

# KINGDOM OF CLAW

THE ASHEN SERIES  
BOOK TWO

DEMI WINTERS

# KINGDOM OF CLAW

The Ashen

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DEMI WINTERS

Kingdom of Claw (Book #2 in The Ashen series)

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*For those whose safe space has become their prison. You are brave. You are strong. You are warriors.*

## Author's note

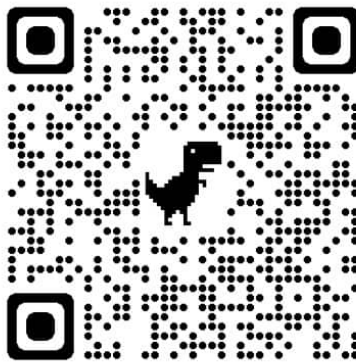
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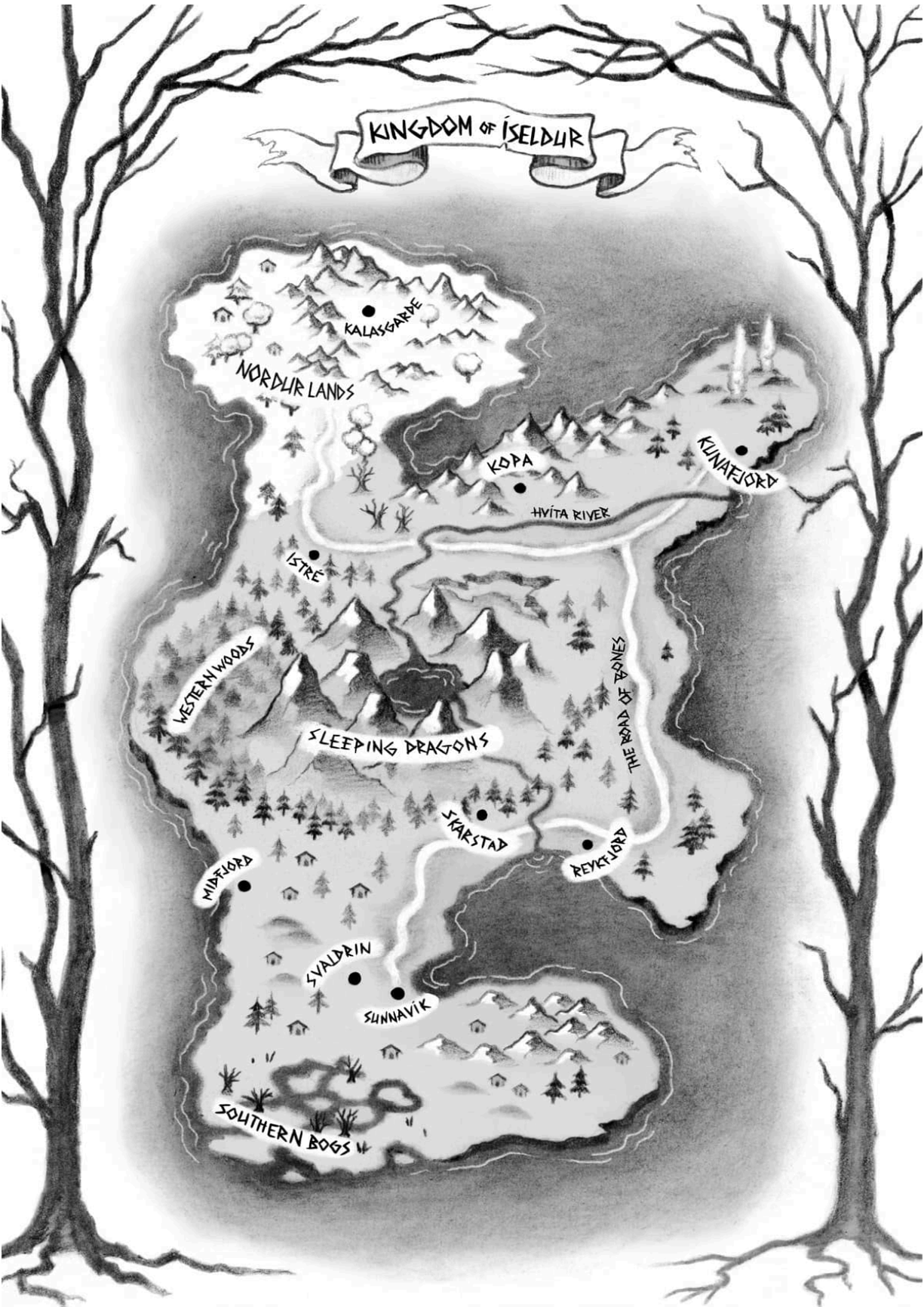
Glossary, Pronunciation Guide, and Zagadkian translations are provided at the end of this book.

Kingdom of Claw takes place in a dark fantasy world and is intended for mature (18+) readers. Some scenes may make certain readers uncomfortable. A full list of content warnings is available at:

<https://demiwinters.com/trigger-warnings/>

or by scanning the code below:







## The Road of Bones Recap

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Silla Nordvig was on the run after the queen's warriors killed her father while trying to capture her. Her father's last words sent her to seek a shield-home in the city of Kopa, which required her to travel the Road of Bones. After only narrowly surviving the first leg of the journey, Silla climbed into a supply wagon, without realizing it belonged to the Bloodaxe Crew, who were on their way to complete a dangerous job in the town of Istré (just west of Kopa).

Upon discovery, Silla brokered a deal with their leader, Reynir 'Axe Eyes' Bjarg, to help him obtain information from the Crew's former leader, Kraki, in exchange for a ride part way. But in the process, Silla learned that Rey had been using a false last name (Galtung) and she used this information to blackmail him into giving her a ride all the way to Kopa. Despite their antagonistic relationship, Rey revealed to Silla that the skjöld leaves she was taking for headaches were dangerous. When she decided to quit taking them, Rey supported her and kept her addiction secret.

Much to Silla's surprise, the leaves had been causing her to hallucinate the little blonde girl who followed her around everywhere, and suppressing a big secret—she was one of the Galdra, a class of magic-wielders hunted and

executed by Íseldur's king. During a confrontation with the queen's assassin, Skraeda, Silla also learned she was Eisa Volsik, a princess thought to have been executed seventeen years prior, and that the girl she hallucinated was her older sister, Saga.

Meanwhile, Silla had begun a secret relationship with Jonas 'the Wolf' Svik. When Skraeda tried to capture Silla, Jonas discovered that Silla had been hiding the truth of her past from him. He was hurt, but agreed to help her. But when the queen's warriors again came for Silla, and Jonas's younger brother was killed, everything changed. Jonas felt betrayed by her, and used the skjöld leaves to drug her and hand her into the Klaernar in Kopa.

When brought to Kommandor Valf of the Klaernar, Silla fought for her life, smashing his skull in with a statue and climbing out the window. She ran to the man who'd told her father of shield-homes, only to find him dead, and Skraeda waiting for her. Silla and Skraeda fought, Silla at last killing the assassin. Upon leaving the home, the Klaernar were waiting for her, and chased Silla into the forest bordering Kopa.

Meanwhile, it was revealed that Rey was the smoke-wielding Galdra who'd been killing people along the Road of Bones. Upon entering a hidden entry to Kopa to help Silla, he was forced to use his magic on a group of Klaernar. Unfortunately one escaped before he could kill them. Rey found Silla fleeing the others, and pulled her into the bushes, shielding her from discovery.

Silla and Rey escaped Kopa together, Rey with the goal of reuniting with the Bloodaxe Crew in Istré, and Silla with a rough plan of going north to a place called Kalasgarde. At the end of The Road of Bones, Silla had not revealed her identity to Rey, much as Rey had not revealed his to Silla.

Meanwhile, in Askaborg, Saga was summoned to a meeting with Queen Signe, where it was revealed Saga had spent a month without leaving her chambers. The queen informed Saga she was to rejoin them for meals and take her place at her betrothed's side. As she returned to her chambers, Saga began to panic, and fled into a secret passage before anyone could see her.



While hiding, she overheard Signe and Maester Alfson's conversation in the room beyond, learning that her sister Eisa was alive.



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## Prologue

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SEVENTEEN YEARS AGO, SUNNAVÍK

**I**t was a good thing queasiness had been trained from Ivar Ironheart as a child, because victory smelled an awful lot like blood and shit. The scent drifted on the wind as Ivar paced a path into the black sand beach. Behind him, Askaborg, his new castle, loomed over a fresh boatload of Norvalander thralls laboring to clear the corpses from Sunnavík's streets. Before him, a woman was secured to the ruined pier as the tide flowed into the bay.

Frustration gathered in Ivar's gut. He'd vanquished King Kjartan and had taken Íseldur's throne for himself. He should be able to relax at last. But instead, *this*.

Ivar let himself remember the look in the Volsik king's eyes as he'd told him he'd be blood eagled while his people looked on. But even the memory of peeling the king's flesh from his back, of cracking his ribs open and pulling the lungs from his body, did little to temper Ivar's current irritation.

"Tell me!" he bellowed at the infernal, stubborn woman. "What is in this weaving, Galdra?"

But she only pressed her lips together. Strands of brown hair were plastered to her face, the tide swirling around her shoulders. How much longer did the woman have? Fifteen minutes? Ivar paced another lap into the sand.

Now that Íseldur was claimed, Ursir demanded Ivar set his focus on his next campaign—to raise strong sons. One to follow his Sea King ancestors and claim the next isle in Ursir's name. The other to inherit Íseldur's throne. But before he could consider any of that, Ivar had to ensure his Norvalander wife could bear him sons. Little Yrsa was a few years old, and while his iron heart warmed a few degrees in her presence, she was still only a *daughter*.

It was *sons* Ivar needed; strong, capable warriors to carry out Ursir's Edict. Without sons, he was shackled. He'd done his husbandly duty; he'd even set aside his whores for two months now. Yet month after month passed with Signe's bloods coming on cue. The maesters and midwives could find no physical deformities, but Ivar was growing impatient. If his wife was defective, he must know so he could find an alternative, and quickly.

Which was how Ivar had found himself standing in the doorway of a ramshackle home belonging to a Galdra woman. He was familiar enough with the magic-wielding warriors of Íseldur—the impossibly strong Blade Breakers and impossibly quick Harefeet. And of course the infernal Shadow Hounds, who'd slipped past Ivar's lines and caused chaos in their war camps.

But he was told this woman was a different type of Galdra, with gifts of the mind. A Weaver, they called her. The rest, Ivar did not understand. *Threads of the past, present and future*, she'd told him. A prick of his blood, and the Weaver could find his threads in the webwork of the world. Would weave them into a tapestry.

All Ivar drew from this talk was that the woman could glimpse his future. If he could only reassure himself he would father sons, Ivar could set his frustrations aside and begin his reign in earnest.

But it had all gone awry. The woman had taken his blood—had gone into a strange trance and worked at her loom. And after hours of weaving a tapestry filled with bright colors, a black thread had appeared. The Weaver had recoiled—had turned to the king with a bloodless pallor.

“My apologies, Your Highness. I cannot complete the tapestry today,” she'd said. “Might you return on the morrow?”