



ISOLDE FROSTBANE

Exclusive Free
Chapter!

A
SWORD
OF THE
SHATTERED
KINGDOMS
NOVEL

ROD TRENT

Welcome, dear reader. This is a small piece of a larger story that has swelled within my inner workings for decades. The stories represented in the Sword of the Shattered Kingdoms are vast but knitted together by a simple, single thread of connective tissue whose name is: Eldric Blackwood. In each book we see how every character in the secondary storylines fits into a larger cog. This is very much like each of us and how our actions, reactions, and relationships serve an end.

I invite you to delve into the lives of our heroes as they navigate a potentially treacherous future. Every character in this series reveals our moral duties and the journeys we often take to fulfill them.

As the author of this story, I began my career writing fiction, a passion that has never dimmed even as I ventured into the world of technology content to pay the bills and drive my career forward. The act of creation is not just a job; it is a therapeutic escape, a return to the roots of my creativity, and I am thrilled to be sharing this passion with you. In a very real way, this book is just for me. Selfish, huh? But for those that know me, I share everything, so, I hope you both excuse and enjoy my attempted intrusion into your world.

- Rod

Chapter 1

Humble Beginnings

Isolde Frostbane's eyelids fluttered open to greet the day, a sliver of dawn's light piercing the chill of her modest chamber. She lay still for but a moment, savoring the warmth that crept across the wooden floorboards and climbed the foot of her bed like a curious cat. The serenity of morning graced her features, which bore the pallor of winter's first snow, yet in her heart, an untamed fire kindled, eager for the day's promise.

With a swift motion, she cast aside the furs that had shielded her from the night's caress, her lithe form rising like a specter against the tapestry of twilight shadows that clung to the corners of her abode. There was no time for languid stretches or idle dawdling; purpose flowed like static through her, insistent as the mountain streams during thaw.

She dressed with a practiced haste, garments of homespun cloth embracing her frame — a tunic of earthen hues and trousers sturdy enough to endure the rigors of village life. Each fold and fastening was a familiar ritual, a reminder of her roots entwined with the simplicity of those who toiled under sun and star.

Her bare feet whispered across the floor, seeking out the well-worn steps that led down to the hearth of home. The scents of breakfast beckoned her forth, a medley of rustic fare prepared by hands that had nurtured her from cradle to cusp of destiny.

"Good morn, Mother. Father." Her voice, cool as the frost-kissed breeze, carried into the kitchen where Elara and Thorian busied themselves amidst the clatter of cookware and the crackle of flame.

"Isolde, my child, you've risen with the sun," Elara remarked, turning from the hearth with a smile that softened the lines etched by years of laughter and labor.

"Indeed, the day has much to offer, and I intend to seize it," Isolde replied, her eyes alight with an inner fervor that mirrored the sky's growing luminescence.

Thorian nodded, his gaze appraising his daughter as if seeing more than the visage before him. "The spirits are restless this morn, whispering of journeys and revelations. Your path leads ever onward, Isolde."

"Let us break our fast then, for the road awaits," she said, her tone imbued with the resolve of one who has danced with fate and emerged unbowed. Her parents exchanged a glance, unspoken words passing between them like leaves on the wind.

Isolde joined them at the table, the simple meal a grounding force amidst the swirl of thoughts and emotions that heralded the dawning of a new chapter — one written in the indelible ink of legacy and the crystalline clarity of purpose.

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Isolde swept through the kitchen with a sprightly ease, her movements as fluid as meltwater streams. She laid out wooden plates and polished cups with an almost ceremonial care, her fingers dancing lightly over the surfaces. Gleams of excitement in her eyes reflected the flickering hearth-light as she swiftly gathered loaves of bread, arranging them like treasures upon the table.

"Will you fetch us water, Isolde?" Elara's voice was soft yet carried the weight of centuries, like a whisper from the heart of a glacier.

"Of course, Mother." Isolde embraced the task, seizing the empty pails with vigor born of anticipation. The morning air greeted her with its crisp embrace as she stepped outside, the well standing sentinel in the breaking dawn. With practiced grace, she drew the water, each droplet glinting like a diamond in the sun's nascent glow.

Returning, she poured the cool liquid into waiting pitchers, the sound a gentle harmony to the breakfast tableau - now complete. As they settled around the hearty fare, anticipation bubbled within her like a hidden spring beneath the frost.

"Father, Mother," she began, her voice threading the air with the reverence of one who treads on sacred ground, "tell me again of the ice priestesses – of your bond with their ancient order."

Thorian chewed thoughtfully, his blue eyes clouding with memory. "The ice priestesses," he intoned, "guardians of Eldoria's delicate balance. Your mother and I – we were but stewards, assisting them in their sacred duties."

Elara's gaze turned inward, recalling days wrapped in white silence. "I remember the chill of the temple, the ice alive with spirits' whispers. Our order was the realm's silent backbone, wielding frost's might to quell fire's fury when discord threatened."

With a reflective gaze focused on an unknown point on the wall, Elara grasped the curious crystal shard that hung around her neck attached with a long, leathered string. It seemed to pulse with light when touched. The heirloom – *the shard of the Ancient Crystal* – had always incited both excitement and dread within Isolde but it had always been a fixture and felt like just part of her mother. She had learned to cast away the emotions it emitted. The shard was a mere fragment of the mythical *Ancient Crystal*, but even at a fraction of its full glory, its power was of bearing.

"Power and wisdom flowed through us, as ceaseless as winter's relentless march," Thorian added, his words falling like snowflakes upon Isolde's eager mind.

"Such tales," Isolde breathed, her eyes wide with wonder, "speak of more than mere duty. They speak of purpose — a legacy entwined with Eldoria's very essence."

"Indeed, daughter," Elara affirmed, pride glimmering in her deep blue eyes, still clutching the crystal shard. "Our connection to the ice priestesses is a bond forged across generations, from the deepest roots to the loftiest boughs."

"We are but keepers of their lore, custodians of their power," Thorian said, his tone solemn as a vow. "And now, it seems, the mantle hovers at your shoulders, ready to settle upon one worthy of its weight."

Isolde nodded, her resolve crystallizing like ice upon a wintry branch. "Then I shall bear it," she declared, "with honor and reverence, as you have before me."

Their meal commenced, a symphony of shared history and unspoken vows, while outside the world awoke, unaware of the destiny stirring within its midst.

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The fire of dawn had crept through the veil of night, casting a golden sheen across Isolde's small abode when she spoke her heart's yearning. "Mother, Father," she began, the words tumbling eagerly from her lips like spring's first melt, "I crave to stand upon the Glacierhorn Mountains, to feel the ancient chill and hearken to the whispers of our forebearers."

Elara met Thorian's gaze, an unspoken conversation passing between them, as old as the mountains themselves. With a reluctant nod, Thorian acquiesced, "Very well, Isolde. We shall

escort you to where the land kisses the sky, to the realm's frosted edge."

"Truly?" Isolde's voice shimmered with excitement, as if touched by the first frost.

"Indeed," Elara affirmed, her eyes reflecting the steadfast resolve that lay beneath her motherly concern.

With haste befitting warriors setting forth to battle, Isolde donned her leather boots, the tongues licking at the winds of destiny. Together, they stepped out into the glory of Eldoria's morn, where the verdant embrace of the countryside awaited their passage.

They traversed the valleys, the rolling hills bowing in silent homage to their tread. Wildflowers – crimson and gold, azure and emerald – danced to the rhythm of the gentle breeze, a symphony of color for the eyes of those who dared to journey.

"Behold the grandeur of our home," Thorian's voice thundered softly, a low rumble akin to distant thunder. His hand swept across the horizon where the majestic Glacierhorn Mountains etched themselves against the heavens, their peaks veiled in clouds and mystery.unwavering

"Like the spines of a great beast," Isolde whispered, awestruck by the sight that rose before them, ancient and insurmountable. Each step forward was a pledge, a testament to her unwavering will.

"Yonder lies your destiny, Isolde Frostbane," Elara said, her tone imbued with a sacred gravity. "Let not the path daunt you, for it is carved with the strength of your kin, tempered with the cold of eons."

"Nor let the softness of these fields beguile," added Thorian, gesturing towards the wildflowers swaying in the wind. "For

true power rests in the heart of ice, in the silence that commands storms."

Isolde's icy gaze hardened, mirroring the unyielding stone of the distant mountains. Her stride grew firm and purposeful, each footfall a covenant with the earth underfoot – an affirmation of her lineage, her heritage, and the solemn vows soon to be made beneath the watchful eyes of the ice priestesses.

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The world seemed to hush as they ventured on, the tales of the ancients whispering through the pines that edged the path. Thorian's voice, low and resonant, cut through the stillness like a blade through water.

"Once," he began, "I stood before an ice priestess, her gaze piercing me as if she could unravel my very soul. With but a whispered incantation, she calmed a raging blizzard that had besieged our village for days."

Isolde's breath caught in her chest, her footsteps momentarily faltering as she hung on her father's every word. "What was it like – the power?" Her eyes, as blue as the heart of an iceberg, searched his face for secrets long buried beneath snow and time.

"Like the moon commands the tides," Elara interjected, her voice a melodic contrast to Thorian's rumble. "Subtle yet absolute." She smiled at Isolde, a knowing look that spoke of mysteries soon to be shared.

"Did you fear them?" Isolde pressed, her steps quickening with the pulse of her burgeoning curiosity.

"Respect, Isolde, not fear," Thorian corrected, his gaze fixed on the horizon where the mountains loomed ever closer. "For they wield a power ancient as the frost, guardians of balance and keepers of lore."

"Yet even the coldest ice can preserve the warmest of hearts," Elara added softly, reaching out to brush a lock of white hair from Isolde's brow.

As the trio drew nearer to the Glacierhorn Mountains, the verdant embrace of Eldoria gave way to a realm kissed by winter's eternal caress. The grass, lush and green, surrendered to a carpet of snow that crunched beneath their boots. A crystalline chill brushed against Isolde's cheeks, painting them with the bloom of roses.

"Behold," Thorian said, his arm sweeping toward the spectacle before them. Snow-capped peaks soared into the sky, a silent watcher carved from the very essence of winter. Frozen streams wove through the landscape like ribbons of silver, mirroring the crisp clarity of the air.

A shiver of pure exhilaration rippled through Isolde, her heart dancing to the rhythm of this frozen symphony. Every flake of snow, every whisper of wind, sang to her spirit – a siren's call beckoning her to embrace her destiny.

"Father, Mother," she breathed, her gaze drinking in the splendor of ice and stone, "it is more beautiful than I ever imagined."

"Beauty is but a veil," Elara murmured, "behind which lies the true strength of the ice priestesses. And you, Isolde, are destined to wield it."

"Come," Thorian urged, his eyes gleaming with pride. "Let us tread the final steps to where your journey truly begins."

With each stride, Isolde felt the pull of her ancestors, the silent chorus of priestesses who had walked this path before her. The air grew colder, the world around her a cascade of white and blue – a winter wonderland that opened its arms to welcome her home.

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Isolde's boots crunched upon the virgin snow, her breath a mist before her as they entered the clearing that served as a threshold to the hallowed grounds. There it stood in the distance: the temple of the ice priestesses, its walls glistening like diamonds beneath the kiss of the sun. The view left her breathless, a solitary fortress surrounded by a range of mountains.

"By the spirits," Isolde whispered, her voice a reverent hush against the silence of the snow-laden expanse.

Thorian smiled, peering at his wife through a side-eye. Isolde's manner down to her phrases was a clone of Elara.

"Observe the ancestral sanctum," Thorian declared, his eyes fixed upon the distant edifice, both magnificent and intimidating. "Its walls have withstood the test of eons, a testament to the might of those who commune with the frost."

Elara stepped forward, her hand resting gently on Isolde's shoulder. "This is where we part, my child. The path you tread now is for your feet alone."

"Remember, Isolde," Thorian added, his face etched with lines of solemnity, "the ice does not yield its secrets lightly. You must walk with both reverence and fortitude."

"Am I ready?" Doubt flickered in Isolde's eyes, seeking their affirmation.

"More than any before you," Elara assured, her voice unwavering. "The blood of priestesses flows through you, strong and pure."

"Go forth," Thorian said, stepping back, his figure seeming to merge with the landscape, as if carved from the very rock and

snow. "Embrace your destiny, as the spirits have foretold. Your mother and I will be waiting here for you."

With a deep breath, Isolde nodded, her resolve hardening like the ice beneath her feet. She raised her chin, her eyes an echo of the glaciers that surrounded them, and stepped forward into her fate.

"Be cautious, Isolde Frostbane," her mother's words followed her, "and be true."

"Your heart is your compass," her father added, "let it guide you within those sacred walls."

"You have to take these next steps on your own," Elara said, visibly holding back joyful tears.

Without looking back, Isolde walked toward the temple, her slender form a solitary silhouette against the vast whiteness. The heavy silence of the mountain seemed to acknowledge her passage, a sentinel to her solemn journey.

Thorian and Elara watched Isolde disappear ahead and prepared for a long wait.

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Isolde's heart thundered in her chest, each step a silent drumbeat echoing the tumult within. The temple loomed before her, grandeur etched into every facet of its architecture. Her breath formed a misty cloud that danced away into the crisp air, but it was the majestic ice carvings on the temple walls that snatched that breath away entirely. Mythic beasts and scenes of ancient lore were frozen in time upon the facade, their tales immortalized in crystal clarity.

"Ancestors of frost and snow," she whispered, her words a vow to the figures that seemed to watch her approach with eyes carved from the very essence of winter.

With reverence in each step, Isolde traced her fingers over a depiction of the First Priestess, her visage commanding yet serene, locked in eternal guardianship of the sacred place. The intricate patterns of swirling snowflakes that bordered the temple's entryway felt alive under Isolde's touch, as if each one was a spell cast to protect the sanctity of the halls within.

She crossed the threshold, and the hush of the temple enveloped her. It was as though the mountain itself held its breath, acknowledging the arrival of one who belonged to its frozen embrace. The solemn quietude was not oppressive; rather, it was the silence of profound respect, a sanctuary undisturbed by the chaos of the outside world.

Torches encased in ice sconces cast a soft, ethereal glow, their flames rendered azure by the surrounding chill. Isolde's footsteps whispered across the icy floor, her gaze drawn irresistibly to the sculptures that adorned the temple's interior. Heroes of old stood sentinel along the corridors, their frosted forms captured mid-battle against monsters long extinct, their victories preserved for eternity.

"Each of you once walked where I walk now," she murmured, her calm exterior belied by the tempest of emotions within. "Guide my steps, so that I may honor your legacies."

The deeper Isolde delved into the temple, the more the air thrummed with ancient power. Here was the wisdom of ages past, the collective might of those who had harnessed the elements themselves. She could almost hear the echoes of their chants woven into the stillness, a reminder that she tread upon hallowed ground.

"Your spirits linger strong," she said, her voice a gentle intonation that harmonized with the tranquil ambiance. "I am here to learn, to grow, to uphold our traditions."

The weight of generations bore down upon her, yet Isolde felt neither crushed nor cowed. She was Isolde Frostbane, descendant of the revered priestesses, and this temple was a testament to her heritage. In this moment of solitude, surrounded by the masterful works of her forebears, she embraced the mantle she was born to wear.

"Here, I stand ready," she declared, her conviction resonating through the chambers. "Ready to commune with the ice, with the spirits, with my destiny."

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Isolde's breath misted in the frigid air as she ventured further into the sanctum of ice, her footsteps muffled by the thick snow that carpeted the ground. The temple's walls seemed to pulse with a life of their own, casting shimmering reflections that danced like wraiths around her. In the heart of this frozen labyrinth stood a figure, as timeless as the ice itself.

"Child of Frostbane," a voice called, echoing softly through the crystal corridors. It was a sound both ancient and comforting, woven with the chill of winter winds and the warmth of a hearth fire.

Isolde turned toward the source, her eyes falling upon an elderly priestess who regarded her with piercing blue eyes. Seraphina Glacialis stood enshrouded in robes that whispered of snowflakes and starlight, her silver hair framing a face etched with the wisdom of countless winters.

"Seraphina Glacialis," Isolde intoned, her voice steady despite the awe that gripped her heart.

"Come closer, Isolde," the priestess beckoned, extending a hand clad in a glove of intricate frost patterns. "The spirits have whispered of your arrival. You carry the potential to wield the frost as your ancestors did before you."

As Isolde approached, the air grew colder, yet within her chest bloomed a fire of determination and desire. She reached out, her fingers brushing against Seraphina's, feeling the thrum of ancient magic coursing through them.

"Will you take me as your acolyte, teach me the ways of our order?" Isolde asked, her gaze locked with the priestess's ageless eyes.

"Indeed, I shall guide you on this path," Seraphina replied, her tone imbued with solemnity. "But know this – it is a journey fraught with peril and sacrifice. Are you prepared to embrace the destiny that calls to you?"

"Under your tutelage, I will face any challenge, endure any trial," Isolde vowed, her every word a testament to her resolve.

"Then let us begin," Seraphina said, a hint of a smile gracing her lips. "The teachings of the ice are vast and deep. In time, you will learn to listen to the whispers of the glaciers, to shape the frost with your will, to become one with winter's embrace."

A profound sense of purpose swelled within Isolde as she followed the Frost Guardian into the bowels of the temple. The walls around them glinted with the stories of those who had walked this path before, their triumphs and tribulations frozen in time.

"Watch closely," Seraphina instructed, forming a sigil in the air with a fluid motion. The ice responded, coalescing into a sculpture of delicate beauty – a bird poised for flight, each feather a masterpiece of frozen artistry.

"Control is paramount," the priestess continued. "Feel the ice, understand its nature, bend it without breaking. Your spirit must be as unyielding as the mountain, yet as adaptable as the snow."

Isolde nodded, absorbing the lesson as she felt the cold seep into her bones, not as an enemy, but as an old friend come to lend its strength. Her hands lifted, mimicking the movements of her mentor, and for the first time, she sensed the dormant power within her stirring to life.

"Good," Seraphina praised, her voice a murmur of encouragement. "Your journey has truly begun."

And so, beneath the watchful gaze of the ancient ice priestesses carved into the very walls of the temple, Isolde and Seraphina embarked upon the path of mastery — one that would forever intertwine their fates with the destiny of Eldoria.

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Isolde paused amid the frozen columns of her new sanctum, her breath a misty cloud in the chilled air. The silence of the temple was profound, yet it spoke to her with the whispers of ages long past. Her heart pulsed with the rhythm of ancient wisdom that seemed to emanate from the very ice beneath her feet.

Seraphina's voice echoed softly, a testament to the reverence due to the hallowed ground they tread upon. "Your soul resonates with the call of the glacial spirits."

"I hear them," Isolde replied, her voice steady as the eternal ice, "and I am ready to answer." She closed her eyes for a moment, allowing the serenity of the temple to seep into her spirit. When she opened them again, they shone with the clarity of the glaciers that guarded their realm.

"Mother, Father," she whispered, her words a silent prayer carried on the frostbitten breeze. "You have led me to the threshold of destiny. Your love, your stories, they have kindled a flame within me that even the coldest winter cannot quench."

"By your faith in me, I shall not falter," she vowed, the determination in her gaze as unbreakable as the everlasting ice. "I will wield the power of the ice priestess with honor, guarding our lands against the shadows that seek to engulf us."

Seraphina watched her protégé, a nod of approval gracing her lined features. "So you shall, Isolde Frostbane. You are the vessel of our legacy, the bridge between the world of flesh and the realm of spirits."

"Let us proceed, then," Isolde declared as she moved ahead to face the destiny that had been set for her since she was born. With each breath, she felt the weight of her lineage, the strength of her people, and the unwavering support of her parents guiding her.

"Let us indeed," Seraphina agreed, leading her deeper into the sanctum where the true test of her resolve awaited.

In the stillness of the temple, Isolde's reflection danced upon the ice, a specter of the future that lay ahead. She would become what Eldoria needed, the guardian of balance, the Ice Priestess in whom all hope would rest. When the training would formally start, Isolde knew she would welcome the cold as a sign of her heritage and the rising power within her.

Seraphina motioned to her side where two priestesses were standing, watching in anticipation. On Seraphina's direction they left and soon after Thorian and Elara arrived.

"Her maturity of mind belies her young years," Seraphina whispered discreetly to Elara and Thorian. "She is everything we hoped."

A prideful smile erupted on Thorian's face. Elara's face furrowed into a worried visage knowing full well the sacrifice that lie ahead for her daughter. She almost wished it didn't have to be this way.

"Take her home now," Seraphina said walking away. "I'll call for her soon."

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The wind howled through the narrow mountain pass, carrying with it the biting chill of the Glacierhorn Mountains. Thorian, his broad shoulders hunched against the cold, led the way with a determined stride. His cloak billowed behind him, a dark contrast against the pristine white snow. Elara walked closely, her footsteps almost mirroring his, her eyes scanning the rocky landscape for any signs of trouble. Isolde, though weary, kept pace, her thoughts a mix of relief and anticipation.

The journey had been arduous, but the sight of their village in the valley below spurred them on. The familiar smoke rising from the chimneys and the distant sound of the river brought a warmth to their hearts that the icy wind could not extinguish.

"Just a little further," Thorian's voice, though low, carried a note of encouragement. He turned slightly, his gaze meeting Elara's, who nodded in silent agreement. Isolde, catching the exchange, felt a surge of strength. They had faced many dangers in the Glacierhorn Mountains, but they had prevailed. The village was their sanctuary, and they were almost there.

As they descended, the path became less treacherous, the snow giving way to patches of grass and stone. The air, though still cold, grew less oppressive. The first signs of spring were beginning to emerge, tiny buds on the trees and the distant call of birds returning from their winter havens.

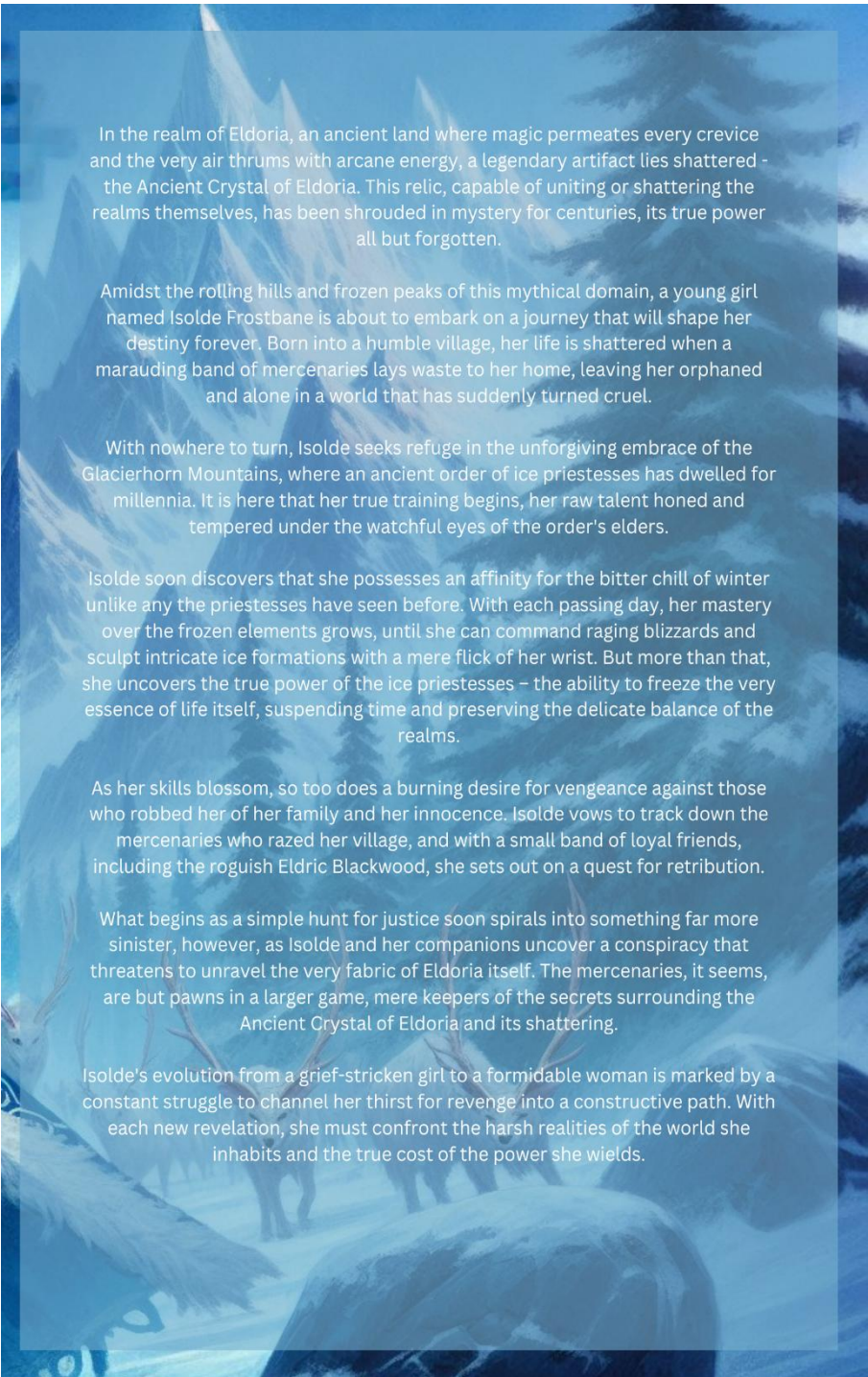
Elara paused for a moment, taking in the sight. "It feels like a lifetime since we left," she remarked, her voice tinged with emotion. Thorian placed a reassuring hand on her shoulder. "We've been through much, but we return stronger."

Isolde smiled softly. "And with stories to tell," she added, thinking of the adventures and trials they had faced. The Glacierhorn Mountains had tested them, but they had also forged unbreakable bonds.

The village gates appeared before them, welcoming and familiar. As they walked through, the villagers greeted them with a mixture of surprise and joy. Children ran ahead to spread the news, and elders looked on with knowing smiles.

Thorian, Elara, and Isolde exchanged glances, a silent understanding passing between them. They had returned home, not just as survivors, but as heroes. The Glacierhorn Mountains had been conquered, and their village would hear of the courage and determination that had brought them back.

As the sun set behind the mountains, casting a golden glow over the village, they knew that this was just another chapter in their ongoing saga. Together, they would face whatever challenges lay ahead, for their bond was unbreakable and their spirit unwavering.



In the realm of Eldoria, an ancient land where magic permeates every crevice and the very air thrums with arcane energy, a legendary artifact lies shattered - the Ancient Crystal of Eldoria. This relic, capable of uniting or shattering the realms themselves, has been shrouded in mystery for centuries, its true power all but forgotten.

Amidst the rolling hills and frozen peaks of this mythical domain, a young girl named Isolde Frostbane is about to embark on a journey that will shape her destiny forever. Born into a humble village, her life is shattered when a marauding band of mercenaries lays waste to her home, leaving her orphaned and alone in a world that has suddenly turned cruel.

With nowhere to turn, Isolde seeks refuge in the unforgiving embrace of the Glacierhorn Mountains, where an ancient order of ice priestesses has dwelled for millennia. It is here that her true training begins, her raw talent honed and tempered under the watchful eyes of the order's elders.

Isolde soon discovers that she possesses an affinity for the bitter chill of winter unlike any the priestesses have seen before. With each passing day, her mastery over the frozen elements grows, until she can command raging blizzards and sculpt intricate ice formations with a mere flick of her wrist. But more than that, she uncovers the true power of the ice priestesses - the ability to freeze the very essence of life itself, suspending time and preserving the delicate balance of the realms.

As her skills blossom, so too does a burning desire for vengeance against those who robbed her of her family and her innocence. Isolde vows to track down the mercenaries who razed her village, and with a small band of loyal friends, including the roguish Eldric Blackwood, she sets out on a quest for retribution.

What begins as a simple hunt for justice soon spirals into something far more sinister, however, as Isolde and her companions uncover a conspiracy that threatens to unravel the very fabric of Eldoria itself. The mercenaries, it seems, are but pawns in a larger game, mere keepers of the secrets surrounding the Ancient Crystal of Eldoria and its shattering.

Isolde's evolution from a grief-stricken girl to a formidable woman is marked by a constant struggle to channel her thirst for revenge into a constructive path. With each new revelation, she must confront the harsh realities of the world she inhabits and the true cost of the power she wields.