

Years 9 & 10

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## The Legend of Kolrass Flametongue

One of the great things about being a journalist is that you get to meet many interesting people, and hear their stories. But I have never been invited to meet someone *quite* like Kajun, an old dwarf famous for his axe skills, his apple pie, and the legendary slaying of Kolrass Flametongue.

Only a few days ago, he was sitting opposite me in a plush armchair across from a crackling fire. It really was quite cozy in there; the rain on the roof and the howling wind made for a perfect story-telling atmosphere. His cousin Kloves hurried in with a large pot of strong black coffee and several mugs. Djinjer, his brother, poured me a cup, and I took it gratefully. Kajun was silent for a while as he stared into the fireplace, but then he spoke.

“I suppose it started, as you would expect, with Kolrass Flametongue. He was a magnificent red dragon, the size of a small castle. He was also one of the last dragons, something that nobody seems to think is important. But it was, and is. If there were many dragons, they wouldn't be as big a problem, contrary to popular belief. Dragons used to be peaceful, but when knights started killing them just to prove themselves, they got angry and started attacking villages. Because of this, your Emperor decided that it would be a good idea to get rid of the dragons completely, so they sent their army in. It took two decades, but finally there were only a few of the great wyrms left.

Enter the dwarfs. Dragons were no friends of dwarfs, that is true, but even we could see your Emperor was making a grave mistake. We had heard about Kolrass Flametongue, the dragon who lived at the top of Agate Mountain and had decided to wreak as much damage as possible before he died. He believed himself to be the last of his kind. We knew he was not. Our King sent us to talk to him, to come to an agreement with him so that he would not needlessly kill himself.”

The old dwarf paused to have a gulp of coffee before he continued. “It took an entire month to reach his cave, and when we reached it, he was lying on a bed of treasure, fast asleep. But, the instant we stepped inside, he woke, and moved like lightning. One second we were trying to be stealthy, the next we were pinned to the ground beneath his claws. In other words, he wasn't too happy to see us. To be fair, it was the middle of the day, when dragons are usually asleep. At this point, I was too scared to be of any use to anyone, so Kloves, a master of speaking and convincing, took over. He explained to Kolrass our King's plan to preserve the race of dragons. He would go into hiding, so that everyone believed him dead. The great red dragon agreed, on one condition.”

“So you *didn't* kill him?” I asked, confused.

“No,” Kajun says, chuckling. “I did not. Anyway, for the next two months, a dwarven digging crew tunneled deep into the heart of Agate Mountain, where they hollowed

out a large chamber, roughly the size of his original cave. Then we transported all of his treasure to the new chamber with him, and sealed up his old cave.”

Groaning softly, he stood up. Catching my glance, he smiled wryly. “I’m not as young as I used to be; I can’t go gallivanting around the country like before. Oh well, we’ve fulfilled our promise to Kolrass now, so there won’t be any need of that. Have you got the package, Kloves?”

Kloves nodded, hefting a large wrapped up object around the size of my head. “Good. Djinjer, you grab the pie from the oven, and I’ll unlock the door,” he says. Djinjer nodded, and left the room. Kajun went to the back of the room, and pulled back a massive tapestry from the wall there, revealing a door set in the wall. He unlocked it with a key spotted with rust, and the door slowly swung open.

“This wall is hard up against the mountain,” he explained. “This is the tunnel that we use once every year to visit Kolrass with an apple-pie, which was something we added to the deal when it became clear that it would take a while to complete his side of the bargain.”

Djinjer came back at that moment, holding a massive pie tin that looked far too heavy for him. Wordlessly, he staggered down the tunnel. “Shall we?” asked Kajun, and I followed him and Kloves into the darkness. Soon, the light faded, and we walked in the darkness for a long time. Then, suddenly, I felt the oppressiveness of the tunnel vanish, and I knew that we had come into the chamber of Kolrass. Torches flickered to life around the cavern, and I could come to appreciate the size of it. Truly, it was gigantic. There was an enormous curled up shape in front of us. The shape shifted, and raised its head. I found myself staring into the great golden eyes of Kolrass Flametongue.

“And who is this?” he asked, his voice low and melodic. “A friend of yours, perhaps, Kajun?”

“Yes,” Kajun replied. “We have finally found what you sought, Flametongue.”

The dragon pulled back his head in surprise. “You have? Where was it?”

“We found it in the care of the wyverns on the Iron Slopes. It is a Blue.”

Kolrass puffed out a cloud of smoke.

“Show me,” he demanded.

Kloves set the package down on the ground before the red dragon, ever so carefully unwrapped it, revealing a brilliant sapphire egg, the size of my head.

“Oh,” I said. It seemed the only appropriate response.

Kolrass dipped his head toward Kajun.

“I cannot thank you enough.”

The egg rocked slightly, and Kolrass gasped in wonder.

“It’s ready to hatch?” he asked, stunned.

Kajun grinned. "Yes, it is. All it needs to hatch is to be kept warm for an hour in a fire made by a dragon, and the hatchling will have the energy to break free."

The red dragon shook his head slowly.

"This is an unexpected surprise. I have told you this already, but you are one of a kind, Kajun. You are a testament to the good faith of the dwarves."

Carefully, he dug a small pit in front of him, and placed the egg gently inside. Then he used his wing to sweep some logs towards him from a pile at the cavern wall. He put them in one at a time around and on top of the egg. Once the egg was completely covered, he opened his great jaws and breathed out an inferno of white-hot flames. The wood caught alight instantly, and Kolrass fixed his attention on the fire and stood like a statue. I realized that he was going to stay like that for the entire time that it took for the egg to hatch, and I sat down and prepared for a long wait.

None of us moved for half an hour, and when the fire collapsed, Kolrass wordlessly put more wood in and went back to watching the fire. Finally, we heard a tiny squawk from the pit, and a small blue shape crawled out, shaking its wings out. It lifted its tiny head and looked at Kolrass, then coughed out a small flame. The red dragon stroked the hatchling from its head to tail, tracing its body.

"It is a she," Kolrass said, his voice thick with emotion. "I name her Elpízo, meaning Hope. Hope for me and hope for all dragons out there, if there are any others left."

"Oh, there are," Kajun assured him. "As far as I can tell, there are a few who live in hiding far away from here, on the far side of the Emperor's Teeth, a mountain range over six hundred leagues away."

Kolrass slowly turned and looked at Kajun. "You knew?" he growled, angrily. "You knew where more of my brethren are, and you didn't tell me?"

Kajun raised his hands placatingly. "If I had told you, you would have attempted to reach them, and you would have been killed before getting halfway, undermining all our efforts to keep you hidden."

Kolrass swung away from him, smoke leaking from his nostrils. "I should kill you and be done with you, but I could never make six hundred leagues with Elpízo. You have trapped me, dwarf."

The little dragonet squawked, and he immediately faced her.

"Don't worry," he murmured softly. "I won't leave you behind."

With his tail, he pushed the pie tin from before, towards Elpízo.

"Eat up," he said softly. "Kajun's apple-pie is probably the best thing you'll ever taste."

The sapphire dragonet put her snout right up to it, and took a cautious sniff. After deciding that it was safe to eat, she took a small bite from the massive tin. I saw her tiny eyes widen in delight, and a moment later, she was digging in with relish. Kolrass smiled contently, and then turned back to the three dwarves.

“So,” he rumbled. “Have you got a plan to reunite me with the rest of my race?”

“Yes,” Kajun answered. “We will travel all the way to the Emperor’s Teeth. You can change to your human form, can you not?”

“I can, but I don’t like it,” the dragon replied, grimacing.

A second later, the colossal bulk of Kolrass’s body disappeared, and a man wearing a simple tunic and a cloak stood in his place. Only his cat-like eyes were evidence of his dragon self.

“Perfect,” Kajun said. “Elpízo, of course, will not be able to do the same thing, but we can hide her somewhere. I will find some horses, and we will leave tomorrow at first light.”

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The next morning, Kajun, his brother, his cousin, and Kolrass prepared to ride away on horses bought with some of the dragon’s hoard. Kolrass had a bit of trouble with his horse; it was suspicious of him, as if it could sense he was not really human. Elpízo’s head poked out of one of their saddle-packs, and she chirped cheerfully. Finally, Kolrass managed to mount up.

“Are you sure you don’t want to come with us?” Kloves asked, from his horse.

He had asked me the same question last night, and I’d been tossing up the idea since then. It was tempting. A quest to far-off lands to find other dragons sounded like just the adventure I’d always wanted.

“Alright. I’ll come,” I said, decisively.

I had been getting itchy feet over the past few years anyway.

Kloves grinned. “Good. I packed your bags already, and there is another horse in the stable, which I bought just in case you changed your mind.”

I shook my head in wonder at his foresight, and went to collect my bags and horse. An hour later, we rode out onto the plains below the mountain, with the sun at our backs. I urged my horse to a canter, and delighted in the feel of a horse beneath me and the wind in my face again, after so long.