfound respect for the lad. "Very impressive young Warrick. For someone who claims he isn't a warrior, you sure worked an old man this day" he says as Warrick gets to his feet.

" But, as you said, I've still a lot to learn" he admits as he works a sore spot from his back.

" Aye lad, I did. And with that I can help" Gregory says as he turns to the king.

"Your Majesty, if I may ask a favor" he says with a slight bow.

The king nods his approval as Sir Gregory continues.

" Give me one day with young Warrick. For I feel he can prove to be a valuable asset on our up coming endeavor"

" Continue Gregory, continue" the king says with great interest.

" Thank you sire. I feel with his strength and a little coaching, he could be quiet the warrior. Regardless, his skills as a blacksmith alone could come in handy, as we are going after metal" he tells the king convincingly.

" I see your point" the king replies as he rubs his beard.

" What do you think, Sir William ?" the king asks as he turns around.

The knight stands and acknowledges the king with a bow, before turning his attention to the two men below.

"Do with him what you will Sir Gregory. But keep him out of my way!"

And with that he walks angrily away.

" There you have it then, Sir Gregory. You have your day" the king replies.

" Thank you sire" Gregory says with a final bow to the king.

He then looks at Warrick.

"Don't just stand there boy, we have work to do!" he yells.

And as the crowd has truly been entertained, they cheer their approval as the two exit the arena.

Chapter Five

As the black castle sits eerily on chard like land, the sounds of misery can be heard from inside. Evil watches, as the peasant slaves forcibly serve the devil horde of King Krimus. Trembling to the sounds of

cracking whips and growling hellhounds, the peasants spend their days extending the castles cave like corridors. Down below Krimus holds the red stone, as he ponders his revenge on King Marcus. He smiles at the thought of Princess Ilea as his personal servant and chuckles at the thought of her father dying a slow death. A vision from the red stone tells him Castle Brave Rock will soon be without the protection of the knights, as he plans his next move.

“Gordo! Bring me the one they call Sir Wally” the hell king orders.

Respectfully, the white-eyed demon obeys and disappears in the corridors.

Lying on the hard dungeon floor, Sir Wally and the others try to get what rest they can. As a plan of escape goes through Wally’s head, the silence is disturbed by the sound of keys rattling at the door. Wally turns to see Gordo and three other demons by the exit. “You come. King Krimus waits!” the beast says.

But as the door opens, one of the knights’ charges the beast. For his efforts, he is quickly batted away. As the creature waves its ax to finish him off, Sir Wally springs to his feet.

“Wait! “he yells in desperation.

“I’ll go with you!” The demon lowers his ax, as Wally exits the cell.

The cell door slams shut as one of the demons roars at the men, before following the others. Sir Wally is led through the corridors passing several of the slaves. The sight of the peasants being forced to work for the demon leader enrages him, but he keeps to himself for he can do little to help them. They pass through many corridors, before finally reaching the throne room of the hell king. As he is led closer to his demonic host, Wally can’t help but be afraid. As Krimus speaks a satanic voice fills the room.

“Sit knight. Sit and tell me about the castle of your king” he demands.

“I will sit as you ask demon, but I will tell you nothing of the castle, or my king” he says bravely.

“I expected as much from a knight, but you will tell me what I want to know” he says raucously.

Just then two of the peasants are dragged to a cage beside them. As they are thrown inside, the door slams to a gruesome horror. Waiting inside is one of the hellhounds. The two peasants are immediately terrified and start screaming as the large hound attacks. As he painfully watches, Sir Wally tries to get up only to be held to watch by Gordo and the others. The animal rips and shreds their bodies till their screams are no more. Just as the knight feels like he will throw up, things get worse.

“Gordo, get me two more humans and then two more” the king repeats.

The demon leaves the room, only to return with a woman and a small boy. Wally looks in horror as the beast takes them straight to the cage. Still eating on the others, the hound welcomes the sight of fresh meat. The boy and woman squirm and try to get away as the hound snaps at them from the bars. The boy looks at Wally as if to plead for help, as Krimus wins.

“All right I’ll tell you what you want to know“, Wally says to the screams of the peasants. “Good. Gordo get rid of the cage and worthless peasants. Sir Wally and myself have much to talk about” he says delightfully.

With tears in his eyes, Wally tells him everything about the castle. Krimus sits with a sinister grin as a most heinous plan comes to mind.

Outside the castles walls, Sir Gregory and Warrick are deep in their training. The sound of clanking metal is continuous as the knight teaches Warrick the art of the sword. As he thrashes out in a fury of strikes, Warrick soon finds himself angering like he did in the arena. Sir Gregory easily maneuvers the blacksmiths’ sword from his hand, as the youth can only stand and catch his breath.

“Warrick you will never master the sword if you persist to lash out in anger” the knight tells him.

“How else will you have me be, for this anger has gotten me this far” he says picking up his sword.

“And that day in the arena that same anger would have got you killed, if it was for real!” Gregory says angrily.

“What is this anger that fills you so?” Gregory asks.

“It’s not your problem” Warrick replies.

“Tell me lad. Keeping it bottled up inside is slowly tearing you apart. Tell me boy, and we will face it together” the knight pleads convincingly.

Warrick hesitates at first, and then figures' keeping it inside truly was doing him no good. He sits on a nearby log and is joined by Sir Gregory.

"It started a few short years ago" he begins.

"What did lad?" asks Gregory.

"This" Warrick says as he exposes the scars on his back.

The knight looks at long, deep scars down his muscular back. Some of them were a half-inch wide and the length of his back. As Warrick covers the scars back up, the knight could only sit and think about how much pain he must have endured.

"As I said. It started long ago. My mother and I were traveling through the woods with the rest of my village, when they came out of no where" he explains.

"Who did lad?" Gregory asked with great interest.

"The demons of Krimus. They were fierce fighters and we were quickly over taken. When they grabbed my mother, I ran to her rescue. But, I was soon struck from behind by one of those things. The pain from my back was excruciating, as I was sliced several times. I must have passed out and left for dead, because the next thing I remember was Ethane standing over me. As I looked around, there was no sign of my mother or the others" he explained sadly.

"That was quite a tale lad. But I assure you, on my word as a knight. Vengeance will be yours" Gregory says as he pats him on the shoulder.

"We have the same enemy you and I. If you truly want to learn the ways of the knight, then stand and put your anger aside" Gregory instructed him.

Sir Gregory explained to him that his anger would be of use soon enough, but for now he needed to keep a clear head. They started with the basics, with a block here and there. As Warrick kept his composure; he finally started to become quite a swordsman. Soon he was a most formidable challenge for even the trainer of knights. They continued to practice for most of the night, as his skills were now being complimented by his great strength.

"Well-done Lad" Gregory says, as Warrick counters his every move.

"I fear if I show you more, I will be learning from you" he replies in confidence.

Warrick proved to be a quick learner, as his skills excelled his wildest dreams.

"Thank you Sir Gregory" Warrick said with great respect.

"Thank me in battle lad. But for now we must get some sleep, for tomorrow is a big day." Warrick agreed as they walked in the night. But, his excitement continued. For tonight, he slept in the comforts of the castle.

Chapter Six

As Warrick tried to sleep, he found himself only able to toss and turn. He was so in awe, to the fact that he was in the castle walls. His room was massive, with a large fireplace. A bearskin on the floor, served as a most impressive rug. In the corner, a beautiful light wood desk supports a bowl of fruit. Above that was a frame of reflective glass, which captivated from across the room a picture of the king's crest above two crossed swords. As he lay in his bed, he was in true heaven. He thought about how proud his mother would be of him, when a knock came at the door. Springing up from the large canopy bed, he slowly walked over to the door. Another knock rang out, as he cautiously opened it. He was surprised to see a short man wearing the clothing of a servant.

"The king has summoned you to the throne room" the servant said.

"The king wants me?" he said puzzled.

"It is of grave importance" the servant replied. Thinking good and bad thoughts about what the king might want, Warrick followed the servant.

When he arrived at the throne room, Warrick noticed the king sitting on his throne and the sorcerer Kalavar standing beside him. As he approaches them, Warrick is both intimidated and curious as to why the king has summoned him so late at night.

"Ah Warrick. Come in lad, come in" the king says eagerly.

" You summoned me your majesty?" Warrick asks.

" Yes my boy. That I did. Sir Gregory tells me your sword is becoming quite impressive" the king says.

" I have learned a lot from him. He is a good teacher and has greatly improved my sword" the blacksmith admits.

"Good. Sounds like you will need it. Tell him Kalavar" the king says excitedly.

"Tell me what sire" Warrick asks curiously.

" A vision, young Warrick. I've had a vision" Kalavar says.

" Why should I care of your vision sorcerer?" Warrick says as he gets impatient.

" This vision was of you" Kalavar starts.

All the young lad could do is stand there. At first he thought it might be a sick joke. But he soon thought better of it, seeing as though it was the king he was talking about. As he looked into their eyes, he pondered what a vision could possibly have to do with him. "Tell me then wizard. What was this vision" he asked firmly.

"You will be very helpful on this journey to the dragon cave. As well as the disposal of King Krimus" Kalavar reveals.

" Surely I will do my part, but I am no knight, just a simple blacksmith" Warrick said as he tried to make sense of it all.

"Silence boy. This is not about a knight or a blacksmith. It is about you alone and what you possess inside" Kalavar explained.

The concerned look on the kings' face told him that this vision was real. Thinking this was his big chance to be a knight, Warrick was quick to find out more.

" Tell me what you want me to do" he said to the king with a bow.

" Go with Kalavar. He will tell you what you need to know" the king says assuredly.

With another bow to the king, Warrick followed the sorcerer through a small doorway behind the throne room. They passed through an eerie-lit corridor leading to another small door. On the other side of the door, was a room of mystical proportion. The walls were full of many books, most of which were full of dust from years of sitting. The room was slightly lighted, as the moon shined through a large window. Large tables in the middle of the room were cluttered with scrolls and more books turned to various pages. Other tables had tubes joined by colored hose and jars of colored powder.

On the corner of one of these tables, was a small chest. Warrick watched as Kalavar walked over to the chest and opened it, to a mysterious green light. The light was coming from a stone attached to a small chain. The stone held Warrick in a trance like hold, as the sorcerer placed it on his neck. Much to the young mans surprise; the stone went dull as soon as the sorcerer let it go.

"What happened wizard, the glowing has stopped?" Warrick said as the wizard stepped back.

As if it would help, Warrick grabbed the stone and started to shake it.

" Let it be boy, the stone is working just fine. It's adapting to your body as we speak" he explained.

"What does it do and how do I use it?" Warrick questions.

" It was a gift from the gods, and holds the fate of humanity. It was given to King Marcus II, to defeat Zuel the father of Krimus. Zuel used the red stone to char the lands, so he might rule a kingdom of lifelessness. When King Marcus II heard of this, he asked the heavens for help to preserve the lands. A winged messenger brought him the green stone, making him swear to use it for only good. The king used it to temporarily neutralize the power of the stone of death, once carried by Zuel. With the stones power gone, Zuel was easily defeated" he explained.

" If the stone is that powerful, why doesn't King Marcus do the same?" Warrick asked.

" Obsessed by his new power, the king used it to win a great battle. When the battle was over, the messenger returned and took the stones power. Knowing this day would come; the messenger assured him that its power would return. He said that one day a brave man that's pure of heart, would emerge and only then would its power be returned. I have seen such a man in my vision. It is you, young Warrick" he says proudly.

Surprised and honored by the sudden change in events, Warrick stares at the stone as his thoughts roam.

" But how will I know when to use it?" Warrick asks again.

"The stone will let you know. Now off with you. Go rest while the stone gets acquainted" the sorcerer says pushing him out the door.

Warrick makes his way back down the corridor and into the throne room. As he notices the king is now gone, he returns to his own room to rest.

Chapter Seven

In the kingdom of the devil horde, the peasants sit to rest after completing the work on the corridors. Since they arrived, they have worked in shifts round the clock and fed just enough to keep them alive. But, their rest will be short lived as Gordo makes his way to King Krimus. The hell king sits deep in thought, as Gordo enters with the good news. "My lord. The peasants have completed the castle construction" he reports.

" Good Gordo. Now we can concentrate on defeating Castle Brave Rock" he says eagerly. " That is good sire. The horde grows restless, for it has been a while since they have tasted blood" he says.

"Then let's not disappoint them. Tell them to ready themselves and bring me ten of the humans. For tonight we have a hunt" he says as Gordo leaves with a devilish grin.

Gordo takes ten of the best shaped humans and sends them to Krimus, while the others are taken to the dungeons. The dungeons are cold and smell of rotting corpses, but a welcome sight considering the fate of those less fortunate. Gordo returns to find the horde most excited, as they sharpen their axes in anticipation of the hunt. The humans kneel at the kings' feet, as they shake in fear. Krimus sits staring at them, as the hellhounds growl at their every breath. Fearing they will soon die a horrible death, some begin a silent prayer as the others think of their families. Suddenly their fate is revealed, as the king speaks.

" Peasants of Brave Rock. You have worked well and deserve a reward. But, no reward goes without consequences" he says with evil demeanor.

" You select few have been chosen to participate in a game of death. You will be taken to the castle gate and released as free men. If you make it back to your village, you live. But be warned ,for my demons will follow!" he explains.

The thought of being set free gives the peasants new life, as their hearts pump harder and harder. As the men are led to the castle gate, the horde roars in excitement. They snap and growl at one another, as each wants to make the first kill. Upon Gordos return the bloodthirsty beasts are released.

After a long run across the lifeless land, the peasants make it to the edge of the woods. Some of them haven't been out of the castle in years, and the thought of freedom fuels their bodies with energy. Breaking branches and disturbed grass fill the air as their hearts pump harder and their breathing gets deeper. As the kingdom of demons gets further away, the fleeing humans decide to go in separate directions in hopes that some of them may survive.

Hearing the sounds of the horde behind them, one of the men makes the fatal error of looking back. The sight of the approaching beasts distracts him, as his feet get tangled in the tall grass. Landing hard on the ground, the peasant finds himself facing in the direction of the approaching threat. As the horde closes in on him, he sees that their spooky white eyes are encircled in red and their faces are filled with spiteful rage. Hateful growls can be heard all around him, as he covers his ears and curls in a ball of fear. Several of them pass him by and for an instant he feels that he might be spared. He slowly uncurls himself, as the screams grow fainter. Lifting his head up above the grass, he sees them disappear up ahead. Rising to his feet, the man gives a sigh of relief. He celebrates by bending forward and grabbing his grass stained knees to catch his breath. He straightens his body to hot breath on his neck complimented by a low growl. He slowly turns around to see an open mouth of teeth before all goes black.

The others are fairing no better, as the creatures close in. Soon screams can be heard in different areas in the woods. One of the fleeing peasants finds his feet blindly guiding his body. His head pivots frantically from left to right, as he starts to hear them from behind. Just when he feels like he can't run

anymore, a pain in his heart tells him he has come to a sudden stop. He looks down to find himself speared by a fallen tree and blood running from his chest.

The last two of the group run by him as he thanks god for a quick death before going limp. They get only a hundred yards past him, before they find themselves surrounded by the hungry horde. Now standing back to back the men are helpless against their numbers. The demons toy with them a minute, like children playing with their food. The men slowly disappear into a wall of black, as their meat is ripped from their bones. One by one the beasts raise their head to roar in the victory of a triumphant hunt. With all of the peasants dead, the horde settles down for a quick meal.

Back at the castle a winged demon brings news from Castle Brave Rock. The flapping of large wings is silenced, as he glides to the castle entrance and disappears into the corridors. He makes his way to the throne room of the hell king and with a short bow gives his report.

“Lord Krimus, I bring news from the land of humans. Seems they’ve found interest in the cave of the dragon and the knights will leave for there at first light.”

“At last my moment has arrived. With the knights gone, the castle will be most vulnerable” the king says pleasingly.

“ Prepare the horde Gordo. For soon you will storm the castle and bring me the princess” he adds with a grin.

With that, the demons leave Krimus to ponder his thoughts, as his plan of revenge begins.

Chapter Eight

The sun starts to rise and Castle Brave Rock gets very busy, as the men get ready to embark on their adventure. The wagons are loaded with supplies, as the knights check their armor and weapons. Warrick arrives to find that the knights and others are all but ready to go. He mounts his horse to a familiar voice from the front of the group.

“ So blacksmith, I see you decided to join us after all. And just when I was starting to worry that you wouldn’t show” Sir William says sarcastically.

“ You worry about the wrong person Sir William. And although I’m flattered that you missed me, I have to say you’re not my type” he says as the men begin to laugh.

Angered by the laughter, Sir William digs his heels into the side of his horse and the quest begins.

Ever so deeper into the woods, the men slowly press on. They have now traveled for hours and have seen no sign of the horde or anything else of a threat. Titus entertains some of them with stories of battles fought long ago. The men listen a bit and soon start telling their own tales of bravery. One story is just as impressive as the next, as the woods start getting dark from the night.

Before it gets to dark, they decide to stop in a small clearing. The horses are secured and the men start unpacking some of the supplies. After a quick meal, they settle on logs around a large fire as more stories are told. Some of the tales are rather funny, as the men roar in laughter. Leaving the men to amuse one another, Sir William gets up to answer nature’s call. He walks several yards away and soon finds a spot to empty his bladder.

When he finishes he takes a moment to fix himself, when he hears a noise from behind. He turns around to find himself quickly pinned against the tree by a U- shaped spear. Standing in front of him is a hairy creature with a large head that resembles that of a huge ram. The creature is large and strong, as it presses the spear against his adams apple. Not able to go for his sword, he can just stand there as the creature speaks.

“ You trespass in the land of the Ram Beasts. Any last words before you die” the creature asks.

“Yeah, your head will make a nice trophy” William replies as he removes his dagger and lodges it deep into the beasts heart.

The beast screams in pain as Sir William frees himself from the tree. He draws his sword and slices the ram beast in two with a quick swipe. It falls to the ground motionless, as he thinks of the others.

Around the fire, the men continue to laugh at one another. The tales seem to get more far fetched, as the night goes on. But suddenly the tale telling comes to an end, as the stone around Warricks neck begins to glow.

“Warrick your stone” Titus tells him.

Warrick looks down to see that the stone is glowing brighter and brighter.

“What does it mean lad?” Gregory asks.

“I don’t know. It hasn’t glowed since the sorcerer gave it to me” he replies.

Warrick holds the stone, as it continues its mystifying glow. But soon there is no time for discussion, as the woods open up with cries of anger. The men look around and almost smile at the approaching threat. Springing to their feet, they draw their swords as the battle begins. Warricks sight is cloudy for a second, as a vision from the stone guides his attention to one of the creatures coming from behind. With the stones mystical power, he can now clearly see the approaching danger. In the vision, he sees a large hairy creature running towards him with a spear. Without even looking around, he draws his sword and lunges it passed his side and buries it into the beasts stomach. But as soon as that one falls, another approaches him as he spins around and slices it’s head from it’s body. Soon all of the men are challenged by the ram beasts, as they come from all directions.

In the middle of the action, Titus swings his large ax slicing at the creatures one by one. He soon finds himself covered in their blood, as he cuts through them like a knife through butter. Warrick takes a moment to admire his skill, before he sees Sir William join the fight. The knight runs towards one of them with his sword at his side and then amputates its arm below the shoulder with a powerful swing. The beast roars in pain before being silenced by another blow across its chest.

But, even before that one hits the ground, William is smothered by three more, as they take him to the ground. He looks up at their snarling faces, as he feels a spear cut through his shoulder. The pain is almost unbearable as the beast pulls it out and aims at his head. Just as it lunges downward, it stops as a sword bursts through its heart. Wasting no time with the other two, Sir William bats their spears away and springs to his feet. One of them grabs his wounded shoulder as he screams in pain. He takes the dagger he used in the woods and slashes its throat open.

The creature gurgles in blood and then falls to the ground. But as he turns for the other he finds it already dead. It lies on the ground with a large cut across its gut to expose its intestines. He quickly looks around to see who helped him, when he hears a scream from behind. He looks up to find one of the new men being torn to shreds by the beasts. Titus and the others come to his aid. But as the men easily defeat them, they find it to late. They stare at the mans mangled body and take a moment to mourn him.

With the ram beasts defeated, the men take a moment to regroup. They suffered only three losses and consider it a victory. But soon find themselves with little time to celebrate. Still charged by the thrill of battle, the men decide to break camp and move on. Putting the battlefield behind them, they leave the carnage to be cleaned up by the creatures of the forest. As they move on at a steady pace, Sir William rides along side his old friend.

“Thank you Sir Gregory” he says with a gratifying look.

“Thank me for what, William?” he asks puzzled.

“Back there against those beasts. I surely would have not made it out alive if you hadn’t helped” he admits.

“Perhaps you’re right. But you thank the wrong person” he says looking at Warrick.

“The blacksmith?” William says.

“Aye. His sword has improved amazingly. Like him or not William, he is the reason you speak to me now” Gregory informs him.

“It’s not that I don’t like him Sir Gregory. He’s an outsider. And you know how I feel about that.”

“Aye, that I do. I have the scar of an arrow to prove it” Gregory reminds him.

William remembers the arrow that Gregory took for him. He also remembers how they became good friends afterwards.

“I guess I’ve been a bit of a thorn to the lad” William says regrettably.

"Then go talk to our young friend" Gregory says with a smile.

But his smile is short lived as they notice a disturbance up in front. William kicks his horse and rides ahead.

When he gets to the front of the group, he notices that the men's horses are very nervous. The horses almost seem to be backing up, as if spooked by something. William helps the men quiet them down, as Gregory and Warrick arrive.

"Something has them spooked" one of the men says looking around the woods.

"Aye, It's the swamp of death" William says as he too looks around.

"It is said to be the home of the Blood Hive" Sir Gregory adds.

"What is this Blood Hive?" Warrick asks.

"A deadly band of blood thirsty beasts with large fangs. I hear that they can suck a man dry in seconds. It is said, that some of them can even fly. We must leave here William" Gregory says with concern.

But before another word is uttered, a scream can be heard in the distance. All the men turn, to see a large creature on top of one of the men in the back. William breaks from the group and with a deadly sword strike, cuts the thing in half.

Warrick and the others are soon by his side. Together they look in horror, as the mans skin is now wrapped closely around his bones. Just as Gregory reported, in a matter of seconds, the thing had sucked the blood from his body. The thing laid there in a pool of blood. Much of which belonged to their dead friend. As William kicked the thing over, the men saw the fangs that Gregory spoke of.

They were about eighteen inches long, with razor sharp tips. The fangs were very deadly looking and dripped the mans last few drops of blood. It's eyes were like that of a serpent, which was surrounded by a slender head covered with short hair. It's arms and legs were of medium size, but very strong. Instead of fingers it had talons, to hold it's prey tight. It's feet had five long toes consisting of three in the front and two in the back. They also had long talons, which made them perfect for snatching victims and carrying them off in mid flight. It's mid-section was large and rounded for storing several gallons of blood. It had large retractable wings on it's back, which come unfolded from Williams strike. As the men looked at the creature, the hair stood up on the back of their necks at the mere thought of falling victim to one of them. But as their minds were filled with horrid thoughts, their eyes were distracted as Warrick's stone glowed once more.

"What is that glow?" William asked.

"It's the stone the sorcerer gave me. It started glowing back there when the Ram Beasts attacked. If it's any indication of things to come, I fear we're about to have company" he says looking around.

Just as he finished speaking, the swamp come alive with more of the blood-suckers. They threatened both from the air and from hiding spots in the forest. Two of the men were quickly taken by the flying creatures, as the beasts fought in the air over which one would have them for dinner. The men screamed in pain, as the things dug their long talons deep into their skin. High in the air the men were ripped apart, as the others fought below.

On the ground, the men fought one after the other. The earth beneath their feet soon turned to blood-stained mud, as the men lacerated the creatures blood sacs. As Warricks sword was knocked from his hand, he found himself holding one of the blood suckers off by it's fangs. The creature dug its talons deep into his shoulders, as it tried to pull him closer. Just as its fangs got close to his chest, the hungry beast was slashed in half. Warrick was still holding its upper half as he looked up to see Sir William standing in front of him.

"Now we're even blacksmith. So drop that thing and rejoin the fight!"

Then the knight surprised him with a smile, before returning to the battle.

Warrick found his sword just in time. As he turned to join the fight, he found himself threatened by three of the blood suckers. The color red splattered everywhere as he ruptured their blood swollen bellies. When the third one fell, he quickly noticed that Titus was in trouble. In each of his strong hands he held one of the creatures off. Without hesitation Warrick slung his sword through the air, as the mighty Titus was

taken to the ground by the threat. The sword whistled in the air as it cut straight through the blood beast.

The creature's blood covered Titus, as he found his ax and split the second in half. Blood ran down his face as he stood up and thanked Warrick with a wave of his ax. He picked up Warrick's sword and threw it back to him. Just as the lad caught it, a bright light covered the battlefield. The men shielded their eyes, as it was too bright for man or beast to see.

Frightened by the bright light, the hive quickly retreated from the fight. The men were relieved to see the creatures disappear back into the woods. Although the men were holding their own, they were quickly tiring from the hives numbers. They all took a moment to catch their breath and wipe the blood from their faces, when the source of the light crossed all their minds.

"They will be back when they realize that they are no longer in danger" a voice rang out.

The men turned in unison to find Kalavar the sorcerer standing among them with his power staff.

"Thank you sorcerer. Your timing is impeccable" replied Sir William.

"I come to check on your progress and to bring a message from the king. He has sent messengers to our allied kingdoms asking for reinforcements for the battle against King Krimus. Now hurry on your way and I will hold the hive off till you clear the woods" the sorcerer says with urgency.

"You can assure the king that we will arrive with the metal soon, Kalavar!" William shouts as he and the men mount their horses.

As they started to ride away, Warrick approached the sorcerer. His head was full of questions about the stone's power. But as if the sorcerer was reading his mind, Warrick was interrupted before he could utter the first word.

"I feel the stone's power growing in you young Warrick. By now you have started to feel it too. Listen to it Warrick. Let it guide you. Now go and join the others. For the hive returns!" he demands.

The sorcerer's words were discreet but somewhat comforting. Although Warrick still had many unanswered questions, he somehow knew that he would have his answers soon enough. As he rode off to catch the others, a confident smile crossed his face. He was indeed feeling the stone's power grow inside of him. And soon that power would exceed his wildest dreams.

Chapter Nine

With Sir William and the others riding toward the dragon cave and Kalavar distracting the Blood Hive, Castle Brave Rock sat unaware of the nearby danger. By order of King Krimus, the horde slowly closed in on the castle. They wasted no time taking out the king's lookouts, as Gordo made his way to the bedroom of the princess. As she lay asleep in her chambers, the demon approached her bedside. As he stood over her, she awoke to a horrific sight. But before she could scream, a strange dust filled the air and she quickly fell back into a deep sleep. He easily placed her over his shoulder and escaped back out the window to the ground below. As he straddled her over his horse, he took one last look at the castle and they were off into the night.

When the horde reached Castle Dread, the sun was starting to come up. Gordo grabbed the princess and carried her through the castle corridors, while the others cleaned and sharpened their axes. The horde knew that once King Marcus discovered his daughter was missing, he would send his knights to rescue her. The thought of a fight on their home territory excited the demons to the point where they often quarreled amongst themselves. Nevertheless, they were ready for anything the humans had to offer.

Gordo took Princess Ilea to a special cell, behind the throne room. He chained her to the wall next to a dark haired woman. The woman was very dirty and wore rags for clothing, but was still very beautiful. Gordo snarled at the woman, as she turned her head in fear. She was brought here by the horde years ago, after one of their hunts in the woods. As Gordo left the room, she looked over at the young woman and noticed her clothing. She assured herself that the young woman was royalty by the way she dressed and figured her reason for being here was truly of sinister nature. She started to speak to the woman. But before she could open her mouth, King Krimus entered the room.

He walked straight to the princess and stared at the young woman with great interest. With his large hand he picked up her head to expose a most beautiful face. For some reason he found himself aroused by human woman and it showed as he moved his hand down her gown. Her head slowly lowered as he rolled the back of his hand over her breast. He became very aroused when her gown opened up exposing her firm young breast. He examined her curvy body and was pleased at what he saw. She moaned slightly as she was slowly starting to gain consciousness. She looked up and was quickly startled by the sight of him.

"Welcome Princess" he said as she looked around.

"Where am I?" she asked.

"You are in the kingdom of demons. This is Castle Dread and I am King Krimus" he said proudly.

"What do you want with me?" she replied.

"In due time princess. But first, let us get acquainted" he said as stroked her hair.

She quickly pulled her head away and spit at him in anger.

"My father will come for me. And when he does, he'll have your head!" she yelled.

Krimus was quickly angered by her outburst and slapped her in the face. Her head snapped around and tears began to roll down her cheeks.

"Your fathers arrival will only bring his death! I will hang his head on a pole and you will serve me forever!" he yells.

"I will never serve you" she says in disgust.

"We will see soon enough. You'll change your mind when his army is at my mercy" he says as he holds her head toward him.

Then he roars at the two women and exits the room.

As Krimus shut the cell door behind him, the tears continued to fall down Ilea's face. The woman next to her watched, as she struggled against the steel of the chains.

"It's no use princess. I've tried to escape. But I fear it is impossible" the woman said sadly.

"How long have you been here?" asked Ilea.

"I don't know really. I was separated from my son Warrick, as we passed through the woods. We were attacked by those monsters, on our way to the village by your fathers castle." As she finished the princess looked at the woman with a surprised look.

"Warrick is your son?" she asked.

"Do you know him. Please tell me he lives!" the woman says with excitement.

"If we speak of the same person he not only lives, but is on his way, with my fathers knight's, to the cave of the dragon" she replied back.

The princess told her of the plan's to retrieve the metal from the cave, in hopes of defeating King Krimus. She then told her of how she first met Warrick and about his battle with Sir Gregory. The women were soon in deep conversation and filled with hopes of their rescue.

Chapter Ten

When the king first heard of his daughters disappearance, he was angered. He knew it was the work of King Krimus, by the ax that was found embedded in one of the guards. All he could do was hope she still lived and that the knight's would return soon. His thoughts of them were soon interrupted, as Kalavar entered the room.

"Kalavar have you word from the knights?" he asked.

"I have seen them my lord. They are close to the dragon cave. They encountered some resistance from the creatures of the forest " he reported.

"Yes, as we expected" the king said as he slowly stared out the window.

The sorcerer looked at the king, as he knew what troubled him so.

"They will not harm her sire" he assured him.

"It is not her that they want" Kalavar added.

"Perhaps. But I still worry so" the king admitted.

"The knights will get the metal sire. They will then return to defeat King Krimus" Kalavar assured him.

“ How can you be so sure?” the king asked welcoming good news.
“ The one they call Warrick” Kalavar replied.
“Ah yes, the blacksmith. Has the stone accepted him?”
“ The power of the stone grows stronger as we speak” Kalavar said with confidence.
The king walked over to his throne and sat down as he stroked his beard.
“ It’s hard to imagine my kingdom being in the hands of a mere blacksmith” the king said lowering his head.
“ He is no longer a mere blacksmith sire. Soon he will have power unmatched by even Krimus himself”
“ And he can handle such power?” the king questioned.
“ He is strong my king. And his heart is pure. Besides, when the two stones meet in battle, it won’t matter.”
“ Explain yourself Kalavar” the king said curiously.
“ It will all come to an end soon sire. The kingdoms fate is in good hands.”
With that, Kalavar bowed to the king and exited the room.

With the swamp of death behind them, the men closed in on the dragon cave. They were all eerily quiet, as their destination got closer. Warrick, strangely enough, found himself riding beside Sir William. He had a lot of respect for him as a knight, but his social skills left something to be desired. So many questions of knighthood rang in his mind, but he kept them to himself in fear it would bring an argument. Just when he thought he would burst from the pressure of silence, he was surprised by a civilized conversation.
“You surprise me blacksmith” Sir William started.
“ I? Surprise you? How?” Warrick asked.
“I have to admit, when you first started talking of being a knight I was offended. I mean, the thought of a blacksmith thinking himself equal to myself was quite disturbing” William added.
“ And now” Warrick replied.
“ I have seen many young men talk of knighthood and bravery. I grew quite fond of one of them. I taught him the art of the sword, only to watch him easily slain. But, you are different. And that stone is only part of it. You are proving to be quite the warrior. And I am honored to fight by your side” the knight said respectfully.
“ Thank you Sir William. For your words are kind. But your still not my type” he says with a smile.

William has to smile as well, as he remembers his comment when the journey began. They start to laugh at one another, as Sir Gregory rides up beside them.
“ If you two are done holding hands, I believe were here” he says pointing forward.
The two men look ahead and soon find themselves staring at the entrance to the dragon cave.

No one uttered a word, as they stared at the entrance to the dragons lair. The entrance to the cave was rather small. Some of the men made comments that there may not be a dragon inside at all. To prove their theory five of them volunteered to enter. Two of them carried spears, while the others had crossbows. They approached slowly at first. But soon got braver, as the silence in the cave continued. While Sir William and the others looked from a distance, the five men disappeared into the cave. Several moments went by and still no proof that a dragon was inside. Sir William was the first to speak, as the waiting got the best of him.
“This is madness. I will wait no longer” he said impatiently.

But when he started forward, Warrick’s strong arm held him back. William’s head snapped toward him in anger, but soon his attention was turned to the stone. It glowed bright around Warrick’s neck, as the knight noticed the serious look on the blacksmith’s face.
“What is it lad?” he asked.
Warrick glared at the cave entrance, as if mesmerized by the very sight of it. An eerie fear filled the warriors, as his words confirmed the unknown.
“ It’s in there! I can feel it!” he said in a concerned voice.

Just as his words made some of them start to tremble in fear, screams could be heard from inside. The screams were silenced by a loud roar, as all eyes were now on the cave. They watched in horror, as one of the five staggered out of the lair. His body was charred beyond recognition and he made it only a few feet

,before falling to his death. While his body smoldered in smoke, the others could do nothing to help him.

Sir William started to wonder how they could possibly defeat such a foe, when he heard a sword hit the ground. He looked over to observe Warrick rid himself of his weapons and armor.

“What are you doing lad?” he asked with concern.

But he got no answer. Warrick just kept his focus on the entrance to the cave.

“Warrick I asked you a question!” he said firmly.

Warrick looked over, as the knight approached him. His words were confident as he revealed his intentions.

“I have dreamed of this moment since I was a boy. You will do well not to stop me” he said with a clinched jaw.

“What are you saying blacksmith?” William asked now concerned more than ever.

“It is time. The stone's power is now my own. And it's time to let that power out” he said with confidence.

“Prepare the wagons Sir William! We will soon be gathering our metal!”

The other warriors could only watch, as Warrick walked to the cave entrance and disappeared.

“What are we doing! Are we not warriors! Let us storm that cave and cut that vermin dragon down” Titus yells.

“Aye, my large friend” Gregory replies.

“But, I fear that this is something Warrick must do himself” the knight finishes.

“As much as I hate to admit it, Sir Gregory is right” Sir William says with regret.

“The stone grows strong in our young friend. I fear we would only get in the way” he adds.

“But, make no mistake about it. If Warrick falls to the dragon as well, we will storm the cave as one and let the beast feel the wrath of our vengeance!” he shouts in anger.

The men all agreed to let Warrick continue alone. If victorious, he would truly prove himself worthy of the stone's power. But, if he failed, then heaven forbid the consequences.

Chapter Eleven

Inside the cave, Warrick proceeded with caution. As he walked, he could smell the fowl odor of the others as they laid on the ground. Their bodies were charred like the one at the cave entrance and he had to cover his face to escape the smell. Their armor was melted to their bodies, as smoke rose from the corpses. Looking down at them, he thought of what pain they must have endured.

As Warrick continued on, he could see the remains of other warriors that tried to enter. Just like his friends, their bodies were burnt to the point where they looked almost un-human-like. He noticed weapons of all kinds, from warriors of long ago. He was saddened by the carnage, but soon his sadness turned to rage. As Warrick rose to his feet, he could hear the dragon in the distance. As he looked down at all those lives lost, his body was overtaken with rage. With his rage increasing over the slaughter of so many warriors, he could feel the stone charge his body.

Normally, the stone would reject such thoughts of revenge. But, Warrick was not an evil person and the stone could feel that even with all his hatred for the dragon, his intentions were still of good nature.

As Warrick walked in the dragon's direction, the stone's power continued to fuel him. With every step, the stone got brighter. Warrick could feel his chest start to burn, as the stone fed him power. The burning traveled across his shoulders and down his arms. Finally, when the burning reached his fingers, he looked down to see his fingertips glowing the same green glow that the stone possessed. When the burning stopped, Warrick could feel the invincibility of the stone's power running through his large arms. By the time he reached the dragon, the blacksmith had the power of the stone gods.

Around four hundred feet from the cave entrance, the cavern opened up to a large opening. Warrick looked around and could see the metal that they came for. The metal was like a shiny pewter that sparkled from the torches around the room. The room smelled of death and had more charred bodies

scattered around. In one corner of the room, stood the dragon. It was about forty feet high and had dark green scaly skin. Its head was like a large triangle, with demon red eyes. Its large mouth was full of short pointy teeth. When the dragon seen Warrick, it roared at his intrusion. White smoke shot out of its nostrils, as it stared at him.

As Warrick slowly approached it, he noticed that it moved extremely fast for its size. He watched as it drew back its head and spit fire from its mouth as a warning that he was in danger. Even though the flame was a few feet from his body, the blacksmith stood still. When the dragon saw that Warrick wasn't afraid, it became very agitated. It roared in excitement, drew back its head and once again spit fire at him.

This time the dragon meant business. The fire was coming right at Warrick's body. But, to the dragons surprise, Warrick shot a green light from his hands that deflected the flame. The dragon snorted white smoke and looked into his eyes as if to have a stare down. As Warrick moved one way the dragon moved the other. The beast soon realized that this human wasn't like the others. It snapped its head from side to side as if to intimidate him. But, Warrick wasn't impressed.

"What's the matter dragon, not use to a fight" Warrick said as if to taunt the beast.

The dragon glared at the blacksmith with curiosity. It was true that it had never had someone survive one of its fire attacks. Again it drew back its head and spit fire. But, Warrick easily deflected it away. Again surprised, the dragon stared at him. And for the first time in its life, it was afraid.

"You know why I'm here, don't you? Yes you know. And for all those lives you took, you will pay with your life" Warrick said in an eerie voice

Suddenly, the dragon moved toward him. Fire shot out of his mouth, as Warrick leaped to the side. He quickly shot a bolt of light from his fingers that caught the dragon in the neck. The beast roared in pain , as blood ran from the wound. It immediately tried to spit more fire at him, but the wound wouldn't allow it.

In a desperate attempt to save its own life, the dragon started snapping its large mouth at him. Warrick shifted from side to side, as the dragons mouth snapped beside him. As the dragon showed signs of fatigue Warrick jumped back. The dragon stood in a state of confusion. Never before had it fought such a worthy opponent. As the blacksmith glared at the beast, the images of all those men it killed ran through his mind. His jaw quivered as his teeth tightened together in rage. The dragon looked at him, as Warrick raised his hand toward its large body.

"For my friends and the others you killed dragon. I send you to hell!" Warrick yelled.

As the dragon roared one last time, a bolt of green light shot from Warrick's hand, striking it in the chest. The dragon exploded into pieces that covered the room. Warrick shielded his face, as flesh flew everywhere. When the last piece fell to the ground, he looked around the room at the walls of precious metal. With his hands still glowing and his body still enraged, he blasted the metal in anger. Large chunks fell from the walls, as his fury continued. He stopped only when he thought the cave itself would collapse on top of him.

When he finished, he dropped to the ground. He stared at his hands and noticed the glow was gone and the light of the stone was out. He gave a sigh of relief, when he realized he had accomplished his task. The metal they came for was theirs and the evil dragon was dead.

Sir William and the others hearing all the commotion inside, ran in expecting the worst. When they got to the room, they were surprised at what they saw. The dragon's carcass was in small pieces and the metal scattered throughout the opening. In the middle of it all was Warrick. He was still on the ground and his body was drained from battle. Sir William walked over and placed his hand on Warrick's shoulder.

" You are a remarkable man blacksmith. I'm just glad you're on our side" he said with respect.

" Well I've appeared to of made a big mess" Warrick said as he rose to his feet.

"Never mind the mess, we can take it from here" William replied.

As Warrick walked out for some well deserved fresh air, the others looked in amazement. With his new found power on their side, they actually looked forward to the battle with the horde. A smile crossed Sir

Williams face, as Warrick disappeared from site.

“ And to think that I didn’t want him to come” he said to Sir Gregory.

“ Kick yourself later my friend. But, for now we have metal to load and a kingdom of demons to conquer” he replied back.

“ Then stop gawking lads, for our next stop is Castle Brave Rock!” Sir William yelled.

Chapter Twelve

With the dragon out of the way, the warriors were finally able to enjoy the caves reward. They found the metal easy to load and mysteriously light. Warrick’s fury left it in small enough pieces to where the men could handle it. One by one, they loaded the wagons until they had enough. When the last wagon was loaded, they took a short rest and were on their way.

The trip back to the castle was a quiet one. It was decided to go around the evil they encountered in the forest, to avoid being slowed down by confrontation. No one spoke of the battles they had, nor did they brag of the evil they killed along the way. They traveled very cautiously, closely guarding the wagons of metal. As they rode in silence, they had but one thought among them. The final confrontation with the devil horde.

When the castle was finally in view, they witnessed a most welcome site. Gathering around the castle walls, were warriors and knights from all over the world. The request for help, by King Marcus, was answered in great numbers. As Sir William rode through the castle gate, he noticed the mood around the castle was one of great anticipation. He stepped down from his horse and was approached by the king.

“ Welcome back Sir William” replied the king, as the knight bowed to him in respect.

“ It is good to be back your majesty. Although I didn’t expect such a gathering” the knight said as he looked around.

“ Fifteen hundred of the best warriors in the world. Now you have an army my friend. I just hope it isn’t too late” the king said sadly.

“ Too late for what sire. What has happened that troubles you so?” William asks.

“ Krimus has happened Sir William” replies Kalavar.

The sorcerer’s words were firm, as the king bowed his head in sorrow. Sir William knew by the look on the king’s face, that the words Kalavar spoke of were true.

“ Krimus was here? When?” the knight asks.

“ It was Gordo. Leader of the horde of Krimus. They came at night, during your battle with the hive. Some of the guards were killed and the princess was taken” Kalavar informed him.

“ Then we have little time!” shouted someone from behind.

The one speaking was Warrick. His voice was one of revenge and anger, as he approached the others.

They all turned to him, as he approached the king.

“ Your majesty. I must get started with the metal right away” he said anxiously.

“ I expected you would my lad. Kalavar has prepared a room for you in the castle. There you will find all that you need” the king answered.

“ Come, show me sorcerer” the blacksmith said walking away.

As Warrick and Kalavar made their way into the castle, Sir William had the palace servants take the metal to the room that was spoke of. Warrick indeed found all that he needed to transform the metal into weapons. He also found ten other blacksmiths waiting to help. In the middle of the room was a large fire surrounded by anvils, hammers and sword molds. Warrick wasted little time getting started and soon the room was busy, as the metal was brought in.

Soon the swords started piling up. Sweat and muscle combined, as they made one sword after the other. Each sword was about ten hands long and about four fingers across. They also made a special ax, to fit the mighty hand of Titus. The men worked feverishly until all the metal was used. When the swords were finished, the last thing to do was to make them razor sharp. Warrick and the others used special stones

designed by Kalavar, that worked perfect. When the last one was sharpened, they were ready and the horde was in for a surprise.

Chapter Thirteen

The next day, after some well deserved rest, the warriors prepared for their battle with the horde. The servants helped them with their armor and weapons, as they readied themselves for the final confrontation. As Warrick was helped onto his horse, Kalavar came over for some last minute advise.

“ I wish you were coming with us Kalavar” Warrick said disappointed.

“ This is something that was meant for you to do. You were chosen by the war gods Warrick. They will be by your side in time of need. Call to them if you need help” Kalavar instructed.

“ Even so, I would feel better if you were there” the young warrior admitted.

“ Only you and the stones power can defeat Krimus. Besides, I’m needed here to protect the castle, in case the army horde somehow gets by you. Now go and remember to save the stones power for Krimus. Your strong arm and swordsmanship will take care of the rest” Kalavar assured him.

“ Thank you for all your help sorcerer. I will not fail” Warrick said with confidence.

After a quick nod of respect to the king, Warrick joined the others. Once again the road was long and quiet. They all knew that this would be their only shot at defeating the horde and they were ready.

After a long ride, the men finally reached the outskirts of Castle Dread. As they expected, the horde was waiting. They were about 2,000 strong and very eager to fight. Sir William and the others stared at them, as they growled, snarled, and shook their axes in rage. The size and attitude of the satanic army was intimidating at first. But, soon Sir William, would have his army blood-thirsty as well.

“I have fought in many battles, but never have I faced an enemy such as this. They come and take our families. They turn them into slaves and torture them for pleasure. I don’t know how this battle will turn out, but I’m proud to be fighting here today with each and every one of you. So come warriors of Brave Rock! Join me and let them feel the fury of our king!” he yells.

The men join him in a final battle cry and then as one, they charge straight into the heart of the beast. The horde charges as well and they meet with a thunderous crash. The battle is very bloody and intense, as death immediately fills the air. Titus is the first to test the new weapons, as his ax shears through the demons with ease. In just a few moments, he has already killed about seven of the beasts and is soon surrounded by mangled flesh, as the horde falls to the might of his ax.

Sir William and Sir Gregory fight almost side by side, as they too find the new weapons to be a formidable match for the hordes axes. Limbs fly and bodies fall, as the two work together in the middle of the battlefield. But soon the tide is turned, when they are separated by a swarm of beasts led by Gordo. As Sir Gregory continues to cut through the hordes forces, Sir William finds himself staring at the horde leader himself.

“ Just so you know human, I plan to eat your heart after I’ve killed you” Gordo threatens.

“ Save your tongue hell-beast and prepare for a knights vengeance” William threatens back.

Sir William then swings his sword in a fury, as sparks fly from the impact of Gordos ax. Back and forth they go, as neither man gives ground to the other. Sir William finds Gordos strength to be of none he has ever faced before and soon is knocked to the ground. He lies helpless on the ground, as his sword falls from reach. He soon finds Gordos ax deep in his shoulder, as pain crosses his face. His armor only slows it, as it almost separates his arm from his body. Gordo places his foot on Williams chest and pulls the ax out. The knight screams in pain, as Gordo prepares for the fatal blow.

Seeing the knight in trouble, Titus gives a war yell and charges the beast. But is soon over taken by several members of the horde and taken to the ground as well. The beasts look into his eyes growling and showing their teeth. Trying to fight back, Titus finds their numbers to be too great. As he lies in silent prayer, one of the horde roars once more, before ripping his throat out.

Gordo smiles with a devilish grin before turning his attention back to Sir William. Once again, he raises his

ax to finish him off, but stops when a sword penetrates his large chest. Blood runs from his mouth, as he turns to find Sir Gregory standing behind him. The last thing he sees is the knight's sword swinging in the air, before his head is separated from his shoulders and his body falls to the ground.

Chapter Fourteen

Warrick slices his way into the castle and makes his way into the dungeon area. He finds the cells holding Sir Wally and the others and soon frees them.

"I don't know who you are, but thank you" Wally says in a gratifying voice.

"Thank me when the battle is over. Now free the others and join the fight!" Warrick replies back.

Sir Wally frees the other knights and the peasant slaves, as Warrick pursues King Krimus. He cautiously travels through the corridors, when he finally finds what he is looking for. In the large throne room, deep in the castle walls, he finds King Krimus. He stands on the other side of the room and taunts Warrick as he speaks.

"What is this? I expected to be challenged by a King and they send a boy"

"You will find this boy is more than enough for the likes of you devil beast!" Warrick says in anger.

Krimus looks the younger man over and grins foreseeing an easy victory. But, he finds himself momentarily shaken by the sight of the stone. He quickly recognizes it to be the very stone that killed his father. He stares at the stone, now glowing bright around Warrick's neck. He shows fear only for a moment, before that fear turns to rage.

"I see you wear the green stone. For your sake, I hope you're prepared to use it!" Krimus threatens.

"Use it I shall son of a satan! You will pay for the lives you have taken!" Warrick threatens back.

"Then ready yourself lad and behold the power of the red stone of the hell-gods!"

And with that a red bolt of light shoots out of the stone, as Warrick dives to the side. A large hole is made in the wall behind him, as Warrick regains his feet.

"You are quick young one. But your speed will not last forever" Krimus says as another bolt of light heads at the blacksmith.

This time Warrick blocks the red light, but is knocked to his feet from the power. As he once again gains his feet, he is met by another blast. This time, the two stones' power collide in a powerful and thunderous clash. Both man and beast hold their ground, as the light gets brighter.

"You are very strong for a human. But, I will show you what true power is!"

Then with a burst of power from the beast's stone, Warrick finds himself sliding backward, as he holds the beam off. His body continues to be pushed back, as Krimus starts to smell victory. Warrick feels himself starting to weaken, as he remembers the advice of Kalavar. In a desperate attempt of survival, he shouts to the war gods.

"Hear me Gods in the heavens. If I am truly the chosen one, then guide my hand in victory. I ask this in the name of my king and all that is good!"

Krimus smiles at the prayers of the human and increases his power to the red stone. Soon Warrick's back slams against the cold castle walls, and just when he feels like his arms will drop, his prayers are answered. His body suddenly is charged with unimaginable power. Soon it is Krimus who finds himself backing up. He looks at the young human in disbelief, before focusing all his power into the stone. The two stones glow brighter and brighter. Warrick feels the stone's power flowing through his veins and his whole body begins to get very warm. Just when he thinks he can take the heat no longer, the red and green of the two stones turn white and then they both explode into pieces.

Both man and beast are sent flying to the ground with a thud. Warrick is the first to his feet, as he still feels a strange power from within him. He watches as Krimus raises to his feet, horrified at the loss of his red stone. He slowly looks over at Warrick who reaches for his sword.

"Now devil beast! Go to hell and be with your maker!"

Krimus can only watch as the youths sword whistles in the air, striking him in the heart. His feet leave the ground, as he's thrown back against the wall behind him. He looks down at the sword and slowly pulls it out of his bleeding chest. He drops the sword to the ground and begins to laugh, as his last words are spoken.

"We will meet again human."

And with his final words, Lord Krimus falls to the ground. Warrick gives a sigh of relief and thanks the heavens. The devil king is dead.

But Warrick finds little time to celebrate, as a voice rings out from the room behind Krimus's throne. Warrick runs into the room to find Princess Ilea chained to the wall. He quickly runs to free her, when he hears a voice he hasn't heard in a long time.

"Warrick! My son! Is that really you?"

Warrick looks over to see that his mother is alive after all this time. He frees them both and after a few moments to embrace, they make their way out of the castle.

They exit the castle, to find what remains of the horde fleeing into the woods. A group of men led by Sir Wally runs close behind. Warrick slowly makes his way over to Sir Gregory, who is helping a badly wounded Sir William onto his horse. They look at the young lad, welcoming the sight of his safe return.

"Is it over?" asks Sir Gregory.

"Aye. That it is" Warrick says in relief. Then he turns once again to embrace his mother. Although weak from her ordeal, she finds the strength to hug her son tight and then mother and son join the others to return home.

Chapter Fifteen

That night, a large feast is prepared in victory. Warrick sits beside his mother and princess Ilea. As he looks around the room, he notices that everyone is present for the big event. There is even an empty seat in honor of the mighty Titus. Warrick stares across the room at Sir William, who gives him a grin and a nod of respect. Suddenly, a voice rings loudly throughout the room. It was King Marcus, who rises to his feet to address the crowd.

"Tonight we have much to celebrate. Not only did we defeat the Kingdom of demons, but we have a new hero among us. Warrick! Come before your king!"

Warrick rises to his feet to the cheers of all in the room. He makes his way across the room and bows to the king.

"Kneel my lad" the king says respectfully.

The young man looks up at the king in surprise and finds a proud smile across his face. Warrick then kneels at the king's feet. He shakes with excitement as he has waited for this moment all his life. His mother and Princess Ilea show their approval with a smile, as the king speaks.

"For your bravery in protecting your kingdom, you kneel a mere blacksmith. Now rise lad. Rise as I dub the Sir Warrick."

The cheers roar once more as Warrick rises to face them. He walks back across the room, as Sir William and the other knights congratulate him. Everyone else joins in the celebration. But the celebration will be short lived, as one of the king's messengers storms the room.

"What is the meaning of this?" the king asks

"My lord. Forgive me, but I bring news from King Peter. His kingdom is under attack by a most feared evil force. I was sent here to ask for your help" the messenger replies.

But before anyone can respond, a bright light enters the room. When the light goes out, the winged messenger of the Gods is standing in the middle. The messenger looks around the room and walks straight at Sir Warrick. He then speaks to the king, as all goes quiet.

"King Marcus, the Gods congratulate you and your kingdom in victory. Krimus has been a thorn to us since his birth. The destruction of the stones, was a victory for the gods as well. But I fear that, as your messenger has mentioned, more evil exits throughout the lands. So the gods have asked me to assign you a permanent warrior, to defend on their behalf."

The messenger then turns back to Warrick. He stares at the young warrior briefly, before bestowing a great honor.

“ Warrick of Brave Rock. You have pleased the Gods and have proven yourself worthy of the stones power. It is in their name that I permanently give you the power of the green stone. Use it well Warrick and make us proud.”

With that, the messenger disappeared from site, leaving the king's messenger to repeat his plead for help.

Sir William looks at King Marcus and then to Warrick, as the room remains totally silent.

“ So what do you think Sir Warrick? Ready for another go?”

Warrick turns to Sir William , as his eyes glow bright green. A smile crosses his face as he speaks.

“ Absolutely!” he says with excitement. Then without another word, he leads the men out the door. He leaves not only a newly dubbed knight, but as -Hero of Castle Brave Rock.

The End