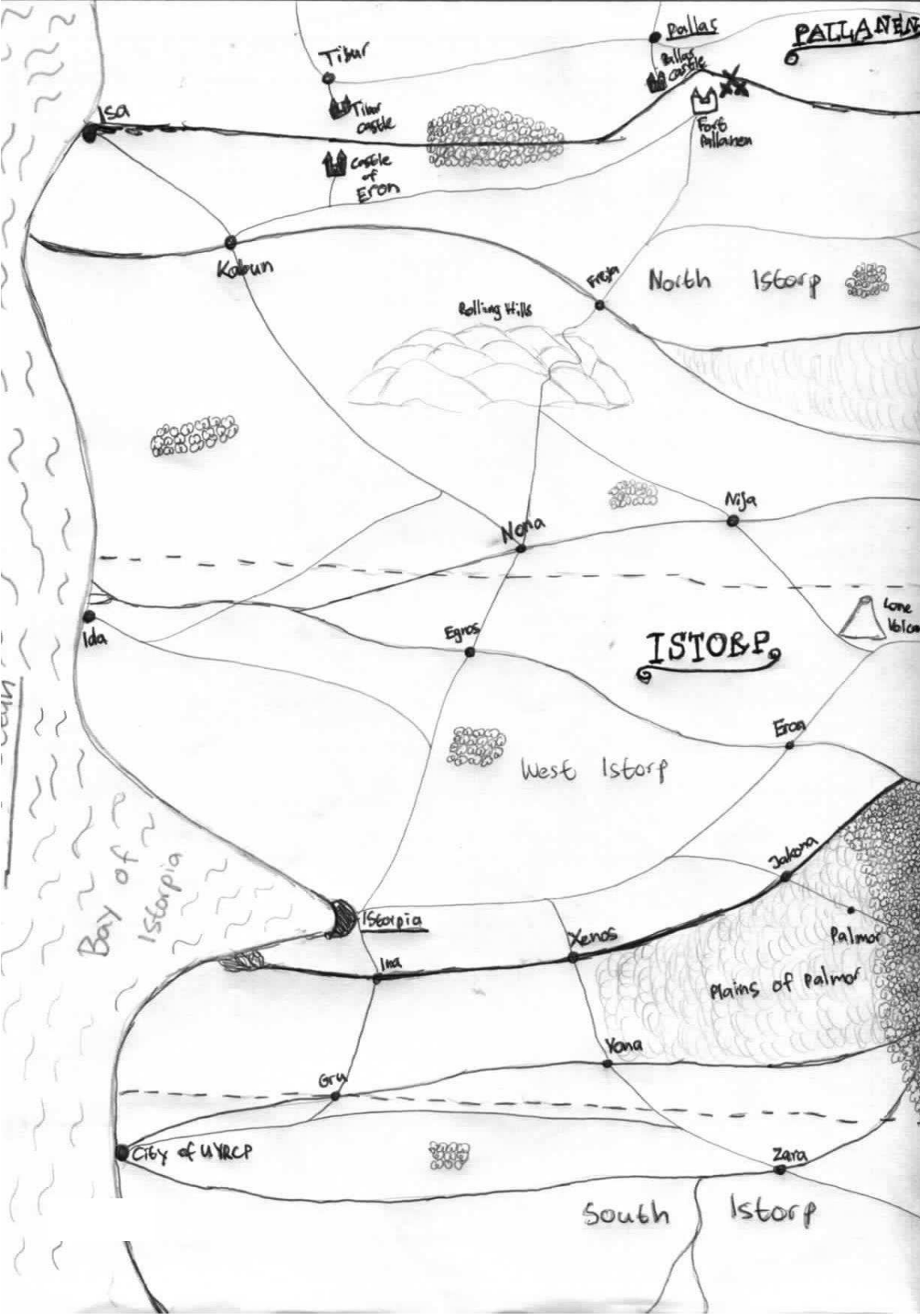
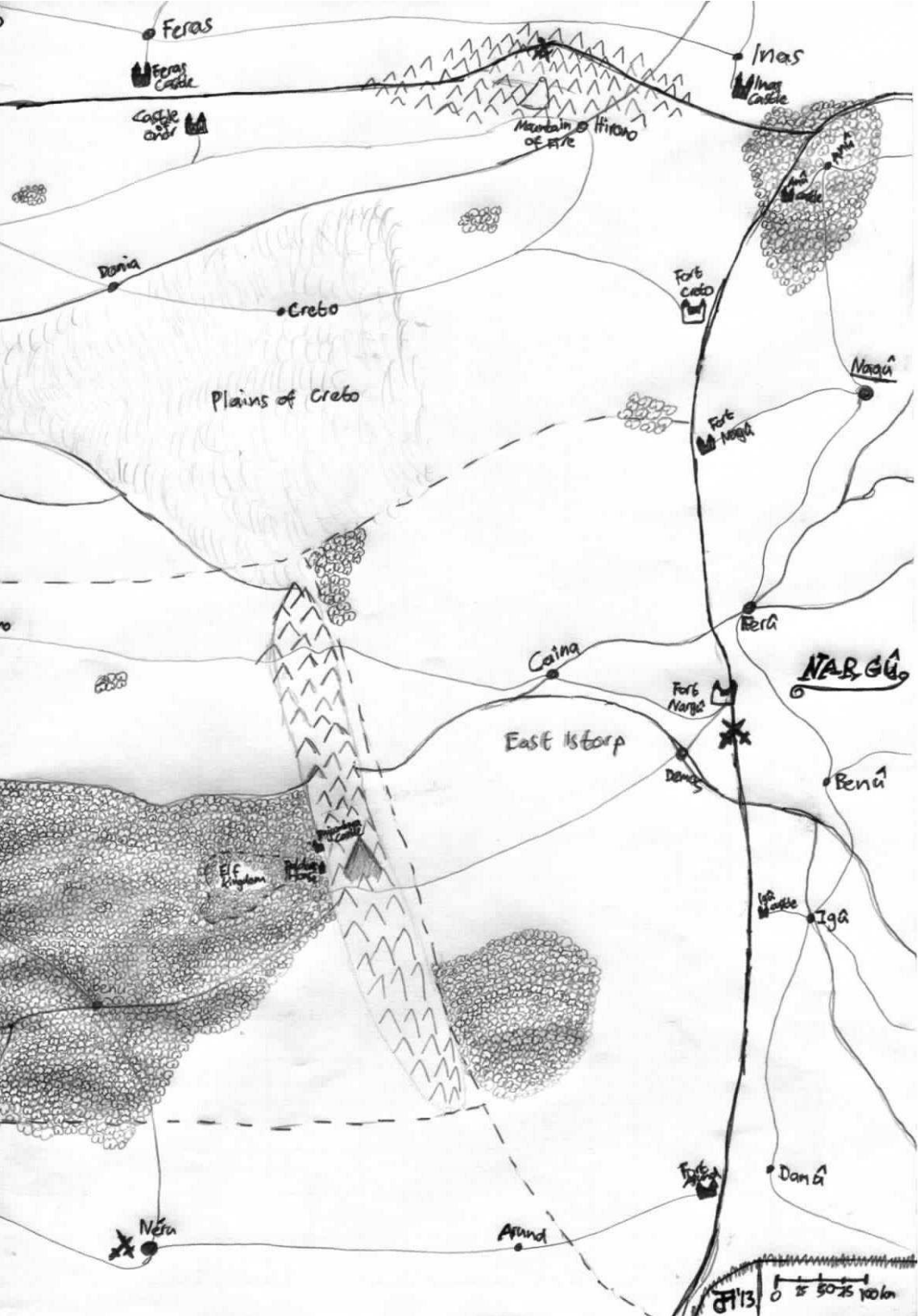


The World of Istorp

By J.T. Holle





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I wrote this book for my siblings

Malte Simeon Holle

and

Greta Nadeschda Holle

Table of Contents

<i>Chapter 1: The awakening</i>	13
<i>Chapter 2: Strange experience</i>	20
<i>Chapter 3: Exploration begins</i>	40
<i>Chapter 4: The Curious Mountains Part 1</i>	56
<i>Chapter 5: The Curious Mountains Part 2</i>	70
<i>Chapter 6: The howling cave</i>	84
<i>Chapter 7: Return to Baldur's house</i>	98
<i>Chapter 8: A mysterious trip to Istorpia</i>	110
<i>Chapter 9: The secret meeting</i>	134
<i>Chapter 10: A dangerous road</i>	152
<i>Chapter 11: Fort Nargû</i>	168
<i>Chapter 12: The Battle of Nargû</i>	176
<i>Chapter 13: The old speech of Istorp</i>	184
<i>Chapter 14: The trip north to the Plains of Creto</i>	198
<i>Chapter 15: Creto and its people</i>	210
<i>Chapter 16: A strange old man and a forgotten past</i>	222
<i>Chapter 17: The Forest of Anû</i>	234
<i>Chapter 18: Aeriana</i>	240

Chapter 19: The River Is 252

Chapter 20: Icy water and chilly looks 260

Chapter 21: The silver city of Néru 268

Chapter 22: Istorps last stand 278

Chapter 23: A banquet and a farewell 290

Chapter 1: The awakening

He was already awake as the first light of day slowly rose above the misty treetops. What had happened last night? He did not remember much, but only that he was not at home anymore. This wasn't his house, this weren't his clothes and was this even his country? London was different, there weren't that many trees around and the air was much heavier then here.

After slowly sliding out of bed he searched for his slippers, but they were gone, too. He thought: "*Maybe this is just a bad dream*", but after standing up tall he realised that he nearly touched the ceiling with his head. Had he grown, or had the house shrunk. Then suddenly he heard a noise that made him startle as he was ripped out of his thoughts with almost brutal force. What was that noise? Intuitively he knew what it was. The noise could only be the creaking of an old staircase, which meant that someone must be coming.

Since he lived alone he now knew for certain that he wasn't at home anymore and started to search for a place to hide with great anxiety. The noise was getting ever closer and he still hadn't found somewhere to hide. Now close to hysteria he saw something in the corner of the room that made him stop dead in his panicky search. A sword stood in the corner. It shimmered as the sunlight fell upon its shiny silver handle which was beautifully crafted. The handle had exquisite black leather and red leather in a coil pattern tied around it and at the top there were two metal spikes, sharp like daggers, sitting either side of the blade. In the centre of the blade sat a thin strip of metal with

golden letter engraved in it. It said KGEFRW QUMPB and then after he looked at it for a while and oddly enough he knew what it was saying: "*Mighty sword*". He could not explain why all of a sudden he could read whatever the letters were, but now was not the time to contemplate further. As he picked it up he noticed that the sword was perfectly balanced, the handle weighed exactly the same as the sharp blade. Since he had always had a keen interest in swords, he knew this was not an ordinary sword, it was a sword made for a king.

Then yet again he heard that noise and his thoughts dissipated as quickly as they came. Slowly the doorknob turned and the door started to open with a loud squealing noise. He jumped towards the door with the sword raised up high in his hand. But suddenly he heard a voice shouting: "*Young master don't kill me please*". He slowly lowered the sword and stepped back. Since he had been to quite a few medieval festivals he at least knew how to hold and wield a sword properly.

After careful consideration he decided it was safe to talk to the person. "*Who are you?*" "*I am Baldur the dwelve*" a voice replied. "*What is a dwelve? I have heard of dwarfs or elves but never of a dwelve before. Is it something like a crossbreed? Why I am here? How did I get here? And what happened yesterday*", he asked as fast as the words could escape his mouth. "*Slow down young master. I am overwhelmed by all your questions, but I will answer them all one after the other. So firstly a dwelve is exactly what you assumed it to be a mixture of a dwarf and an elfe. Would you have the courtesy to maybe let me into the room young sire so I can explain more comfortably?*" came from the other side of the door.

He let the door open fully and what entered was something like nothing he had ever seen before. It was green and covered in hair at all

the exposed parts and it was only as tall as the regular ten or eleven year old boy in London.

The dwelve had big feet, twice the size the feet should be for his size and they were as hairy as bare. Looking further up it was wearing something trouser like only that they were grey, washed out and covered in holes. He was also wearing a breast plate of an armour, it was shimmering in the light and it seemed like it was its most treasured possession. It was buffed up and made of the shiniest material you've ever seen and had some beautiful gold engravings around the edges. The arms were skinny, green and as you'd probably guess, hairy. The hands were quite big and apart from the fingers and palm covered in thick hair as well. Its head was normally proportioned. The thick green beard made the mouth almost totally drown in it and the part of the mouth that could be seen seemed to be smiling. A big, knobby and slightly reddish nose sat right in the middle of the face. The eyes seemed to be gleaming happily but there was a slight sign of nervousness but also a tiredness and sadness that distinguished an experienced warrior. Its ears were pointy like elven ears. The green hair reached up to the shoulder. His hair was thick and also slightly curly but it seemed to be matted from being never combed.

"And now to your second question. You are here because you are a hero and you will help us defend the world against the dark creatures that are trying to overtake it. You got here by the ring on your finger, it summoned you here and the ring chooses its bearer."

He looked at his hand and to his surprise there really was a ring there. It was one of the most beautiful rings he had ever seen and he had seen many rings as he used to work in a jewellery store in London. The Ring

was made of silver and although it had some scratches on it, it was still amazing to look upon. On the top, four pieces of black stone were inserted into the silver. They were almost arranged in a symmetrical pattern. A long and a short piece of stone faced each other with a small space in between them. The same was seen next to the first two pieces but they were arranged in the opposite way so that looking from whatever side you would always see two different length pieces.

Yet again he was drawn from his thoughts by words: „It's beautiful, isn't it? This is Enor the earth ring, one of the five rings of the elements. With each of the rings you can control the specific element on a small scale. The other rings are Nani the ring of air, Wurg the ring of water, Badun the ring of fire and Egros the thorny ring. You may question why are there five rings of the elements as there are only four elements? The fifth ring is for the fifth element but what it actually is and why it exists, is only remembered by few. I am unfortunately not one of the people who knows."

"Who knows then? And where am I actually?" he asked Baldur with great anxiety. "Young master don't be so hasty, we have time and I still haven't finished answering the other questions and you keep coming up with more. I can understand that you want to know about all of this, but time is the best explanation. I will explain it all at the right time although the question where you are might turn into a very long tale but I will try my best to keep it short. However back to the question how you got here and in order to explain that I shall need to answer your last question first. You are at the edge of the forest of water and you are near the middle ridge mountains, at the borders between south and east Istorp. This is my home, I know it's small but it's mine. And you are in the upstairs guest room under the roof."

Now to the question how you got here and the question of what happened last night. I don't exactly comprehend how you got to Istorp but I know how you came to my home. Last night I went into the forest to find some mushrooms and some meat for my dinner and maybe something for my supper too. Once I came to the clearing where you find the best mushrooms, I saw you lying there on the ground. Of course I didn't know whether you were dead or unconscious or merely sleeping. As I normally don't like strangers in my home I was going to leave you there but then I noticed the ring on your finger. Every last child here in Istorp know the story, the myth, the prophecy, that one day the five warriors of the elements will return and free us from oppression. When I saw the ring, I knew that you were one of them."

"But I am no warrior, I am merely a university student in London and I don't know how to fight" he said with a fearful voice. "You are the warrior that was send to us and you can fight better than most men" Baldur said in a calm and collected voice. "Let me show you something". He turned around slowly and walked towards the stairs. The young man followed him and when they reached the bottom of the stairs he saw the dwelve disappear in a small side room. "Come here this belongs to you, I took it off for you yesterday before I put you in bed" he heard Baldurs voice saying muffled through the open door. He slowly went towards the open door and as he came ever closer he gleamed upon a shiny armour. It was almost like the armour Baldur wore but it was slightly more beautiful even.

This was not just the breastplate, no it was the full armour including a shield and a helmet. All of the armour consisted of at least ten separate pieces all made of shiny steel and polished to perfection. The pieces were not merely polished steel, but they all had a band of gold engraving around the edges. There were two gloves, a pair of boots, a

breast plate with a matching chain armour for underneath, arm and shoulder pieces and leg pieces. Even the helmet had engravings around the edges, two squares for the eyes and one for the nose and mouth sat in the appropriate places and were also framed by gold engravings. Peacock feathers were sitting at the top of the magnificent helmet.

The shield was also shiny and silver with gold engravings, so it could match the magnificent armour and helmet. It also bore a big gold engraved pine tree in the centre. The same tree could also be seen on the middle of the breastplate. As he realised he was still holding the sword he looked at it once again noticing how perfect it was and how amazingly well it fitted with the armour, the shield and helmet. Everything reminded him of the medieval festivals in London that he had been to over the last years. A voice started to come through his thoughts slowly. It was Baldurs voice. *"This is the uniform of the warrior of the earth. He bears the pine tree as a sign of the earth. And this is yours, all yours."*

Chapter 2: Strange experience

After having talked with Baldur for another hour or two and after a big breakfast of eggs and toast he went to explore. "*Don't go too far it is dangerous at night around here and dangerous to be alone so don't go too long*" Baldur had warned, before he left.

He slowly turned towards the forest and started to walk that way taking nothing but the sword and the ring with him. Before he reached the edge of the forest he sat down on an old tree stump and started to think to himself. What could he do? Could he go home or did he have to face his destiny to return home? After thinking for a long time he came to the conclusion that he probably would have to stay here and if that was the case he should get to know the world around him.

The young man entered the forest to explore as he had now accepted his fate. After having walked for about half an hour in the forest he started hearing a strange noise. It was like the fluttering of wings, but he could not see anything around him. He quickened his pace although it seemed like his ears were deceiving him but then he saw it right before him. It was small, only about the size of his hand and was flying at the height of his head. It had little clear wings like an angel and it also looked a lot like a small angel. The creature was wearing a white dress and in it's small hands it was holding a bow. It's face looked at him angrily with blue eyes and it's brown hair. Then it spoke: "*Do not go further, this is the kingdom of Queen Julia.*" He stopped dead in his tracks.

This little thing asked him to stop?! He was about to start moving again when more came. There were at least a hundred of them, maybe more. All of them had different hair colours like ordinary people do. Blonde,

brown, ginger and black and all possible colours in between. After staring at them for a few seconds he took up his courage and asked: *"What are you? Are you angels?"*

A reply came promptly with a slightly mortified and angry shriek rather than words: *"We are elfs, wood elfs. And who are you to talk to us like that?"* He felt pitiful for them and he replied with a soft voice: *"I am sorry if I have offended you, I am not from around here and I have hardly any acquaintance with the creatures of this country."* The little elf who had spoken to him before said: *"If you are not from here, where are you from then?"* Before he could reply he thought to himself, I can't tell them where I am from, they won't understand. *"I am from a country far away. I understand that I am here to fulfil my destiny. As far as I know I have been called by the ring of earth to help and free you from oppression."* The little elf looked like she was at slight disbelief but then she glanced upon the ring that was still sitting on his finger and at the sword at his side.

After a quiet nod to the other elfs they all lowered their bows.

"If you are truly the warrior of earth and you have been sent here to help us then the queen will treat you like an honour guest. Sorry if we didn't identify you straight away. There are just so many strange creatures around in these parts lately."

Once they had travelled silently for a while they reached a doorway or rather an archway made with beautiful flowers. There were roses in pink and yellow and the scent was sweet and almost dizzily strong. Then the elf spoke again: *"You have arrived at the archway to our kingdom. You will be able to walk it as our guest and our friend and we will help you whenever you need us."* He was baffled by these warm

words and replied: *"Thank you so much for your kindness. It is very much appreciated. And may I ask who I had the pleasure with?"* Then a strange new voice a lot calmer and more beautiful than any he had ever heard said: *"You had the pleasure with Nina. She is my General and I am Queen Julia."*

He decided to kneel before the queen, as he had seen in movies before. Then the queen spoke again: *"Rise my most honourable guest. A hero such as you shall not have to bow before the queen!"* He slowly rose again and was going to thank the queen but the words did not pass his lips. He tried hard to speak but was unable to do so and slowly walked through the magnificent archway.

What he saw on the other side was so amazing and beautiful that he stopped walking and just stood there and looked. He had entered the elf kingdom of the elf queen Julia. The elf's seemed to be very neat and beauty loving creatures. It was a big clearing and only one very large tree was standing in the middle. The tree was dead and seemed to be hollow as elf's went in and out of it. All the trees around the edges of the clearing were interconnected by something like small woven bridges, which looked like step ladders.

In each of the trees were several nest like structures which seemed to be the houses. But they weren't simply nests like birds' nests, they were more like a mix between weaver birds' nests and the actual houses people lived in only that they were made of different materials. When he looked around he could see anything from straw to human hair or any other material that could be used for building. As each elf seemingly used different things in their home they were all unique but some distinct features were always the same.

They each had a round door at the bottom and there was a small window either side of the door. Usually the ground floor seemed to extend quite far back. It also had a second and sometimes even third floor, which always had several bay windows. The window frames were made of wood and beautifully painted with golden decorations. Glassless windows were separated into four squares by woven and twisted grass. And one thing that stood out very distinctly was that there were flowers everywhere in all imaginable colours. He kept looking everywhere and try and spot as many different looking houses as possible, trying to count them.

A voice brought him back, the voice of Julia: *"This is beautiful isn't it?! We are a different culture to human beings altogether although we are relatively closely related. I am sorry I'll have to go now, but Nina will explain it to you."* There was the voice of Nina again, but this time a lot calmer and more collected: *"I will be honoured to explain to you young sir. Humans tend to be in the way that men are the army and do the hard work, whilst women do the household and take care of the children. In the elf society it has developed the other way around. Women are the army here and we do the hard work. Men are there to cook, care for children and do other household chores. It developed that way since there were very little elfs in existence at the beginning and there were more females than males and as we are small creatures large numbers are required to kill some animals to eat and due to the numbers women became the hunters. It has stayed like that ever since. We are also a slightly more communal society than humans tend to be. The hunting is always done in groups and we eat dinner together with the other families whom we share a tree with. I hope you will understand us and enjoy being with us."* After Nina had ended the story he knew that this was different to what humans are like and he did like their way of thinking,

especially the fact that they were a communal society. This was something he had always lacked when he was in London.

He then replied in the kindest tone: *"This is a very nice story and I really enjoy that your people are different and that makes you unique. I would love to stay here for a while and become friends with you."*

This time another elf replied who had a deeper voice than any he had heard from an elf yet. She said: *"You are free to stay with us for dinner and maybe sleep here as well. You wouldn't fit into our houses but you could sleep on the ground, we'll make you a bed."* He thanked the elf and promised to stay for dinner, then he wandered off to have a look around.

Right on time for dinner he arrived back and saw Julia standing there. In her beautiful voice she said: *"You have returned from your walk, we shall eat very soon."* The young man quietly sat down and after a while some elf children came to sit with him. One of them said: *"Could we maybe hear a story, please?"* He did not know any good stories so he answered: *"I cannot tell stories very well, I am sorry."*

Then Julia started to speak:

"I know just the right story for you children. Once upon a time there was a man called Xenor. He was a wizard and the world was being attacked by strange creatures. To help save the world he created four rings of the elements and gave one to each of his four sons. The elements were fire, water, air and earth. He then perceived that it was not complete and he created a fifth ring for a fifth element. It has been long forgotten since, what element the fifth element is but it was created as they were only complete as five. The rings have been lost over the last centuries, or seem to have been lost, but it is known that when the right time comes the ring chooses its bearer and after the bearer has fulfilled his destiny the ring

disappears until a new bearer has to face his destiny. And the man right before you here is the bearer of Enor, the ring of earth."

He now looked at Julia again knowing the answer to his question why the fifth element had been created. And this time Julia was wearing clothes made for a queen. She was wearing a white dress with gold linings around the edges. But the thing that stood out most was the diadem she was wearing on her head. It was completely golden and seemed to be made out of small bands of gold. They were put on top of each other, four of them and one gold band was coiled around them quite loosely. On the band sat golden leaves together with golden flowers on the top rim and they were beautifully crafted with real passion and care. It was shimmering in the last light that glistened through the treetops with the light seemingly only focusing on her like a spotlight on a stage.

Then he decided to ask the question that was burning inside him since he had been told about the fifth element. *"May I ask your highness if she knows what the fifth element is?"* The reply came in a rather sad and very subtle voice: *"I know that this question has been burning on your tongue, but I am not the one who can answer it. I merely know why the fifth ring exists but not what the fifth element is, I am sorry."* It was the smell of food that brought him back to where he was. He received a bowl of food that smelled very delicious. It was some kind of a mushroom and meat stew with lots of different herbs that seemed to be growing in the forest. He could taste parsley, basil, thyme and rosemary. It was wonderful food and after having finished dinner and having thanked the elves for their hospitality he went to bed.

During the same time at the edge of the forest Baldur just stepped out of the door with a very worried face. It was already past nightfall and

the young master still wasn't back, what took him so long and where did he go? After a while he came to the conclusion that the young sir, whose name he didn't even know, had maybe accepted his fate and wanted to explore the world around him. The only logical conclusion was that he had gone into the forest. Baldur went back into the house to get some things he needed.

Moments later he emerged wearing his breastplate and holding a spear. The spear was just the right size for Baldur and was made of a dark strong wood. The spearhead was oval shaped and sharp on both sides and the bottom of the spearhead was crafted with a pattern of swirls and twists. He also had a small hand axe with him that was his trusty battle axe which had two blades which were almost like half-moons and they were connected by a centre piece the width of a third of the blade. The centre piece and close to the edge of blade were engravings of gold. A spike sat on the top of the handle that sat between the blades. The handle extended further by about the same length the blades were and was made of silver with golden letters engraved on it. It said: JCKKCP MD ZSBSP which means Hammer of Budur. This clearly was something passed down through generations in the family. Maybe this axe had seen battle before maybe it hadn't, only Baldur knew.

Baldur was now ready to go. He slowly walked towards the forest knowing that whatever he may find there could be dangerous. After he came to the same spot where the young master had first met the elves he heard a noise too. But this time it was a deep growling noise that seemed very angry and offended. Baldur, knowing exactly what it was knew that there was no point in running. This was a wear, a mixture of wolf and bear. One of the most dangerous creatures Istorp had to offer. Baldur had to find something like a clearing or anywhere where there was a bit more space as soon as possible. After a short glance around he

saw that there was a clearing nearby and he ran for it as fast as he could. Moments later he could feel the warm foul breath of the wear on his neck. Baldur knew that the wear must be closely behind him, but he never imagined him to be that close.

Finally he reached the clearing. It was illuminated from the light of the full moon. This was bad, very bad. Wears absorb the strength of the moonlight and draw their strength from the radiance but the clearing was the only place where he could fight this thing. The wear gave a big wolf like howl and then slowly stepped into the clearing. Baldur could see it now. It was the size of a full grown grizzly bear and about as muscular. It had the front and hind legs and also the body of a grizzly. But its wolf-like fur covered the entire body. The snarling head and the wagging tail were also wolf-like.

In the moonlight Baldur could see the pelt shimmering like silver or water on a lake that was illuminated by the moonlight. The eyes of the wear seemed to be glowing in an orange colour. Baldur was going to shout for help, but who could help him out here in the forest? Then he remembered that there were supposedly elves here in the forest and maybe the young master went with them. He could not hang onto these thoughts for very long as the wear came running towards him. His spear was clutched in his right hand tightly and he slowly grabbed the axe with the left hand.

The wear was now almost at reach. He knew that throwing the spear would be too risky. He had to try and pierce and slice the wear until it gave in. The wear was now at reach and he thrust his spear at the wear as hard as he could. The spear pierced the wears right shoulder and some blood came splashing out. Now the wear was raging and even more unpredictable and dangerous. The wear jumped away and turned

around. Moments later he came running towards the dwelve once more.

Baldur tried to aim for the heart this time so he could end the nightmare. Due to the wear moving jaggedly he missed the heart and the spear merely got stuck in the wears chest. Now Baldur had to rely on his axe, his intuition and his capability to improvise, but as wears aren't very intelligent creatures it shouldn't be too hard. The wear howled again, this time with more anger and a slight note of pain. Now Baldur faced the wear with only a small hand axe. It was now so close that he could smell and feel his breath again. The wear raised his right paw and swung it towards Baldur.

The dwelve ducked and slid on the ground towards the back legs of the wear. While he was underneath he held his axe up high and tried to slice the wear open from the breast to the belly. As the wear had such thick fur, the amounts of blood that came dripping from the wound were minute as there was hardly any wound at all. When Baldur came out the other end the wear seemed to have lost him, but then the wear turned around and stood up on his powerful hind legs. It growled in an earth shaking growl and dashed his open mouth towards Baldurs head. Baldur made a small sidestep and managed to get hold of his spear.

As the angry wear rose back up, he pulled it out of its chest. A head came dashing towards him again but this time Baldur successfully thrusted the spear into the wears heart. The wear tumbled and fell on the ground with a loud thud. The wear was finally dead.

He woke up just after he had fallen asleep. He had slept maybe an hour or maybe less. Something was wrong, he had heard a howling noise and something that sounded like a fight. It was not very close but he could still hear it. He got up slowly and picked up his sword that lay next to

his bed on the ground. As silently as he could, he walked to the archway. He was about to exit it when he heard a voice he thought he recognised: *"Why are you leaving us already? Did you not enjoy your stay?"*

The voice made him realise how absurd his thoughts might sound and he was sure not to tell her but then the voice spoke again: *"Something is wrong, what is it? Is it the howls? We get them all the time, they are wears. You may wonder what a wear is, but hopefully you will never have to find out."* He slowly replied: *"I am worried about the howls, but I am more worried about the sound that there was a fight. I need to find out what happened and if and who is injured or dead."* When the woman slowly stepped out of the shadow into the moonlight flooded clearing he realised that it was Julia. Then Julia spoke again: *"I do understand your concerns young warrior, but it is far too dangerous out there at night."*

He knew that Julia was right, but he also couldn't leave whoever or whatever was injured or maybe fighting for his, her or its life out there, all by themselves. Heavy hearted he replied: *"I must go. I have a bad feeling about it and I may have a suspicion of who it may be. But I will return to your humble kingdom as soon as I can. If I am not back by the break of dawn, would you send a rescue party?"* The voice of Julia had a sad tone for the first time: *"Go if you must. I am sure you will return. And I will send a rescue party if you have not returned by dawn. May the ring use his power to protect you and whoever you want protected."* He took the last steps and disappeared into the darkness of the forest.

After having walked for a while he came to the clearing and what he saw there astounded him. Baldur was standing there with a bloody spear in his hand and something big and grey lying on the ground next