



Bloody Fingers: Book of Prologues

Chapter 2- Onni

D&D based novel by R Jon Matrim from the Echoing Worlds series.

Bloody Fingers Trilogy book #1: Book of Prologues

Chapter Two: Onni Osheni

Location: Good Harbor (Pre-Midway)

Year: -300

The Elven woman slipped from tree trunk to tree trunk, moving as quietly as possible through the forest. Her movements were graceful and practiced, like a dancer switching between partners- never lingering too long before moving on to the next one. Her tall and thin frame was easily hidden as she leaned into the boles, brushing the bark with her fingertips in a soft caress as she listened for any movement other than her own. The leaves had changed colors and fallen from all but the needle trees, so it was impossible to walk without the soft crunch underfoot. It made it very difficult to be stealthy, but it also kept others from getting too close if you just listened from time to time. She was a very cautious woman who spent much of her time listening to the forest, so she was rarely surprised. She still remembered the last time. It was likely two hundred springs past. It was the day she'd been ordered to rebuild the island. It was the day she had become part of the island.

Onni Osheni had already lived more than three hundred of the seasons. Her dreadlocked hair had turned gray, and her face and neck had wrinkled a little- but her mind and body were both strong. After all, she was still relatively young for an elf. She had been conscripted from the cold woods of the High Kingdom and forced to join the Guardians as a scout and as a healer. Hundreds of elves had been sent on ships over the blue, to save the island city of Good Harbor from some cataclysmic event. When they arrived, there was nothing to save but ashes and broken stone. The best guess of the soldiers was that there had been a volcanic eruption which destroyed the settlement. The damage was enough of a curiosity that Emperor Aeron himself came to survey the island. He flew over the Blue on his great brass dragon, landing in the midst of the Guardians at what was once the village square. The dragon spit a blinding flash of lightning into the air, and when their eyes had recovered it had transformed into an Elven warrior standing next to the great

Aeron, both in perfectly matching armor.

"Have any survivors been found?" the Emperor asked, once the formal greetings were completed.

"No, your Eminence." The Commander of the Guardians was a young elf, younger even than Onni. "But we haven't found many bodies, either. It's possible they may have fled into the woods or perhaps even left on boats. But the village itself has been destroyed. The only stone building still intact was the Gnomish bank. However, it isn't clear why it was spared. The larger inn next to the bank was also built of stones and it was obliterated down to the basement floor. Some of the sailors we traveled with have been here before, so they knew the layout of the village. The damage doesn't seem to follow a pattern I can see."

A hippogriff landed just inside the village remains, the Elven rider dismounting from the horse and gryphon hybrid and sprinting towards the commander. When he saw the Emperor, he tried to stop quickly- only to have his feet slip forward in the ash as he landed awkwardly on his butt. He rose quickly, apologizing repeatedly to all who would hear. The Emperor placed a hand on his shoulder, rendering him silent. He placed two fingers under the soldier's chin, lifting his eyes to meet his own.

"What have you found?" Aeron asked.

"A body, sir. Your Eminence, I mean.. I'm sorry, sir. Please..." The soldier's expression pleaded to be allowed to lower his gaze. The Emperor withdrew his hand, allowing the soldier to immediately stare down into the dirt.

"What did you find?" Aeron repeated himself.

Released from looking into the king's face, the elf managed to find his voice again. "There are two huge bodies, your Eminence. They are beneath the water, but I could see them from the air." He lifted his gaze once more before speaking again. "I believe they are giants, sir."

"Show me!" Aeron's voice had become an almost bestial growl. "Fly!" His last command sent the scout running back to his mount. Aeron returned to stand next to his twinned guard. He raised a hand and lightning flashed from it, again blinding those who weren't able to look away quickly enough. When eyesight returned, the Emperor had already risen into the air on his massive dragon, circling once to allow the hippogriff an opportunity to lead the way back to the shoreline.

"What do we do, commander?" Onni head someone ask.

"We follow our orders." The young man said. "We rebuild and defend."

"But that could take years, sir?" another voice.

“How do we stop giants?” a third.

The young commander didn’t answer. He simply turned and began to sort through the rubble of the buildings around him. The others soon joined him in the work.

Onni remembered thinking that it was the best type of leadership she had seen, leadership by example. She began to work. She was surprised to discover that the thought of not returning home didn’t really bother her that much. Perhaps she could make a new home here. The forests were plentiful, and the trees called to her. Perhaps they could rebuild and defend. Perhaps...

Onni was still moving relatively quickly despite her careful steps. The crew building the new harbor had stopped responding to messaging, so Onni had been told to check. Ten days past she had been tasked with exploring the forests between the fort and the harbor. Her job was to identify any major dangers that could stop travel between the two places. She had found a guarded entrance to one of the dwarven caverns which was unexpected, but otherwise just the expected beasts and trees of a large forest. She was still almost a day from the harbor, but she was the closest person Marques had been able to reach. She could almost still feel the handsome elf’s touch in her mind, where his voice had woken her. He had the magic of sending, so his voice could reach the minds of those he knew well no matter the distance. The message had to stay short, but it was sweet!

Marques, the former young Commander of the Guardians, had relinquished his military command and chosen to stay on the island as its administrator. He was extremely capable and had become a beloved member of the growing community they were now calling New Harbor. He had designed a plan to rebuild the island using its natural characteristics to better protect it. It was a masterful idea, and when completed it would be the perfect legacy to his brilliance and his leadership. Onni Osheni could never stay in a city for more than a few days. She belonged with the trees. However, to be near Marques, she could certainly visit quite often! Thinking of him made her blush. Her thoughts were distracting, and she needed to be focused to be cautious. Onni, was always careful. Besides, she lived for her moments in the forests and today was such a wonderful day.

Onni felt the ground tremble beneath her feet and heard multiple impacts, the sound that large trees made as they toppled to the ground. The sounds and shaking were increasing as if they were approaching her position. Onni turned to run, her happiness had been banished. She had listened to sailors tell horror stories of rogue waves that were taller than a ship’s highest mast. Waves that were capable of swallowing ships and even islands. She had thought the stories were just tales to scare tavern wenches and children- but this sound was just too big to understand. Onni knew of a cliff face that wasn’t too far from her position where the forest and mountains met. Perhaps if she could reach that she’d be able to spider climb before the water hit her.

A horn sounded behind her as she ran. The huge sound hit her ears with an almost physical impact. And then another horn answered off to her right. Onni was confused, but she kept running. The ground was shaking harder now, and the crashing sounds were definitely much closer. But waves didn't sound hunting horns. She stumbled and tripped a few times from the quaking ground, rising back to run again. A new rush of terror kept pushing her onward. The terror was screaming in her head to run faster! Onni didn't realize it was her own voice that was screaming. The fear wouldn't let her think or focus. The only voice she could hear was from long ago. She could hear the voice of the hippogriff rider. It was just as clear to her now as it had been on that day.

"I believe they are giants, sir."

They had found the gargantuan bodies. There had been two of them under the water, not far from the cliffs. They had been burned. No, that word wasn't enough to describe them. They had been immolated with fire! Parts of their skulls and shoulder bones were visible through their ruined flesh. The skin that remained had been charred into a thick black covering that was flaking away in the waves. Their armor had given them little protection. The bones and leather strapped to their bodies had just been more for the fire to eat. The fact that the creatures had still somehow been able to climb up and over the cliffs and then crawl into the blue was testament to their awesome strength and fortitude, for they had been almost disintegrated by the flames that finally killed them.

Those bodies were massive. Onni had seen giant black and white fish called Orca Wolves when crossing the blue. She had looked down at those from the deck of the ship that carried her to this island. Those fish had amazed her, but she had felt safe high above them on the great naval vessel. These giant men had been as large as those whales, perhaps bigger. And looking down at them from the high cliffs also made them seem less than they were. But seeing them from a small boat on the water, seeing their massive corpses from up close had been terrifying. Others would row out from the harbor to see them over and over, but Onni had only needed to go there once. Her terror stayed with her. You could stack four elves foot to shoulder, and they might have looked one of these giants in the eye. You could lay two tall men across the giant's chest. The circumference of their legs was larger than the barrel of a horse. It's hard to comprehend how big something is until you are close to it. And with these creatures, it was frightening to even be near their massive remains.

No other giants had been found, so over time people seemed to lose their fear. The bodies were left in the water, and as the fish picked the remaining flesh from the bone and the waves broke those bones apart, they no longer resembled a man. It was easy for some to forget that original sense of awe. But Onni had not forgotten. She would go to that cliff sometimes and stare down at the waters where she knew the skulls and heavier bones still lay. Always, her hands would clench, and her breath would rush even though the giants were just memories. She even had nightmares from time to time of behemoth forms reaching for her, which always reintroduced her to her fear and kept it fresh. She had never forgotten.

"I believe they are giants, sir."

Onni was still running. And falling. And running. She was bleeding from her arms, her legs, and her forehead- but she kept running. The forest had started to thin, and she knew the cliff face was just ahead. But she also knew that she had been seen, and that she was being chased. She heard the cracking limbs and heavy stomps behind her as a Hill Giant pursued her. When Onni reached the mountains, she had finally started to outdistance the thing chasing her. She placed her back against the rock wall and tried to calm her own breathing. She would need a clearer head to climb.

She had stolen a few frantic looks as she ran, and she had seen glimpses of the monster- but now she had a few moments to really look at it. It was currently glaring at her from the edge of the tree line but had stopped the pursuit. It was leaning against a large tree, gasping. It was far different than the armored giants they had found in the water. It was fat and dirty, and it was unclothed. Its breathing was loud and labored. Evidently, it did not like running. It was perhaps half as tall as the burnt bodies they had found in the water, but it still could have weighed almost as much. This giant's body was incredibly thick, although warped somehow. One arm was longer than the other. Its legs were also proportioned wrong, its thighs were longer than its calves and they bowed away from each other. The monster's eyes were uneven as well. One eye set much higher on its face than the other. Its mouth was still open, gasping for air- with a frothy spit hanging down from fat lips. He had thrown a few branches at her to try and stop her from running, and he still had something in his hand. As the giant's breathing slowed, it brought what it was carrying up to its mouth and ripped at it with its teeth. Onni could now see it was a man's leg- ripped off at the hip.

The hunting horn suddenly sounded again, ripping into Onni's mind and igniting her terror. It was close now. The beast that had been chasing her roared back in reply, looking off to its left. Onni looked as well, and felt her terror reach deep into her soul- squeezing her heart and lungs in its unrelenting grip. A large oak simply leaned and fell to the side as a living Frost Giant stepped into view. He was flanked by two more lumbering Hill Giants, and he was breathtaking! Tall as a two-story inn, and incredibly muscled- the Frost Giant was wearing some type of massive skull over his head like a helmet. He had metal and bone shoulder plates, and his tree trunk legs were covered in thick furs and metal chains. He was carrying an axe in one hand; its bladed edge was longer than a man standing. He sparkled in the light, and Onni realized his body was covered in a thin sheen of cracked ice. He was beautiful to behold. And most frightening of all, he looked at her with intelligent eyes.

The Frost Giant did not break her gaze. He spoke a command, and then he smiled. His teeth had been sharpened into points. Onni felt something heavy smash into her shoulder, driving her back into the stone behind her. The impact pushed the air from her lungs, and she heard her bones crunch. The back of her head smashed into the rock and her vision darkened for a breath, her head then falling forward. The chewed leg was resting on the ground at her feet. The Hill Giant

who had been chasing her must have thrown it at the Frost Giant's command- but the deformed behemoth was still standing at a distance. She looked back to the Frost Giant and was amazed at how quickly he had moved towards her. Just two more huge steps and he would be upon her! Onni tried to scream but there was no breath in her. She could only make a desperate croaking sound as her body tried to gasp for air.

And then wet fire fell upon the Frost Giant from above, dissolving the skull helmet almost instantly and then burning into his flesh. The majestic giant had tried to look up when the fire hit, and that just coated his face- melting the flesh away like wax dripping down a candle. The once beautiful Frost Giant fell forward towards Onni, drops of the liquid fire splashing from the impact and splattering onto Onni's right leg. Now her body could scream!

The pain, the terror, and the living nightmare just broke her. She screamed out her anguish, and yet somehow, she could hear the forest whisper her name. Her eyes stayed focused on the dying giant, but she was somehow still aware of more wet fire falling from the sky all around her. It was burning the trees of the forest, and it was burning the three Hill Giants. The wet fire was consuming everything she could see. The wet fire was also eating her leg!

Again, the power of the Green whispered to her. The soft wind of the forest's voice was much clearer than any of the screaming around her. It shaped Onni's screams with its whisper. It moved her fingers into arcane weaves, leaving greenish sparking trails in the air. And Onni Osheni slowly sank back into the stone cliff behind her like she was falling into water. She fell back and became one with the stone itself. As she slowly reclined, the cool darkness enveloped her and the fire on her leg was smothered by it. She still felt her own pain, and she could still hear the three giants screaming their dying agony. But the blessed darkness took her in its cool embrace and the spirit of the forest whispered to her to just stay inside the stone. Stay in the darkness where she would be safe from the fire. Where she would be safe from the giants. Where she would be safe from her own screams.

The Elven woman fell forward onto her hands and knees, finally expelled from the stone. It was night, but there were pockets of fire still burning all around her. Her eyes were still glazed from the transformation but started to clear as the spell faded. However, the firelight and moving shadows kept her darksight from focusing and that made her even more disoriented. She started to rise up onto her knees and her upper body created a larger shadow on the rock wall behind her. She glimpsed the shadow, screaming and scrambling away from the wall on all fours. Her burnt leg failed her, and she fell onto her side, then quickly rolled onto her back in the ashes. She smashed one hand over her mouth to stop her screams. Her other hand was stretched in front of her, moving in discordant directions to push the shadow phantoms away. Tears filled both eyes and made it even harder for her to see as her Elven sight tried to focus in the ever-shifting firelight. Onni continued to push herself away from the shadows on the cliff face- her one good leg digging into the ash as she tried to get enough traction. And then the back of her head hit

something hard and very, very hot!

Onni screamed again and flopped back to her belly, now pulling herself through the ashes with both arms. Her face was pushed hard against the ground, and her eyes were squeezed shut. Her gasps just filled her mouth with ashes, and she began to choke and cough. Her scream had stopped simply because she had no breath left in her body. Her choking turned wet as she vomited, and it was finally just too much for her. She slumped forward into her own vomit, all her bodily functions releasing as she passed out from the choking and the fear. The Elven woman lay unmoving in her own mess, some of the ash had churned into a muddy paste that her face sank into. The forest had burned all around her, and the whispers of the Green were too far away to wake her this time. The shadows danced against the wall as the flames continued to eat away into the night.

The Elven woman woke once more and tried to raise herself onto her hands and knees. She was covered in ash and filth. Most of the fires had burnt out now, so Onni's darksight could focus. Next to her, a huge lump of blackened flesh was still steaming. It took a few breaths, but the woman soon realized it was the burnt remains of the Frost Giant. She crawled away from it, returning to her place against the rock wall. She was sitting up now with her back pressed hard against stone. Her eyes were frantically moving, trying to identify any threat. But she was the only thing living. Everything else around her had burned. Onni, and the stone wall she had been part of- remained.

She looked down at her leg. Her cloth pants had melted onto her skin- mottling her leg with thick black soot. There were three small but terrible wounds, where the liquid fire had eaten her flesh to the bone. Onni placed her hands over the wounds and invoked the power of the Green to cure her. She did not completely heal, but the meat of her leg grew and spread to cover the bone again. She still hurt horribly, but she could at least use her leg again. Onni rose up into a standing position against the rock and slid along the wall, moving away from the giant's corpse. Her wide eyes were darting back and forth, looking for more danger. She kept moving away, limping- but at a steady pace. After perhaps five or six hundred steps, the ashes and embers stopped, and the forest appeared again. Onni stayed near the cliff wall but kept moving further along as the woods thickened. A soft rain began to fall as the Goddess wept over the destruction. The Green Mother's tears were good. They were right. They would help protect the unblemished forest from any floating embers that might fall. The Green whispered these things to Onni so she would understand, but the whispers could not reach the Elven woman. Onni was still hiding.

The rain grew stronger over Onni. Perhaps the Mother did not like being ignored, or perhaps she was just helping to wash Onni clean from some of the filth. The Elven woman kept limping along. Her long and knotted hair had fallen down onto her face in heavy, wet clumps but she never reached up to push the hair to the side. The rain and hair at least hid the tears that streaked down her pale face.

The rain increased again. The drops are falling harder and the wind now pushing the fallen leaves up against the bottom of the rock wall. Onni's hand was outstretched, her fingertips staying in contact with the dark stone as she walked- ensuring she never moved too far from its protection. She was making small sounds now, whimpering like a newborn pup as her upper body began to shiver. A few more steps and the shaking moved on to her legs, getting more powerful until it tripped her once again. Onni Osheni had finally stopped walking. She sat on the ground in the pouring rain. She had one arm still stretched out to touch the stone wall. Her other arm was wrapped around her knees, pulling her bent legs up tight against her body. Her face dropped forward. Her upper body shook violently as she cried. And then a slow, rolling thunder moved through the woods as the storm worsened yet again. The Mother's anguish turning into anger. Onni screamed as the thunder shook the ground under her. She jumped up and backed against the cliff wall- her eyes once again wide and darting. Her breathing became short gasps as terror squeezed her chest in its terrible grip. Her pounding heart just added to the fear as it shook her.

"I believe they are giants, sir."

The ghostly voice screamed at her this time, the words echoing over and over in her head. Onni's one hand was moving up and down the stone, desperately trying to push inside once more. The spell was beyond her though. She had only accomplished it before with the help of the Green. In reality, Onni had been little more than a puppet to its power. This time, she was not able to melt into the stone. But her frantic fingers did find a crack in the wall. It was down low near her knee. It wasn't big, but it was deep.

A heavy sheet of cold rain dropped onto Onni, the shock stopping her panic for just a moment. It was another gift from the Mother, as that small moment was enough for the Elven druid to focus. She reached into a pocket inside her tattered leather coat. It had been held closed with a single stick of thread, which broke easily. Inside the pocket were small seeds, which readily stuck to Onni's wet fingers. She slapped her palms together, so the seeds were now on both hands. She knelt again, and her arms moved in duplicated motions while she invoked the Green Mother's power. Green sparks came from her fingertips as the now glowing seeds transferred from her hands to the wall, creating the weave for a circle at the base of the stone. When the passwall invocation finished, a small tunnel existed!

Onni immediately dropped down to her hand and knees and crawled inside into the darkness. She kept moving further into the stone until the small entrance she had made was about six or seven body lengths behind her. By keeping the tunnel opening small, she had likely doubled its distance. Reaching the end, she now used her magic to produce a small flame in the palm of her hand- giving her some light. Instead of a solid wall at the end of the tunnel, there was a rubble filled opening that continued into the darkness. Onni realized the crack she had been following widened the deeper it went into the mountain.

As a druid, Onni could mold and manipulate a small amount of earth with her will and her

connection to the Green. She could only move a man's weight in broken rock at a time, but she could do it over and over again with no real effort. She pulled her blouse up over her nose and mouth to protect her from the dust, and she dug. She slowly removed rubble from the crack, depositing it into the tunnel behind her. She did not encase herself inside the mountain, but she did ensure that nothing larger than a rabbit or squirrel would be able to follow her inside. And Onni dug. When her flame would extinguish, she would produce another in her palm- and then continue to slowly dig her way forward. The crack was ever widening, and the larger it became the more space opened up in the darkness. But Onni had to dig for a very, very long time. She slept twice. She couldn't tell how long she'd been underground, or how long she'd slept each time- but the rest did help her. Onni used her magic to transform a tiny sprig of dried mistletoe from another coat pocket into a Goodberry when she woke. A single Goodberry could sustain her.

Safe in the dark, surrounded by stone, Onni was finally able to think clearly and calmly. She was still breathing, so the crack she was following allowed air. She realized the passwall spell she had cast had ended long ago, so her tunneled opening would have already transformed back into solid stone. But the crack in the stone had saved her. Onni had followed it just to make her digging easier, but the Mother had once again shown kindness and guided the elf's actions to a good outcome. Onni Osheni was truly grateful for the mother's love she received from her goddess. Tears formed in her eyes, but this time they were for happiness. She had left the terror behind her for now.

Onni was thinking of Marques. She had not heard his voice in her head since he had sent her to investigate the outpost. It was strange. He would have been told about the fire. That much smoke would have been obvious from anywhere on the island, at least during the day. Even if he thought she had been caught in the flames, he should have sent his message to her. Once they were connected, she had the ability to give him a short reply and he would hear it as if he were standing next to her. It would have been the easiest way for him to check on her. And he had not done so...

Onni's breathing and beating heart were quickening. An image of Marques being ripped asunder by the beautiful Frost Giant forced its way into her mind. Another image of him burning, his flesh dripping from his bones. She pushed her open palms firmly against her closed eyes and wrapped her long fingers around her forehead and temples- squeezing hard. The pressure helped evict the horrible images. She held her breath and counted, expelling the air as she reached ten. She took in another deep breath, holding it as well. Her heart beats slowed. She pulled her hands down and opened her eyes, but she was now in complete darkness. The small flame in her palm had smothered when she smashed it into her face. She cackled and snorted; a sound a crazy woman makes. Hearing herself echo back in the darkness just made it worse- and she laughed insanely at herself as she also cried. Onni realized she may have lost her mind. She certainly did not have control. She tried holding her breath again and failed. She was gasping too hard to hold her breath. In her mind, she pictured herself smashing a big handful of fire into her own face over and over again and the bizarre cackles continued. She stopped fighting and just waited for the darkness to smother her insanity. The cool dark would eventually cover all.

The moment passed and she calmed once more. She licked her dry lips to wet them and was surprised to feel a cool shift of air brush softly against her mouth. She became quiet and listened. By nature, Onni was a cautious woman who always tried to listen. Quiet listening always helped her to focus. As her mind and body calmed, she could hear the sound of dripping ahead of her. The crack itself had opened to the point where it could be crawled without digging, but Onni had still been moving the rubble from the ground and depositing it behind her. Her darksight adjusted now that her flame had been extinguished, and she could see tiny glowing specks of lichen along the dark passage in front of her. They were a soft yellowed green, almost the same pale color as some leaves turned before they dropped from the vine. These specks produced a small amount of gently glowing light, but it was more than enough for her Elven darksight to give her clear vision. She moved forward through the glow, crawling slowly and carefully.

The crack suddenly opened up into a spherical opening. It was a huge domed cavern. The largest building in the village would have easily fit inside- likely a few buildings would fit. The ceiling seemed to be funnel shaped, extending far above her but gradually getting smaller as it reached up. There was a steady stream of water falling from that opening, which cascaded into a large pool of water below. There appeared to be steps carved into the stone in several places beside the pool and also leading up to a multi-level stone rotunda. The domed tower was built from a series of open arches and a statue of some type of gargoyle sat at the very top of the dome- built to appear as if it was watching over the cavern. There were a number of alcoves built at different heights along the cavern walls. Some appeared to be used as rooms, but others were areas where the glowing lichen had been cultivated until it flowed down in thick layers providing ample light for even human eyes to see. This had been built long ago and somehow remained inside this mountain. Onni placed her hands on her temples, pushing- and slowly closed and opened her eyes repeatedly waiting for the hallucination to dissolve into darkness. But the cavern did not fade into nothingness.

Onni was standing now, stretching her aching arms, legs, and back. Her age made her joints crack and her tendons pop, but it felt very good to stand again. As she stepped forward, her feet crunched, and her face wrinkled up from the strong smell of ammonia that had just risen. The cave floor was mostly covered in thin grayish mud-like material that had dried and crusted. It cracked as she stepped onto it, releasing even more of the terrible smell. The fumes were making her head spin.

A soft chittering came from overhead, almost like fox kits at play. Onni looked back up at the curved ceiling of the cavern. A large colony of bats were hanging from points all along the rock dome. Her entrance had made them nervous, and their small shifting movements now made them easier to notice. The crusty floor and ammonia smell was from years of accumulated guano. Onni made her way closer to the pool and the odor lessened, pushed back by the constant steam rising from the warm water.

“Thank you, Mother.” Onni whispered the words aloud this time. Grateful for yet another gift

from her goddess. Onni invoked the power of the Green, one hand raised above her head with a Goodberry sitting on her palm. Her voice cooed softly, emoting rather than speaking any words. One of the bats released its grip, opening its wings and dropped quickly down to her hand. Its weight hit her palm, and her arm was forced down a bit. The bats were larger than they appeared on the ceiling, another good indication of the cavern's height. The bat reached down with its tiny sharp teeth and took the offered berry, crunching down and spilling drops of its juice onto Onni's hand. It swallowed and then bent down again to lick the droplets that had fallen. It was a little creepy, but it did tickle.

"I need you to deliver a message for me my little friend." Onni spoke to the bat in a soft and calm voice. It tilted its head at an angle and held her gaze. "I need you to give my message to Marques." She pictured the man in her mind, sharing the image with the bat through their connection from the Green. "He will be in this place called New Harbor. Probably in the administration building or perhaps the inn." She smiled as those images were shared. Soft green sparkles began to flow up from her palm and dance around the bat. It was not frightened. It did not even break its gaze from her eyes.

"Tell him this..."

My dearest. There are giants and gouts of fire. The outpost is gone. I am safe but hiding. Please be safe. Please answer.

As Onni finished speaking, the tiny wisps settled onto the bats skin and sank inside. It launched from her palm and flew upward, entering a small hole near the ceiling. The other bats quickly followed, their flocking instinct moving them all as a group. There were several moments of chaos as the colony flew around the cavern, somehow mindlessly sorting themselves into a queue to rise up the funnel in the ceiling- moving as if they were all part of a single living organism. Finally, Onni stood in the cavern alone. She noticed that the crack seemed to continue forward into the far wall. It was much larger than before, but still not tall enough for her to stand. She tried moving forward in a squatting position, but her still healing leg couldn't take that strain and she was soon crawling on hands and knees once again. This passage began to angle upward and then stopped abruptly.

Onni backed out and then slowly wandered through the cavern. she was amazed at the variety of life she discovered. There were many different moths that flitted from surface to surface, their painted wings opening and closing. There was a large hairy moth that at first, she took for a hummingbird. It had the same unusual and frenetic flight, darting quickly from one strange fungus to another. There were hundreds of species of fungus, lichen and mushroom. Some traditional with the stem and bulbous top. Others form a moss like covering over a rock. Still others that seemed to grow from a vinelike clinging stem that opened up into glowing bulbs. All throughout the cavern, different types of plants and minerals produced dim colors- some areas of growth creating kaleidoscope patterns on the rock walls and floor. And there were frogs. Different colors and different sizes. Some floating in the pond, some clinging to rocks and walls, and a few others

hopping along the floor like toads. As the frogs began to relax in her presence, their songs filled the amphitheater with a discordant melody, but the sound did have a steady ebb and flow which blended them into a soft constant song. It reminded Onni of the forests she loved so very much! Life, song, and beauty, all blending together in a type of natural harmony. To Onni, this was the true expression of the Green. And she had been led to this haven in the darkness! Oh, how she loved the Goddess!

Onni felt fear and tension leave her body at last. Perhaps she could make a new home here. Perhaps she could build and defend. Perhaps...