

## CITRA (Part One)

A deep scout North West of the Reach, in the heart of winter, is only for senior Harbingers. Tuukka was just that, and regretting his decision not to turn back to Frostreach for a warm meal and bed, but something was driving him to push on a little more. On the morning he had enough of freezing and starving, he was doing just that when in the distance he spotted smoke on the horizon. Heading that way Tuukka came upon the death and destruction of, what looked like, an entire Nordmahr tribe. His experience told him that this sort of whole sale destruction was more than just two warring tribes. His investigation was geared to find out what, not expecting to find any living being out of this killing field. To his surprise he came upon a little girl of 3 or 4 years of age crying over a dead tribes-woman. She was bone white in complexion with white hair that had streaks of blue in it. Even through her tears she had crystal blue eyes that just made you want to do something to make them shine. She had no visible wounds, but was only in a soiled dress with no shoes or coat, and Tuukka knew she would not survive long on her own like that. To his horror, when he went to help her, she was already dead cold! His survival instincts took over, throwing his own coat over her and quickly started a fire. Despite all he did the girl would not get warm. She would say she was fine, that she's not cold, but no one could be that cold and still live. This puzzled Tuukka, but she breathed, she ate and drank, but would not warm up. Deciding the investigation was not as important as getting this child back to Frostreach, he foraged some fresh supplies, and with the child that named herself as Citra, headed out.

Upon arriving Citra was in good health but still colder to the touch than is possible. When Tuukka finished telling his report, he realized after taking care of Citra for the past week or so he had developed a fondness for her that he did not want to lose. When they tried giving her a hot bath, hotter than what would be comfortable, her complexion went from white to almost a normal pale. But the water quickly cooled and her complexion returned to the bone white. So the decision was made to send for a healer or shaman from a nearby tribe to help Citra instead of reporting her as an orphan.

More than a week had passed before a local tribal shaman answered the call for help. Roush was a large hairy woman with more years behind her than ahead. She listened to Tuukka's story and was most anxious to examine this Citra. "Now child, we need to test some things. You need to tell me the moment this starts to hurt." The room full of Harbingers watching closely as the old shaman took one of Citra's hands in hers. As the air turned cold a thick layer of frost covered both their hands before Citra cried out and jerked her arm back. In a blink of an eye Tuukka shoved Roush to the ground as he scooped up Citra to protect her. "Are you out of your FUCKING MIND!? She's only a little girl!" The tension was high as all came to their feet in a ready stance. Roush just sat there staring at Citra, with a somewhat shocked and amazed look on her face. "WELL, explain yourself", Tuukka yelled, "what did you do?" "Just this" as Roush stood and lifted a pitcher of water as high off the table as she could reach. As she poured out the water she spoke a language no one understood and the water froze in mid stream as it hit the table, leaving the pitcher suspended on an iced stream. "Had I done that to anyone else in this room they would be losing the arm. This child is not sick or cursed or

anything like that" Roush said as she walked over to the fire place and carefully put a wrist size stick half way into the fire."She has a gift. I have met a few folks who have an extreme tolerance of cold, myself one of them, but none have I met that where cold to the touch. A great gift such as this comes with warnings, for we are susceptible to the effects of fire." Still holding Citra, Tuukka started shaking his head," NO WAY! NO WAY are you going to burn her just to see! This is a controlled test" Roush started raising her voice, "I will show you first, but what you don't know could kill her! I have salve for a burn, if that happens, and herbs for the pain but we must know."

"Now child, tell me have you ever been burned by fire?"

Citra shook her head no.

"Well then you must be brave. Can you do that for me?"

Citra shook her head yes and Tuukka reluctantly moved toward the hearth.

"You'll be first" Roush said to Tuukka as she lifted the now burning stick from the fire place.

"Just wave your hand across the flame like this" Roush demonstrated away from the flame.

He did so and all that happened was some hair was singed off the side of his palm.

"Very good. Now when I do it," a slight sizzling sound could be heard as she did it. Roush held up her hand for all to see, it was very red with some small blisters starting to show.

"You see what just singes your hair dose great damage to one such as myself. I do not wish for Citra to go to this but that's why we need to know. I want you to you to do it a lot faster than we did." Still holding on to Tuukka Citra waved her hand real fast across the flame... Nothing. Then a little slower... Nothing. Finally she put her hand right over the flame and watched in amazement as her white hand started turning a golden brown color. Knowing he would be burnt badly by now Tuukka grabbed her arm and pulled her hand back.

"It's warm" Citra said as she put her hand on Tuukkas cheek.

"Special indeed," Roush said, "she must come with me to get proper training before she becomes a danger to herself and others."

With tears rolling down his face, Tuukka said "Never can we take care of ourselves as well as her. You can't have her."

Roush knew at that moment she would not be leaving with Citra.

"Then you must let me teach her some things and visit from time to time."

So Citra's days were filled learning how to read write and speak Draconic and Arcacian. After that Roush left but would stop in to "visit" from time to time, as if she was waiting or looking for something.

Citra quickly got over the shock of losing her parents by replacing them with close to fifty "uncles" and a couple of aunts that call themselves the Harbingers. Not knowing Citra's true birthday the Harbingers would celebrate her found date. And now those harden men and women of Frostreach had more than the fight to survive to live for. About her eighth year of age Tuukka, wanting to spend some alone time with Citra, took her out on a short four day "scouting". He said it would do her good to get out and start to learn some "survival" skills. Soon the rest could not wait for their turn to take her out on short runs just to be with her in smaller groups. They were not serous trips, more like extended camping trips, and never any danger. They taught her how to ride and take care of her horse and herself in such harsh condition. Tracking game and finding edible wild fruits and veggies, picking advantageous

spots to camp for the night and basic survival techniques were all part of her time growing up. It was on such a trip about her fourteenth year when it happened. Tuukka was getting well up in his years to be going on to many more scouts when he decided to take Citra on one last trip. Tuukka along with three other Harbingers took Citra out to investigate some rumors. More than a week out the small group found what they were looking for, but not in the way they would like. One night as they camped they were ambushed by something's, not man nor beast. As the battle ensued, long repressed memories came flooding back to Citra, along with fear and helplessness she had not felt since the day she lost her parents. When Tuukka felt her fear turned to rage and she started yelling in the words Roush had taught her. She knew not what she did but she could feel the water in the air. She could control it, bring it together, and make it freeze. Once frozen she could send it hurling or cause it to explode. When the battle was over all four Damon and two Harbingers, including Tuukka, lie dead. The other two had taken wounds, some by her doing, but still alive and stunned by what they just witnessed. They held no animosity towards Citra, in fact they know they owe her their lives, but still trying to come to grips with what just happened they made all haste back to Frostreach....

## **CITRA (Part Two)**

Frostreach is a fortification with a large common room. Most of the Harbingers have a bunk and chest in the common barracks. Not made for luxury there are just a few private rooms there. Citra was afforded one such room, which she went straight to and locked herself in. When the story was heard from the two survivors of the ambush runners were sent for Roush. Despite all they did none of her uncle's was allowed in. A couple of her aunts would bring her food and empty her chamber pot but Citra would not engage in any conversation, nor accept any consoling.

Roush was found within a couple of days, and after hearing the story she rode two different horses almost to death to reach Citra, for she knew the "spark" she'd been waiting for all this time had been ignited. Despite her excitement she was worried for Citra's mental health. For coming into her spark can be quite an ordeal on its own, then compound it with the traumatic event of a life or death battle in which her savior was killed, and there's no telling how she is doing. Cautiously entering the room Roush seen Citra was a frozen mess. With no words Roush just sat down on the bed and held Citra until she was ready to talk. Crying almost uncontrollably Citra kept saying "I killed him, I killed him, and I could've saved him if I'd done something sooner but I didn't so I killed him. His last words to me were RUN!"

"Now child, you know Tuukka would not want to die an old man in his bed. He gave his life so you may live. That is the greatest gift a person can give and you would spoil it if you did nothing with it. Mourn for the ones lost but do not linger too long on them, think of the ones you saved and could save. Now are you ready to honor Tuukka's sacrifice by becoming the interment of his vengeance?"

Something in Roush's words struck home and reignited the rage in Citra's heart.

"Can you teach me?"

"It would be my pleasure, now your true lessons can begin."

For almost the first year no one but Roush was allowed to be around when training for safety reasons. During this time Roush taught Citra the proper words to use to give her greater control over what she was doing. And what she was doing was incredible. She learned how to make shards of ice the size of a bolt then send it shooting through the air, with deadly accuracy, with just a few words and jesters. She learned how to create a ball of ice, in a specific place and cause it explode, sending spears of ice everywhere. She could also command the ice to surround her in protective type armor. Most dangerous of all she learned to direct her ice flows to completely freeze something.

Soon the Harbingers started to complain about all the practices dummies they had to replace. It was just an excuse so they could get a chance to see what was going on with Citra, and eventually it worked. Roush finally relented and allowed small groups to watch at a safe distance as long as they were not a distraction. And what they saw they could not believe, the little girl they all loved and helped raise, was laying waste to the reinforced manikins they made.

Citra was in her second year of training, her sixteenth year of life, when a single surviving scout returned reporting that they were attacked by creatures they could not hurt. He was torn up about leaving his comrades but getting this news back was more important. A council of seniors was called to try to figure out the best thing to do about the situation. When Citra heard of this she used her liberties and entered the meeting without invite.

"What's the plan?" Citra asked.

"We're not sure Cit, by all reports we can't even hurt these creatures. We need to carefully learn more about them without any more loss of life. But we are not planning on running out and avenging those that have died by their hands."

"This is what I've been training for; this is why I'm here. I'm not saying send out the entire post, but give me four men and a free hand to get some answers."

The council could not refuse Citra, for all she has lost and all she shown. Four of their best men, two scouts and two fighters, one named Johan, were sent and so it began. After two weeks out they came upon what the trackers thought was the trail. During this time Citra was spending a lot of her time with one of the best fighters of the Harbingers, Johan. Just four years older than herself Johan just came to Frostreach about the time she started her training with Roush. He was of Norden decent, all of six and a half feet, blond shoulder length hair, bluest of eyes and shoulders she didn't think she could wrap her arms all around. For the first time a Harbinger was not her uncle but ... What? And what was this feeling she was having, all Citra thought she wanted was to find the things that kept killing her family and exact her revenge. Now she was doing just that but could not stop thinking of and wanting to be around Johan. Another week of careful tracking, so not to be surprised, they came upon them. There were two of them, roasting something vaguely familiar to human. They where suppose to just look then form a plain, but when Citra saw the gruesome sight she lost it. She summoned the largest ball of ice she could right between them and detonated it, blowing multiple holes in the unaware Daemon. Rising to her feet she called to the water with all her might to freeze one of them and so it was. The other daemon cursed in an unknown language and charged. Shard after shard shot from Citra's hands, even as the monster fell she would not stop until Johan grabbed her

snapping her out of her battle rage. Ramos, the other fighter, was about to destroy the one Citra froze when Nickolas, the oldest scout, stopped him.

"Wait! Citra can you keep this thing frozen until we get to Frostreach?"

"Yes, it would be as easy as breathing for me," smiling as she catches what Nickolas is thinking, "though I'll not be touching it"

"Just keeping it on ice will suffice; we'll handle the heavy work."

It was about this time when she noticed Johan was still holding her.

"You should give some warning for us before you go do something dangerous like that. If anything bad was to happen to you it would not be safe for us to return to Frostreach."

"So it's all about you," Citra replied with a smile to Johan not sure if she wanted this embrace to end.

Finally realizing he was holding her, tighter than he needed to, Johan released her and stepped back.

The return trip back was slightly slow from hauling a six foot daemon-icicle, but true to her word Citra kept it frozen with a simple spell when needed. Although she did not mind the delay for that was more time she got to spend with him. The long talks of his tribe back in Nordmahr, how he was a twin and didn't want any conflict when it came to which one would someday be the tribe chief so he left to be a Harbinger. That type of family love and unselfishness was an attribute that tugged at Citra's heart strings. Oh yes she would need to talk to one or more of her aunts about this. But it was not that easy, when they returned to Frostreach with a frozen daemon statue the buzz was intense to say the least. It was asked of Citra to keep it on ice, in which she did, so they could study it. Eventually Citra got that talk, which was quite a shock to her, for no one ever thought to tell her of the "birds and bees". And to have about six of your aunts tell you of their exploits is another sort of an end of innocent, not to mention a little uncomfortable. Once she understood she asked what she should do, that was her second mistake. Some wanted to go get Johan right then and there to get it out in the open, some told her to make him chase you and others told her to just do him! What to do what to do? For the first time in her life Citra felt shy around all the men, especially when Johan was around, now that she knew what a man and women do sometimes. Still thinking about what to do another report came in about strange creatures attacking nearby tribes. Help calls must be answered, that's the Harbingers way. The seniors came to Citra that night "daughter, we have heard the call for help. Officially you are not a Harbinger, but in the hearts and minds of all who reside at Frostreach you are the embodiment of what we are. You are not obligated to answer the call but we ask if you would."

Citra's heart leapt, she was not just their child or mascot but seen as a Harbinger. The honor was hers and she wouldn't dream of not answering the call but she put a stipulation on her help, Johan had to come!

And so it was. For the next two years when the call came for help from creatures not of this world this select group was sent. Citra and Johan's relationship flourished, and somehow her cold touch did not affect him. Besides all the other things that made him great in her mind, he was one of the few who could withstand great cold. Even though he had no other gifts it was like a match made in Valhalla (so Johan would say).

In no time in the recorded history of the Harbingers were there so many reports of outer worldly beings. So the decision was made to send "the group" on a scout to the Gorge to see what they can find.

### **CITRA (Part Three)**

Eight of the best of the best left Frostreach on a mission to investigate the rumors of severe activity at the Gorge. Among them Citra and Johan, the hottest couple in Frostreach for almost two years. And in that time they have gone on dozens of such trips, all to the east of Frostreach, and all ending in a battle with daemon. Some more difficult than others but all ending with the death of all daemon they encountered or so they thought. Most of the killing was done by Citra's hands but all are equals in her mind. Most of the time Johan and the other Harbingers were there to make sure nothing got to Citra before she could deal with it. The frequency and dangerousness of these encounters have increased in the last couple months. But this trip was different, they weren't looking for a particular problem and eliminate it, but to look and report. It was at least a four week journey if all went well, not wanting to be seen it would be longer than that.

The Harbingers arrival did not go unnoticed nor was it unexpected. The command was given to let this thorn in their side in as deep as they would come then eliminate them once and for all. The three days they spent snooping around only sealed their doom, for what they saw would mean nothing when they were dead. (Insert sinister laugh.) The group of eight split in two, one heading northeast the other southeast, with plans to meet in the middle of the other side. What they saw there was utterly horrifying; tens of thousands of daemon working industriously planning on what looks like an invasion on a massive scale. Even worse, it appeared that humans, some tribes some just regular looking men, were working with the daemon. How did they all get here, who was leading them? Citra's group managed to capture a human and find out someone called Lord Manx or something like that was commanding this rabble. Citra and her group were at the meeting spot, waiting for the other group when the attack came! A large bat winged creature, towering at least twelve feet tall with a red muscular frame and horns sprouting from his head, landed in the middle of the clearing.

"You are surrounded, you other friends are dead or prisoners, surrender now and you may live another day."

Without thought Citra shot a spray of frost at the creature trying to freeze it. The daemon let out a loud "ROARRR", but freeze it did not!

"Kill them all" the giant thing yelled out as he shattered the ice that tried to encase him. Dozens of smaller creatures came pouring out of the woods, screaming and snarling, in a killing frenzy. Citra just blew up her first group when the large creature swung his mighty fist at her. Johan shoved her out of the way and took the brunt of the blow.

"Citra you must run!" Johan shouted as spun to square off with the bat thing.

"Not without you" Citra said as she readied another spell.

"Not this time my love. You are the only one how can make it. This must be told, NOW GO!"

With her heart breaking, Citra knew the truth of Johan's words; she cast her spell and fled. She did not look back. It took all her skill and knowledge of the woods to get away, but away she

got. Half dead from fatigue and heartbreak Citra came across some Harbingers just east of the reach. She told them all she had seen and started turning to go back for Johan when they grabbed her. "We know it hurts, but getting yourself killed will do no good."

Citra had not the strength or energy left to fight them, so she gave in and let them take her back to Frostreach.

The mood was grim as the council listened to Citra's report. The situation sounds more than hopeless but what could they do? They are Harbingers, but even with Citra's help they could not stand against that. The rest of Arne must know, they must come together, or all will perish. As much as they needed Citra in the battle to come they decided she would be part of them they send out to the capitals to warn the rest of the nations. She could not disagree more but orders were orders. So off she went to Area, tell them what's going on, and then return to get Johan...