



THE  
ROAD  
OF  
BONES

THE ASHEN SERIES  
BOOK ONE

DEMI WINTERS

# THE ROAD OF BONES

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THE ASHEN

BOOK 1

DEMI WINTERS

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ISBN 978-1-7389960-1-8 (print)

978-1-7389960-0-1 (ebook)

978-1-7389960-2-5 (hardcover)

Developmental Editing: Chersti Nieveen at Writer Therapy

Copy Editing: A.E. Mann Editing Services

Proofreading: Grey Moth Editing

Cover Art: Rony Bermudez

Chapter Headings & Section Break Art: Letters by Lila

Map: Eternal Geekery

Sensitivity Readers: Ruthie Bowles and Gianna Marie

Translations & pronunciation: Saxica Ltd.

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*For those who've had to put one foot in front of the other, even when it was really hard.*

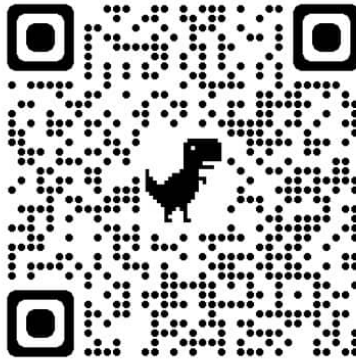


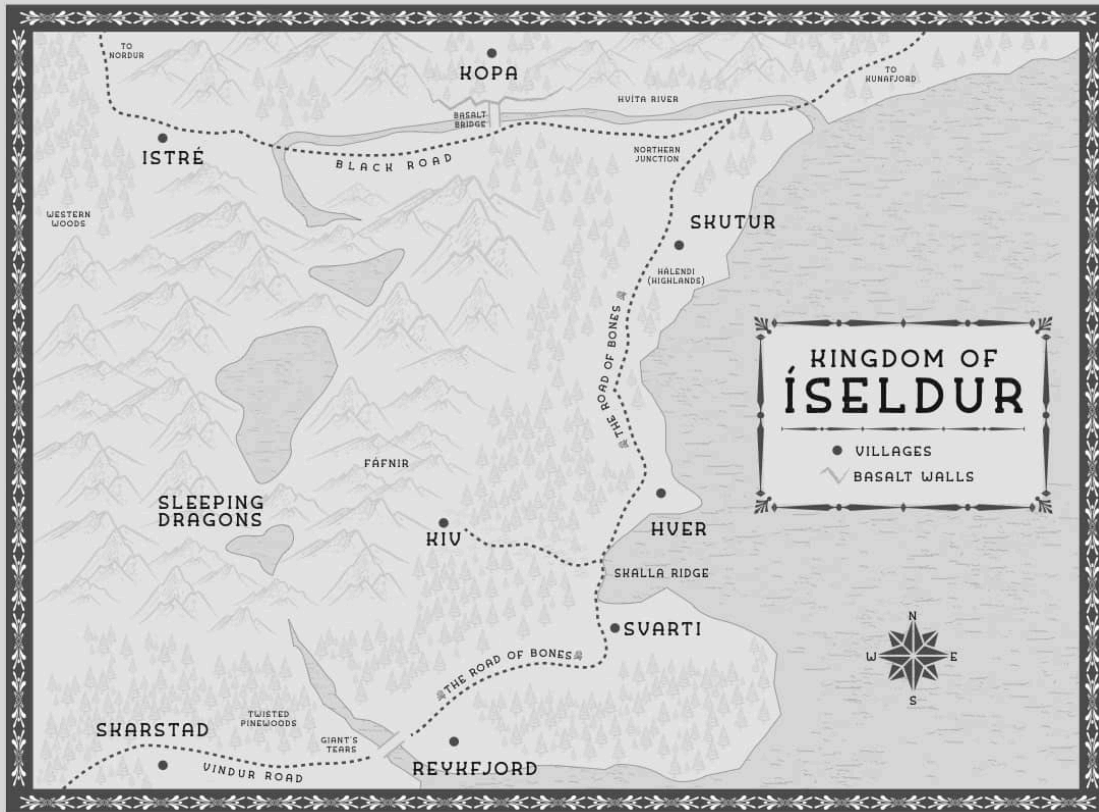
## AUTHOR'S NOTE

The Road of Bones 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:







## PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

**Author's note-** Many of the words and names in this book are derived from Old Norse and/or Icelandic; ð and þ characters have been converted to 'th' and æ to 'ae' to make them easier to read

- **Bjáni-** byan-ee
- **Dúlla-** doo-la
- **Eystri-** ay-stri
- **Flíta-** flee-ta
- **Hevrít-** hev-reet
- **Hjarta-** h-yar-ta
- **Hver-** kveh-r
- **Hvíta-** kvee-ta
- **Íseldur-** ees-eld-oor
- **Klaernar-** klite-nar
- **Kunta-** koo-nta
- **Lébrynja-** lyeh-bryn-ya
- **Myrkur-** mihr-koor
- **Nordur-** nor-door
- **Reykfjord-** rake-fyoord
- **Róa-** r-oh-a

- **Signe-** sig-nuh
- **Skjöld-** shk-ul-d
- **Skógungar-** shk-oon-gar
- **Slátrari-** sl-ow-trar-ee
- **Stjarna-** stya-tna
- **Sudur-** soo-door
- **Urka-** oor-ka
- **Vestir-** vest-eer



## GLOSSARY

- **Berskium-** powder mined near Reyk fjord; taken by the Klaernar to maintain their large stature and strength
- **Bjáni-** fool; an insult
- **Brennsa-** fire whiskey
- **Dúlla-** ‘doll’- term of endearment amongst women
- **Eisa Volsik-** former princess of Íseldur; was murdered by King Ivar—her body impaled upon a pillar in the pits of Askaborg Castle.
- **Eystri-** the eastern-most territory of Íseldur
- **Flíta-** pheonix-like butterflies whose wings light up when they fly. In their old age, they burst into flames, a caterpillar emerging from the ashes.
- **Galdra-** magic-wielding person; also called Ashen; outlawed by King Ivar
- **Hábrók-** god of battle, honor, luck and weather; one of the old gods of Íseldur
- **Hevrít-** an Íseldurian long-bladed dagger
- **Hindrium-** specialized metal that inhibits magical abilities of the Galdra
- **Hóra-** whore

- **Illmarr-** scaled vampire of the sea; can be lured by eel blood and felled by rowan arrows
- **Íseldur-** kingdom of Ice and Fire; the island nation where this book takes place
- **Ivar Ironheart-** the new king of Íseldur who seized the crown from King Kjartan Volsik seventeen years ago
- **Kjartan Volsik-** former king of Íseldur; murdered by King Ivar using the blood-eagle method in the pits of Askaborg Castle.
- **Klaernar-** King Ivar's specialized soldiers. Also known as the King's Claws
- **Kopa-** large stone city in the northern parts of Eystri territory
- **Kunta-** cunt; an insult
- **Lébrynja-** specialized, lightweight armor made of tiny leather-like scales. Worn by the Bloodaxe Crew.
- **Malla-** goddess of love, war and death; name of one of the moons; one of the old gods of Íseldur
- **Marra-** goddess of knowledge, healing and peace; name of one of the moons; one of the old gods of Íseldur
- **Myrkur-** god of chaos and darkness; one of the old gods of Íseldur
- **Nordur-** the northern-most territory of Íseldur
- **Norvaland-** isle northeast of Íseldur; was overthrown by Ivar's father Harald, who now sits on the throne.
- **Róa-** a hot beverage served in Íseldur, made from the bark of the róabush
- **Saga Volsik-** former princess of Íseldur; was seized by King Ivar and raised as his ward; is betrothed to his son Prince Bjorn
- **Skarpling-** a small, mouse-sized creature with quills on its back.
- **Skjöld-** a dried leaf taken to treat headaches
- **Skógungar-** a forest walker; a peaceful tree-like creature who lives in the Western Woods
- **Slátrari-** 'the butcher'; a murderer who burns people from the inside out



- **Svalla Volsik**- former queen of Íseldur; was murdered by King Ivar—her body impaled upon a pillar in the pits of Askaborg Castle.
- **Stjarna**- ‘mother of stars’; Sunnvald’s wife; goddess of weaving, fertility, guidance; one of the old gods of Íseldur
- **Sudur**- the southern-most territory of Íseldur; houses the capital city
- **Sunnavík**- capital city of Íseldur where Askaborg Castle is found
- **Sunnvald**- the Sun God—king of the old gods of Íseldur; god of fire and might
- **Thrall**- enslaved person; in the kingdom of Íseldur they are most often brought in from Norvaland and marked on their inner wrist.
- **Urka**- a large nation to the east of Íseldur; where the line of Urkan Kings, including Ivar Ironheart, originated
- **Ursir**- the Bear God worshipped by King Ivar and fellow Urkans; belief imposed upon Íseldurians
- **Vampire deer**- carnivorous deer who hunt mammals and drain their blood
- **Vestir**- the western-most territory of Íseldur; houses the Western Woods
- **Wolfspider**- large spider covered in shaggy gray fur
- **Zagadka**- mysterious island nation to the south of Íseldur



# PART I *Flames*

*"Fear not death for the hour  
of your doom is set and  
none may escape it."*

*-Völsunga Saga*

## ONE



### SKARSTAD

Silla Nordvig believed in the little signs the old gods left for mortals—red skies to foretell surprise, the flíta to usher in change, and the black hawk as a herald of death. Above all else, she knew that bad fortune came in threes, so it should not have come as a surprise when those wretched bells started ringing. She jumped in fright all the same.

Washing the bread dough from her hands, Silla dried them on the coarse material of her homespun skirts. *Ashes*, she thought. This week was truly taking a toll on her.

It had all started to unravel when Olaf the Red had requested tenancy payment a week ahead of schedule, stretching their threadbare budget beyond its limits. Next, Silla had burned her thumb while pulling barley cakes from the embers, dropping the full batch into the cookfire. Grains were growing more and more costly—after three long winters in a row, crops were stunted, and the harvest would be grim. Silla had earned herself a stern verbal lashing for her mistake.

And now, the third instance of ill fortune this week—those foulsome bells.

Silla smoothed the floral embroidery along the belt of her blue apron dress, the same worn by all of Jarl Gunnell's domestic hands, and made her

way outdoors. The jangle of iron keys signaled the arrival of Bera, Jarl Gunnell's wife and head of the household. Silla quickly found her place in line, fingers threading tightly together as Bera counted them.

"Twelve. All right on your way, you lot," she ushered them in a gentle voice. "Let us hope this is swift. For all involved."

A light breeze caressed Silla's face and pulled a few chestnut coils from her tightly-woven braid as she stepped along the path. For a gray day, it was pleasantly warm, the sun obscured by clouds. A wasp buzzed at her face, and she swatted it away. Birds twittered from the gardens of the homestead. It was almost peaceful for a moment. Until the following toll of the bell, long and so loud, it set Silla's teeth on edge.

She matched her steps to the others, keeping her eyes on the blue skirts of the girl ahead of her. They walked in a single line, making their way down the rutted lane. Silla didn't have to look to know Jarl Gunnell and his men—warriors, stablemen, and field workers alike—would be following behind. The jarl was one of the few members of nobility who did not use enslaved thralls brought over from Norvaland, but if he had, they would join as well. The bells were nothing if not the great equalizer, demanding the presence of every Íseldurian over ten winters of age, regardless of class.

Silla glanced toward the stables but could not see her father. He'd be there somewhere, amongst the fieldworkers in his dirt-stained gray tunic. He'd be wiping grime from his face, worrying about her, about *them*, deciding they'd lingered too long in Skarstad. It would be time for a fresh start. Another one.

They walked along the packed dirt road and through a gate in the stockade walls of the village, past timber homes topped with thatched roofs. While orderly woodpiles were stacked neatly before the homes, the cabbage yards overflowed with kitchen herbs and vegetables. Skarstad itself was small and unremarkable, interchangeable with most towns in Sudur lands. Silla should know; she'd lived in so many of them. Neatly laid out and encircled by tall defensive walls, it held two main thoroughfares which