

Winter's wrath.

I was a young girl when the plague swept through the freljord. It began with the shakes; those afflicted shivered even beside the fire. The diseased bundled themselves in furs and cloaks, hoping to hide their affliction from the tribal elders who would inevitably force them over the northern cliffs to prevent the spread of the disease.

Then came the fever. There was no hiding the sweating, the redness, the panic or the sense of impending doom. The huts of the fever-riddled were burned to the ground while the diseased were marched through the snow towards that jagged maw in the earth where none had ever returned from.

I was born weak and frail, and stayed that way throughout my childhood, easy prey for whatever god, demon, or spirit spread the plague. My mother cried as I shook, begging any god who would listen to spare me. I was the only one of her ten children to see this winter. My father sat grim faced by the fire, keeping my condition a secret from the council he led, in the misguided hope that I would survive. As the fever wracked my small, skeletal body, my father did what was best for the tribe.

As I was marched through the snow towards the abyss, I heard my mother's wails through the wind, begging for one last embrace, plague be damned.

The medicine man said a short prayer as we stood over the crevice; *"From the frozen watchers tombs, to the slopes of the great northern jaws, the freljord has endured. Through storms cold, and blood hot, feasts, famines, love and hatred, we have endured. Through the warmth of tribe and the guidance of Avaroosa's star I call upon the spirits of these lands to cleanse our people of this great evil."*

*"I'm sorry Sejuani, it's for the good of the tribe."* He said as he lifted my frail body in his arms, and dropped me into the abyss.

As I fell faster and faster, the snowflakes seemed to flow past me, I imagined for a moment that I was falling up, away from this land of snow and frost, up towards whatever paradise lay beyond the sea of clouds. I closed my eyes and waited for the end.

With my eyes closed, I began to see; visions of war, of fire, death and destruction filled my mind. I saw soldiers trampled beneath me, legions at my command, tribes bending their knees to me. In this vision I was strong, I was important, I was a conqueror. I was the queen of the north, uniting all the freljord under a banner as strong and indomitable as this land itself.

When I opened my eyes, all I saw was white.

I had survived.

As I climbed out of the snowbank I had fallen into, I heard laughter. An elderly man who had been thrown here hours before I was, sat with his back against the frozen cliff face, his legs and back shattered from the fall, with a massive grin splitting his blue lips.

*"Well hello Sejuani! Isn't it wonderful down here? I have never been this warm in my entire life!"*

He continued to cackle like a madman, flinging his clothes aside as the fever and frostbite consumed him. In that moment I knew, not only would I survive and grow strong, I would conquer the freljord. Because I felt no warmth, there was only the cold.

The icy fingers of winter's wrath raked my flesh as I ascended the cliff face. My bare feet were torn to shreds from the icy rock, numb hands bleeding and bruised as I desperately clung to each hand hold. For what seemed like eons I climbed, each hand hold colder and sharper than the one before, each foothold smaller and slicker. Every fiber in my body cried out in agony, pleading for me to let go, to let

the cold take me. It seemed hopeless; struggling not only against Mother Nature herself, but against the fundamental law of the universe itself: The weak die, the strong survive. But the fire in my soul whispered for me to struggle, to prove my worth to the cold. I was drunk on the future that vision had promised, obsessed with the strength that I had shown: a frail little girl, lost and alone in this harsh existence, growing stronger than all and bringing the tribes of the Freljord together, trampling all before her with indomitable strength.

As I reached up for the next hand hold, I felt nothing; no ice, no pain. I looked up through the sting of the blizzard, and saw nothing but storm clouds. The last of my strength left my body as I pulled myself up onto the frozen earth. In my last ever moment of weakness, I fell to my knees as tears froze to my cheeks. The trial of the abyss must have impressed some god or goddess, for just a moment the storm clouds parted, revealing the star of Avarossa. That single bright guiding light, which led countless generations of Freljordan explorers, warriors, and hunters southward towards home, shone in the heavens for a moment before the clouds of the blizzard obscured it once more. I gathered up strength I never knew I had, I rose to my feet and began the long walk home. The blizzard's fury flowed around me as I put one shaky foot in front of the other, but I knew I would make it, because I felt only the cold.

This journey, one of pain, cold, self discovery, and perseverance, had awoken something inside of me. With the birth of this newfound strength came an epiphany, my nirvana; The only warmth in this world is the blood of those who stand in your way, the only fire that will burn forever is the one inside your soul. This frozen land has eventually broken all, and buried their bodies in the snow and ice. But I will endure, and I will conquer this land because I understand; There is no place here for love, no joy, no mercy. In this land there is only the cold.

There will forever be only the cold.