

## Wizard of the North



A storm was imminent. It promised to be a bad one. It would rain hard, and with the rain would come death.

Within a grotto, high atop an active volcano, a wizard hunkered over a vision within the flames of a modest campfire, holding back long wisps of golden hair.

Something strange was occurring hundreds of leagues south of the cave. Something catastrophic. Tears dripped from the tip of the wizard's nose. The omens foretold the return of a devastating power. A power that had annihilated the unspoiled tracts of the Innerworld a few moon cycles earlier. The same power that besieged Quarnaine Svelte and her expedition four years ago, but this time it was different. This time, the signs pointed to an absolute apocalypse—a total annihilation of

Zephyr, and there was nothing the wizard could do to prevent it.

A cold wind swirled ash into the wizard's face, burning small holes in the silken robes fluttering about the magic user's slight frame.

Ignoring the acrid smoke, the wizard leaned closer to the flames, willing the vision to reveal a deeper understanding. Helleden Misenthorpe was at the root of this storm, of that there was little doubt, but there were other participants involved this time. One bigger than the malign sorcerer himself. If this magical storm of doom wasn't strange enough, there was also something familiar about it. Something that shook the wizard to the core.

The flames burned with more intensity than they had a right to, given the meagre fuel that fed them. They flared up to singe the wizard's hair and abruptly went out.

The wizard quickly uttered an incantation to relight the fire, anxious to witness the unfolding storm, but the flames refused to come back. The wizard frowned and chanted again, paying attention to proper enunciation. Next to a divination invocation, a vision spell was the hardest one to enact correctly. The embers flickered with promise before fizzling out again, but the wizard had felt that familiar presence again. It was as if someone had mentally reached out, desperate for the wizard's attention.

"No," the wizard bemoaned the unresponsive ashes and made a frantic search of the dank interior. Passing over a pile of tattered tomes and brittle scrolls, the wizard found a grimy vial of green ichor—handling it with the utmost of respect. A little hesitant, but with no time to waste, the wizard thought, *why not?*

Pulling the cork stopper loose, the wizard shook the vial in an effort to hurry the gelatinous substance from the container. Excruciatingly slow, the ichor dripped once, and then a second time, sizzling as it oozed into the embers.

The wizard replaced the stopper and dropped the vial into a robe pocket. With both hands free, the wizard intoned the

magical phrase of vision, pronouncing each word exactly as they had been learned.

At first, the smouldering fire hissed and sputtered, but as the wizard panicked anew, a small flame caught, quickly rearing to engulf the entire pit—threatening to climb out of its confines and onto the stone floor.

The extreme heat forced the wizard back against the cave wall. Concentrating like never before, the wizard drew from an unknown reserve, and the vision reformed within the leaping flames. The scene of a bloody battle waged in virtual darkness, except for the fires burning in the fields around a river and the sporadic bursts of what could only be magic, took shape, but this was not Zephyr.

It was difficult for the wizard to determine where the battle took place; certainly nowhere familiar. Immense birds of prey flitted in and out of the vision, swooping down upon hapless victims and then flying out of sight. Men, women, and small misshapen creatures battled for their lives along the banks of a wide river, against an insurmountable number of red demons wielding tridents and other malicious instruments of death.

The familiar sensation reached through the flames, taking the wizard's breath away.

“Silurian?”

Unseen in the background of the image until now, a cylindrical mountain blazed to life. So intense was the illumination that the wizard cowered behind an upraised arm.

The raging fire pulsed once in warning.

The wizard locked onto the compelling pull from within the flames, desperately trying to make sense of what was happening.

The image of the blazing mountain exploded, erupting like a volcano. A visible concussion shot outward, the intensity of the blast obliterating the wizard's vision.

A violent wind emanated from the centre of the fire pit, stoking the wizard's flames, a harbinger of the fiery maelstrom that suddenly engulfed the cave.