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Runeswirth And the Emperor of the Fires

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Runeswirth stood brazenly gazing at the black tower looming before him. This definitely fit Maldeen's description: a shiny jet black palace surrounded by fiery lakes, smoldering mountains, and a smoky, sunless sky. Runeswirth smirked to himself in satisfaction and strode up to the tall raven door of the palace gripping his sword hilt in excitement. He knocked three times with deliberate resolution, and, lo and behold, the heavy door opened ominously just as foretold.

"Ho there!" Runeswirth called enthusiastically. His voice echoed perpetually within the cavernous entry hall. A deep, rumbling voice echoed back from the darkness, "Who dares enter the house of Lord Inflanmoir, Emperor of the Fires?"

Runeswirth stepped cautiously in a bit further as he answered, "I am King Runeswirth, absolute ruler of the Groundweller race. My people is currently at war with the rebels of the Tri-Led Kingdom, and I wish to acquire the weapon, which you have so masterfully crafted, that will ultimately seal their doom!"

The voice cackled hollowly, "King Runeswirth, I count it a great shame that you have traveled all the way from Perfluminobis to seek the secret of the fires, for I will not be so gracious in relinquishing them to you. Your journey will certainly be in vain!"

"If you are so sure," countered Runeswirth tenaciously, "then why don't you show me who you are!"

A figure emerged from the darkness of the tower and stared sternly into Runeswirth's icy blue eyes. The man was frightening to behold. His skin was an ashy pale-gray. His hair was long and coal-black, as was his beard. His eyes, however, were his most frightening features, for they were a furious, fiery red, a color unlike any Runeswirth had ever seen, and the pupils were tiny pinpoints of desolate, dank darkness. He wore a cloak of pitch black velvet around his body and a circlet of gold inlaid with six brilliant gems of six different colors (red, orange, green, blue, purple, and black) upon his head.

"Satisfied, are you King Runeswirth?" Lord Inflanmoir asked haughtily.

"Not quite," Runeswirth replied, "I would like to know the secret of your magnificent diadem, your greatness."

"A wish I have already refused to grant," Lord Inflanmoir answered through gritted teeth. Runeswirth's eyes twinkled as if with merriment, and indeed he was quite glad, for Runeswirth liked earning what he took, for then none could call his success stealing.

Runeswirth spoke steadily, "I am afraid then, Sir, that I will have to learn it by force." Runeswirth whipped out his sword and advanced darkly toward the old warlock. The latter, meanwhile, removed a staff as black as the walls of the palace out from under his equally black cloak and raised the circle cut in the top to the orange gem in his golden crown. Immediately, orange flame burst out from the gem and Runeswirth dodged. Fear intermingled with excitement within the young king, as he patted out his singed hair. Again he advanced toward Inflanmoir only to find a purple blaze heading straight for his breast. He tried to dive, but the flame caught on the sleeve of Runeswirth's lead grey cloak. Before Runeswirth could make any motion to put out the flame, it was gone, and his right forearm was burned to the bone. Runeswirth stared at his charred arm in amazement.

Lord Inflanmoir laughed vilely, "Give up yet lad?"

"Not nearly!" Runeswirth exclaimed foully. Thus, the battle continued furiously with Runeswirth constantly advancing seemingly unhurriedly toward

Inflanmoir and Inflanmoir constantly firing variously colored conflagrations in response. Runeswirth carefully noted the strengths of each flame in his head. The red, which missed Runeswirth entirely, burned much longer than the

previous flames had done though it lacked the fuel to naturally do so. The blue, which just missed Runeswirth's torso, blazed right through the wall of the palace. The palace had otherwise seemed unharmed by the infernos. Lastly, the green, which missed Runeswirth by about a yard, did not touch anything but the seemingly fire-proof floor. However, a rat which sat no less than five feet away from the blaze immediately collapsed after inhaling the green smoke, though that rat was not touched by a spark of the actual flame. After the green flame snuffed out, Inflanmoir hesitantly began to raise his staff to the black gem, but Runeswirth hurriedly hurled himself upon the old man knocking both staff and crown to the ground. The young king held his sword threateningly close to the Fire Emperor's throat, but Inflanmoir sniggered amusedly.

"Kill me now boy, yet you will never discover my secret!"

"I already have," Runeswirth countered, "In defending your invention, you have given it all away!" Inflanmoir's face fell considerably, and

Runeswirth continued, "The orange flame is normal, for it acts the same as any other fire I have ever seen. The purple flame is powerful but instantaneous, for when you launched it at me, it hit with great magnitude and precision but vanished in the next second. The red flame is long-lasting, for though the other flames have all long disappeared, the red flame still burns before us, though you feed it no fuel. Ah, yes, I know your palace is fire-proof, fool! Well, the blue flame is the most destructive, for even though your palace is fire-proof, at least to most fires, the blue flame proved strong enough to tear through even that! Finally, the green flame is highly poisonous, for though that rat over yonder was naught but five paces away from the blaze, it died on inhaling the toxin, and even I, who has withstood many severe venoms, am beginning to feel faint as the smoke circulates the room. Nevertheless, still one flame you withhold from me, oh evil Inflanmoir! I fancy it is the strongest, for you were hesitant in using it upon me, your newfound enemy! Now tell me, what is the force of this mighty flame? Ah! I see you are doubtful in telling me, but heed this," here Runeswirth lowered his voice sinisterly; "I have already won! I have five fires which I will take and use to obliterate the remnant of the Tri-Led Kingdom. I assure you, it will be all the easier to use these fires to force information out of you, Lord Inflanmoir, if need be. You cannot fight back Lord Inflanmoir, for you have poured everything you own into the invention which I have already stolen. You have no skill with a normal weapon, for you spent all your time forging this crown which I have knocked from your brow. Even if you owned the skill naturally, you would have no strength to use it with, for living alone on this island of fiery mountains has rather drained your health. Lastly," Runeswirth leaned so close to Inflanmoir that his lips nearly touched the old wizard's ear. "Lastly, you have no friend and no family to save you, for you rejected your only friend, in your selfishness, killed your loyal wife, in an experiment, and abandoned your lovely daughter in your desire for fame and glory! Ah yes, I know of your family's fate, Lord Inflanmoir, for your daughter, whom I have spoken of has told it all! Maldeen sent me on this mission, and for her, I intend to finish it! So, in the name of Maldeen, tell me, fool, what is the secret of the black fire? Speak or you die!"

Lord Inflanmoir was rather shaken by the sudden memory of killing his wife in the testing of one of the fires and banishing his daughter after losing his temper horrendously. His brow was bathed in a cold sweat, and his breath was shaky, but eventually, observing that the sword was only about an inch from his throat, he managed to speak.

"King Runeswirth," he began, "I suppose I have no choice but to give you the secret of the black fire. Nevertheless, heed my warning! The fires, especially the black, are powerful weapons. I was once an ambitious young adventurer like you, but I wanted more power and more glory. So, I sought out this island to conduct my experiments, and I created one of the most powerful weapons known to mankind. You see what I am now, a wretched old man with nothing to live for but fire and death. Yes, I will tell you the secret to the fires, but I warn you; you have only won the battle. Heaven knows whether you will win the war! I implore you...."

"Enough!" shouted Runeswirth angrily, "I do not wish to hear you preach, Inflanmoir! Get on with the black fire, for I have a rebellion to conquer, and my nation is faring direly!"

Inflanmoir nodded and continued, "Very well, King Runeswirth. The black flame is so dense that when conjured, it can completely consume the chosen victim and bring them back into the gemstone. If left in the fire for very long, the victim will first grow unconscious, then fall into an unreturnable sleep yet he will still be alive until finally, deep, dark death will consume him. Are you satisfied, King Runeswirth?"

"Almost," replied Runeswirth. With that, he shoved his sword in his sheath, snatched up the golden circlet and the staff, and threw down Lord Inflanmoir with an order to not move and sprinted off into the belly of the dark palace. Runeswirth tore through the palace until he found what could only be the forgery. He seized some iron tools from the walls and poked the hot coals in the furnace. He then proceeded to remove the six gemstones from the crown and fused them onto six golden rings which he had been wearing the entire journey. He placed five of them on the fingers of his right hand, and the sixth one, the black ring, he placed on the third finger of his left hand.

Runeswirth laughed triumphantly, "Inflanmoir was a fool to place his gem in a crown. An enemy only has to swipe it from his head, and all his power is lost! I think rings suit me better. I'll have six chances to retrieve the flames if they are stolen, for my enemy will have six different articles to steal, really seven, including the staff!"

Runeswurdth glanced lovingly at the black gemstone mounted on his left hand. "This ring signifies my commitment to Maldeen and her plans to conquer Perfluminobis!"

With all his rings settled, Runeswurdth took up the staff, which curiously appeared to be composed of the same material as the fire-proof palace. He then sprinted back to the entry hall and found Inflanmoir still writhing on the floor, though hours had passed since Runeswurdth's departure.

"I thank you, Lord Inflanmoir," Runeswurdth began confidently, "however there is one thing more I must ask of you in your daughter's name."

"Anything," Inflanmoir choked pitifully.

"Well then," Runeswurdth continued striding closer and closer to the Fire Emperor and he spoke. "Well then, for your daughter, whom you abandoned for this precious invention, for your daughter whom you left to fend for herself though her mother was long gone, for your daughter, whom you expelled from her only home for the sake of your potential fame and glory, for Maldeen, my mistress, my empress, my queen, for Maldeen," here Runeswurdth whispered again into Inflanmoir's weary ear, "die a long, slow death in the black fire and never return!"

Inflanmoir uttered one long, sorrowful, sickening scream as Runeswurdth shifted the black staff into his left hand and shifted his third finger so that it fit perfectly into the peculiar hole in the top. A flame so dense and black that it looked like a fountain of tar burst out of the black gemstone and swallowed up Lord Inflanmoir, Emperor of the Fires. Runeswurdth removed his ring from the staff and the flame, Inflanmoir and all flew back into the ring and disappeared. Runeswurdth cackled triumphantly and marched out of the palace beginning the journey back to Perfluminobis where he would certainly use his new weapon to seal the doom of the Tri-Led Kingdom.

So, Runeswurdth must now be left to carry on his evil intentions with the powerful fire rings. Now, all seems hopelessness and despair for the Tri-Led Kingdom, but perhaps there is still hope. For, though Runeswurdth is now crossing the small stretch of ocean between the island of fiery mountains and Perfluminobis, a certain young man and a certain young woman might be advancing into a journey of their own. These too may soon meet each other, and perhaps they will one day parent the one person who can conquer the evil of the fires. Now, this talk is all supposition, but maybe, just maybe all hope is not lost for the mighty Tri-Led Kingdom.