

# Dragon Eye by C.M. Lance

## Chapter 1

Sig shut his textbook on the physics of elemental earth magic with a snap. He needed a distraction to dig out from the ennui caused by his failure to capture or find Heathcoat, the dark mage who'd stolen his magic. He'd hoped catching up on college classes would help. It wasn't.

He was also getting tired of the sideway glances of concern and pity he had been receiving after returning from the battle. There was no longer any visible sign of misfortune. His skin had long since healed from the acid burns. He wished *they'd* get over it—he was coping.

Calm had reigned since their team chased or killed a horde of evil beings back through interdimensional gateways that Heathcoat had opened. The plague of monsters and demons he had released fed on the bodies and souls of unsuspecting Canucks, thus increasing the strength of black magic in this world. Now the monsters were gone, black magic was back to normal, and Canada was safe, if you don't count the freezing temperatures for three quarters of the year.

Sig grabbed his cellphone—he was bored—maybe because battle wizards were creatures of action. “Hey,” he said when Rick answered. “Doing anything?”

“Giselle and I are heading over to see you,” Rick said. “We were both studying at the library and needed a break.”

“Great, just what I need.” Sig's best friend, a werewolf, and the redheaded Amazon Sig had an off and on relationship with were the perfect people to relieve his frustration.

Sig was in his room at Professor Herman's estate where he'd lived since he came to college when the Professor had taken him under his wing. The Professor had been named the acting dean of the School of Magic at Northwestern University when the previous dean, Heathcoat, had been revealed as a dark wizard. Sig was heading downstairs to wait for Rick and Giselle when the doorbell rang. That was quick.

He opened the door to find Rick, Giselle, and Daisuke, an oriental mage and friend of Professor Herman's who had helped with the Canadian campaign.

“Look who we found,” Rick said, gesturing to Daisuke.

Daisuke performed a quick bow. “My grandmother is flying into Midway in an hour. Professor Herman and I will pick her up.”

“Flying in?” Sig said.

“Yeah, I thought the world's most powerful witch would use magic, the wizard express, or even a broom,” Rick said.

## Dragon Eye by C.M. Lance

"She's over a thousand years old. At her age, flying on a private jet seems like magic," Daisuke said with a half-smile.

"Private jet?" Giselle said. "From roof of the world? Isn't a long flight from a remote site expensive?"

"Legend has it she discovered the alchemy for creating gold," Daisuke said. "I wouldn't know. She hasn't shared the secret with me, but she has sufficient resources to supply her needs."



Two hours later, Sig, Rick, and Giselle were in the study discussing Meredith's last foretelling.

"The blight your mom saw—with monsters crawling out—was black magic and the creatures it drew into Canada," Giselle said.

"I was in Alberta the whole time with you guys and missed seeing the one-eyed, scaly creature from her prophecy," Rick said.

"We haven't seen anything that could be it, except for the image of a dragon in a mirror—nothing living, yet," Sig said. "But the problem with her prophecies is that they aren't recognizable until they happen. I wish she'd work on clarity. I'm getting tired of the *ah-ha* moments when I realize the thing trying to kill me is what she foretold."

"I was hoping you'd be here," Professor Herman said as he walked in with a tall slim oriental woman holding his arm by the elbow. Daisuke and a young man followed.

Grandmother Daisuke had pure white hair, pulled into a bun, and held in place by two long black and gold needles. She wore a shimmering golden mandarin gown, with black pants showing below the knee, and golden slippers. The gown, which Sig recalled was called a qipao (Sig had no idea why or from where he recalled that), had intricate images of birds, trees, and flowers woven throughout in red, green, and blue threads.

Grampa Thor slipped into the room in time for introductions.

"Lady Nele, may I introduce Sigurd, the great-grandson of Thorval Arnsohn, whom I believe you know," Professor Herman said. "And this is Giselle, and Rick, good friends."

Lady Nele nodded at Grampa. "Thorval, of course I remember. And you're a great grandfather now."

"I've finally attained the honor you hold many times over."

"Let's not talk of how many 'greats' I can claim. I prefer just grandmother," Nele said with a chuckle." She looked at Sig for a moment, then Giselle, and finally at Rick. "A Battle Wizard, Amazon warrior, and a werewolf. Good friends for hard times." Magnificent cheekbones showed beneath tawny skin laced with tiny wrinkles when she smiled. Her obsidian eyes twinkled.

She gestured to the tall, slim, but muscular young man. "This is Dorje, my pilot and bodyguard."

## Dragon Eye by C.M. Lance

Rick's intense amber-eyed focus on the young man was almost tangible as if he sensed danger. Sig watched Rick out of the corner of his eye and noticed when he relaxed and gave a slight nod. Sig's tension dropped.

"Why don't you grab their luggage and carry it to the big guest suite," Grampa Thor said.

Sig and Rick hurried out to the Professor's Bentley.

"I noticed your reaction to Nele's bodyguard," Sig said as he opened the trunk. "What's up with that?"

Rick chuckled. "I could tell he was a Were, but he's not a wolf. Then I realized he's a werecat. But I don't know what kind."

"Werecat?"

"Were-cheetah," Dorje said as he glided silently down the front steps behind them. "Very perceptive." He smiled at them as he picked up one of the suitcases.

"Well, then you're my first," Rick said. "No wonder I didn't recognize you. Your kind is rare. Are there any others in North America?" Rick asked.

"As far as I know, I'm the first and only to make the trip."

"Do werecats and weredogs fight?" Sig asked.

"I hope you're not calling me a weredog," said Rick with a frown.

Sig chuckled as he heaved the other suitcase out. "For your next trick, close the trunk. I'll see if I can find you a treat." At two inches shorter than Sig's six three, Rick was wider, more muscular, and retained his super werewolf strength in human form. Despite the fact that Rick could easily take him if Sig didn't change forms, he still kidded Rick mercilessly.

Rick shut the lid with a growl. Dorje appeared to be restraining a smile.

# Dragon Eye by C.M. Lance

## Chapter 2

After dinner, Sig joined Nele, Professor Herman, Daisuke, and Grampa Thor in the Professor's basement laboratory. Nele placed the small valise she brought on the workbench.

"I came because of the mystery of your weapon," Nele said. "Daisuke said it is called the dragon sword and you want to know its provenance."

"Yes, that is what people have told me. The medallion has been in our family for thousands of years. I'm the thirteenth Battle Wizard in our line." He looked at Grampa for confirmation.

Grampa nodded. "Not every generation has had a Battle Wizard, but yes, I was twelfth and you are number thirteen of those who have."

"I knew dragons well before they fled our world. I am somewhat familiar with battle wizards, but have never examined a medallion," Nele said with a smile. "May I see yours?"

Sig glanced at Grampa and then at Professor Herman who nodded.

He slipped the chain over his head. "It can't be very far from me or bad things happen to the holder," he said before handing his sword-shaped talisman to her.

"I'll remain close by," she said. "Let me know the moment you are concerned."

With red and blue chalk from her valise, she sketched a diagram on the stone lab table and then laid the amulet in the middle. She chanted a song, probably either Mandarin or Tibetan. Daisuke had said Nele spoke at least ten languages, some of which weren't used anymore. Sig barely got along in English, if his grade last semester in English composition was a sign.

"Hm-mm, nothing," she muttered.

She removed crystals from her case and placed them at the corners of the diagram and chanted a different song.

After a long pause, she looked up at the others. "It is impervious to magic."

Sig and Grampa Thor, the previous holder of the amulet, nodded in unison.

Raising the medallion to her eyes, she inspected it.

"You didn't refer to it by name," she said handing it back to Sig. "My research says they all have names."

## Dragon Eye by C.M. Lance

"I can't while I'm holding it. Not without changing forms," Sig said. A flush crawled up his neck.

"Will you change now?" She handed it back. "I want to examine it—full size."

"Aðalbrandr." He said and automatically glanced at the ten foot tall ceiling as he rose—stopping with almost a foot to spare. What had been an amulet was now a five foot long sword. He unsheathed it and held the hilt toward her.

She looked at it and grimaced. "I don't think I can lift it. Will you place it on the bench, please?"

After examining it for several minutes, passing her hands over the jewel, and finally pressing her lips against it, she straightened.

"Its power comes from the jewel in the guard which is not a jewel," she said, laying a finger on it.

"What is it?" Sig asked as he stared at the large blue object he'd always thought of as a jewel.

Her mouth curled up on one side, but her eyes remained serious. "It is a dragon's eye."

Sig's mouth fell open, and he turned to Grampa Thor. "A dragon's eye? You mean a dragon died to create the sword?"

Nele's smile blossomed. "Who said the dragon died?"

# Dragon Eye by C.M. Lance

## Chapter 3

Sig looked at the group assembled around Nele. Professor Herman looked as startled as he'd ever seen him—eyebrow lifted *and* head tilted. Grampa Thor scowled—not his angry, eyebrows meeting in the middle, go-to-war scowl—the squinty, puzzled concentration scowl.

The rest of the group mirrored the confusion Sig felt at Nele's statement.

"How can you get a dragon's eye, without killing it, and before it kills you?" Sig asked.

Nele nodded and bestowed a smile upon Sig. He felt as he did when the sun broke through clouds to shine on him.

"It's necessary to understand the nature of dragons," she said. "Dragon mythology spans the world, just as dragons did—from China to Europe and across the seas to the Americas. Dragons were at the top of the food chain, with their armor, great strength, and powerful magic. Despite that, as mankind grew in knowledge and cunning, dragons were persecuted."

"Sure, dragons were hunted," Giselle said. "Farmers didn't want them eating their herds."

"Few were hunted because of damage they did. Most dragons realized domestic cattle and pigs belonged to men, and didn't want to start a war by killing them. Smart enough to avoid conflict, dragons are also expert hunters that can exist by hunting wild game."

"So how were they persecuted? And why?" Rick asked.

"The only thing dragons value above precious metals and jewels are works of art made from them. Dragons live thousands of years with but one main thought—to add to their collections." Nele paused and grimaced. "The only thing more avaricious than a dragon is the insatiable greed of men. But, dragons valued treasure for its beauty. Man sought it for power."

"That hasn't changed," Professor Herman said.

Nele nodded. "At first individuals hunted them to make a reputation for themselves as much as for the dragons' booty. Those who managed to kill a dragon were deemed mighty indeed. Many more hunters died than dragons. But those who succeeded became rich beyond their wildest dreams."

## Dragon Eye by C.M. Lance

“Tales and legends about dragon slayers thrive. I thrilled to them as a youth, and read Beowulf over and over,” Grampa Thor said.

“Yes those tales honor individual dragon assassins. Some were even nominated as saints such as St. George and St. Carantoc of Arthurian tales,” Nele replied. “And of course in Norse mythology Sigurd slayed Fafnir. Organized pursuits are what drove dragons out of our world. The worst were the Knights Templar.”

“The order that protected pilgrims to the Holy Land?” Sig asked.

“That was the cover story in later years when they became revered. The Templars began as a group of brigands united to steal dragons’ treasures. As they grew in numbers and power—fueled by plundered dragon treasures—the Templars decimated western European dragons and pursued those that fled—mainly to North African deserts,” Nele smiled grimly. “Dragons thought putting an ocean between themselves and the Templars would suffice. That’s when the Knights began escorting pilgrims to the Holy Land—as a cover for their continuing quest for dragons’ bounties.”

Sig glanced around the room. Everyone was as entranced by Nele’s story as him. She had a way of teaching which drew the listeners and encouraged participation. “Is that why there aren’t any dragons left? The Knights wiped them out?”

“No, a dragon council was formed to seek a sanctuary. They finally settled on a home in another dimension, not as hospitable perhaps as Earth might be if it wasn’t filled with humans, but quite suited to dragons’ needs and their powerful magic. The remaining dragons around the world fled this plane, taking their treasures with them. The Templars were left with little option but to steal other men’s treasures in and around the Holy Land. Their predation led to the Crusades.” Nele took a sip of the tea Dorje brought her.

“But what does that have to do with the dragon’s eye?” Sig asked.

Dorje had risen and turned to Nele. “She is weary from travel and using magic on your sword. She must rest.” He took a position between the group and her that made him appear every bit her protector.

Sig felt concern when he saw that Nele had grown pale.

Professor Herman shot to his feet. “You may continue whenever you are ready,” he said. “Rest now. We’ll have dinner later. Perhaps we can continue tomorrow.”

Nele smiled as Dorje assisted her to rise and walked with her to the stairway.



Sig, Giselle, and Rick headed as a team to the Professor’s kitchen. As supernatural beings they burned energy at a much greater rate than humans and required higher caloric intake. Since Sig had transformed shape twice today and engaged in battle, however brief, he was famished. Rick was always hungry. Giselle could also pack away the food, if not the way the boys could.

## Dragon Eye by C.M. Lance

Sig grabbed three slabs of smoked ribs out of the fridge and poured macaroni into water he'd started heating earlier.

"What can I do?" Rick asked.

"Make a salad."

That elicited a growl. "Salads aren't food. Salad is what food eats."

"I'll do the salad," Giselle said. "Right after I answer this." She walked to the butcher block topped island to retrieve her vibrating phone.

Sig tossed three blocks of cheese to Rick. "Then grate these for the Mac and Cheese."

Rick caught two cheeses and the third bounced off his chest as his head snapped toward Giselle's.

"What...? Oh my God!" She shoved the phone into her back pocket. "Our tribe is under attack! I gotta go."

"It sounded like trolls in the background," Rick said. His super sensitive hearing must have overheard the other side of the phone call.

"We'll follow," Sig said.

"Please," Giselle called over her shoulder as she ran out the door to her motorcycle.

Sig sprinted with Rick to his pickup.

They broke all speed limits and ran every light on the way to the rural compound where Giselle's Amazon tribe lived. Sig's pickup squealed to a halt next to Giselle on the road leading to the main house

"My bow is inside," Giselle said.

"Aðalbrandr," Sig said. He unsheathed his sword after changing to warrior form. "I've got my weapon."

Rick's wolf shape trotted around the front of the pickup to join them.

Shouts, roars, and growls sounded from the compound. "My sisters are in the main house," Giselle said. "It's surrounded. Bella said they were holding them off—just barely."

"Let's even up the odds," Sig said. "Did I tell you I hate trolls?" Trolls had abducted and held Sig prisoner during his first year in college.

As they advanced, Sig saw two trolls on the ground near the front door. They looked like pin cushions. Multiple arrows sprouted from the motionless bodies. Others were trying to get close to any windows large enough to admit the massive creatures. Arrows blossomed from some of those as well. There were nine trolls Sig could see.

Up close, the huge clubs and swords the trolls carried could do extensive damage to the Amazons inside, but at a distance the arrows kept the trolls at bay—so far.

Sig ran toward the house and two trolls, even taller than him, turned and swung their cudgels. Sig dodged one and blocked the other. Trolls were slow, but immensely strong. Then he turned and lopped off the arm of the first troll. It looked at blood spurting from



## Dragon Eye by C.M. Lance

the forearm that just moments ago had been attached to a bludgeon. The nerves in Sig's arm and shoulder still shuddered from blocking the club.

The second troll swung again, but Sig easily dodged it before sliding Aðalbrandr through its chest.

Sig glanced up in time to see Rick's fangs rip the back of a troll's knee open. The troll collapsed and Giselle ran up and shoved a sword through its throat. The sword was oversized. She must have grabbed it from a downed troll. She ran over to another troll thrashing on the ground with a mangled leg and chopped its head off.

She and Rick made a good team.

Sig turned to other trolls battering the front door with massive clubs. The door panels were splintered and couldn't take much more before collapsing. One of the three attackers at the entrance fell with an arrow protruding from an eye. One down, two for Sig. As he dispatched the first, the light changed. A huge shadow covered him. Sig dove off the side of the porch as claws like scimitars sliced through the space he'd occupied.

A loud pop and roar, like a sail snapping in the wind, sounded as he rolled to his feet with Aðalbrandr pointed skyward. The sweeping wings of a creature with the body of a lion blasted wind that threw dirt and rocks into the air as it pulled itself skyward. A griffin. It had the head of an eagle, if an eagle had a beak large enough to lift a small cow or large sow.

Sig couldn't wait for the griffin to gain altitude for another dive. He ran and leapt when the monster was twenty feet into the air. He pierced its chest, but only a foot deep before it swatted Sig with a huge paw. The griffin screamed and fell to the ground on top of Sig. It was wounded, but not dead. Blood pumped from its breast—covering Sig's face and shoulders as he struggled to crawl from underneath. More blood ran from Sig's side where the griffin's claws had torn it open.

The beast struggled to its feet. Sig rolled on his back and thrust his sword into the griffin's heart. Blood poured out and it collapsed on top of him again.



Sig didn't know if he'd passed out, but his next sensation was laying spread-eagled with a huge warm form pressing him into the ground. He was pinned and suffocating. Dragging arms that were trapped between the ground and the furry form on top of him, he pushed upward against the griffin. It barely moved. While pressing up, he managed to skootch a few inches at a time to the side. Griffins were so elegant and magnificent. Who'd have thought they were such a heavy dead weight?

"Where's Sig?" Was that Grampa Thor's voice?

Sig felt a tug on his leg. "He's here under the dead griffin." Rick said. "Or at least it didn't eat this foot. C'mon over here and help pull him out. Let's lift and you others pull... Heave."

## Dragon Eye by C.M. Lance

Several hands grabbed his foot and leg. The Griffin shifted and Sig began to slide. He pushed up to help and to keep from getting mouthfuls of fur and feathers as they dragged him out.

He came clear. The ones who had been pushing and pulling, Grampa, Rick, Giselle, and three other Amazons look at him anxiously. "Where are you hurt?" Giselle asked. Fear clouded her expression.

"I'm OK. Just a few scratches."

"That's more blood than you get from a few scrapes," Grampa said looking worried.

Sig saw his chest, stomach and arms were covered in blood. "Mostly griffin and troll blood." He looked around and saw a number of dead trolls, but no live ones. Amazons were retrieving arrows "You killed all of them?"

"We killed most of them and the rest ran when you knocked the Griffin out of the sky," Rick said.

"I'm glad you changed forms," Giselle said. "I don't know if we could have pulled you out in warrior form."

Sig felt his chest and again looked at his arms in surprise. "I don't remember changing," Sig said with wonder then dismissed his confusion. "Why were Trolls attacking you?" he asked Giselle and Bella.

Bella shook her head. "Individual trolls sometimes try to rape one of us, but they've never attacked in force like this."

"A better question is why was a griffin working with them?" Grampa said. "Griffins are solitary except when breeding. They wouldn't normally have anything to do with trolls."

"It didn't show up until you three did," Bella said pointing at Sig.

Sig exchanged glances with Rick. "Heathcoat?"

"Were the trolls just a diversion to get you here?" Rick asked. "So the griffin could kill you?"

"Maybe it's Heathcoat's revenge for the Amazons helping us send back the demons and monsters he summoned."

"That all makes sense," Grampa said. "Heathcoat's magic could force the trolls and griffin to work together when they normally wouldn't. Crap. I'd hoped he'd gotten lost between dimensions when he fled. It looks like he's after Sig again."

"But if I can find him, I can get my magic back," Sig said.

"If you live through it," Grampa said. "Remember, he almost killed me."

# Dragon Eye by C.M. Lance

## Chapter 4

“Dude, you are filthy,” Rick said.

“And I feel like crap, too,” Sig said. The claw gouges in his side ached and burned.

“I’ll take you home,” Grampa said. “My truck has leather seats. Easier for you to clean than cloth.”

“OK.” He tossed his keys to Rick while the back of his mind registered Grampa said *you* clean up.

“You better have enough gas. I’m not filling it up,” Rick said.

Sig just nodded weakly, unable to come up with a retort, then climbed into Grampa Thor’s pickup, and leaned his head back.

“You don’t look so good,” Grampa said when he settled into the driver seat.

“Be better when I get home and change back to battle form. I heal faster that way, but you know that.” Grampa had formerly been a Battle Wizard until the now dead Heathcoat twin had cast a spell placing him into a coma. “How’d you know to come to the Amazons’ home?”

“I heard you and Giselle holler and run out,” Grampa said. “I tried to follow, but got lost.”

“Shoulda used the GPS I got you.”

“Damned new-fangled gadget, I forgot how to work it,” Grampa said angrily then changed topics. “Why’d you change to human form?”

“I don’t know. I woke up changed—with the griffin squashing me flat.”

“That’s not right,” Grampa said. “Battle Wizards retain form even when unconscious.”

“That’s what you always told me, but I’ve never been unconscious in that form.”

“Mmm,” Grampa mused.

They rode the rest of the way home in silence. Sig tried to close his eyes on the pain. But it crept in behind his eyelids.

Grampa nudged him awake, the truck was already parked. “Need help?” Grampa asked.

Sig shook his head, climbed out, and said “Aðalbrandr”. Nothing happened. Fear clenched in his gut. Grasping his amulet he repeated it. This time it worked, but the change was slow. Slower than ever before. The feel of bones lengthening and muscles

## Dragon Eye by C.M. Lance

stretching was uncomfortable, almost painful. It had always been instantaneous and painless.

“Let’s go inside and find the Professor and Daisuke,” Grampa said, frowning. “There’s something wrong with you.”

Sig climbed the stairs to his room to shower and change, while Grampa went to find Professor Herman and Daisuke to describe the attack on the Amazon compound and explain the recent symptoms Sig experienced. Sig came downstairs in time to hear the end of Grampa’s recitation.

“How are you feeling?” the Professor asked.

“Better. But healing is slow.” He raised his arm, lifted his shirt, and looked down at the slashes made by the griffin’s claws on his torso. They were raw, ragged, and still weeping.

“You should be healed by now,” Grampa said.

“Do you think griffin magic is interfering?” Sig asked.

“I don’t know,” Grampa said. “This is my first griffin.”

“Really?”

“They’re extremely rare,” Grampa said. “It’s not like they’re around every corner, like trolls and demons, when you’re fighting dark magic.”

“Griffins have strong magic,” Daisuke said. “But I’ve never heard of one interfering with a Battle Wizard’s powers”

Nele walked into the study with Dorje. She looked much recovered. “Griffins are the only creatures that stood a chance against a dragon,” Nele said. “But they wouldn’t need magic to fight a Battle Wizard without his powers and are more likely to fight *against* black magic than with it.”

“Hey, I *killed* the griffin,” Sig said. “I’d say he needed magic.”

“It’s entirely feasible you could kill a griffin. In particular if it was a surprise attack.”

“Au contraire. It launched a surprise attack on me.”

Nele paused to consider. “Yours was an extremely commendable action and somewhat surprising.” Sig took note of her tactful answer and filed it for future use.

“Grandmother, do you think there was something wrong with the beast?” Daisuke asked.

“Sig’s healing power is having trouble coping with griffin wounds,” Grampa said.

“May I see?” she asked.

Sig raised his arm so Nele could examine the slashes.

She frowned and tsked at the injury. “I need to see the animal.”

“The Amazons were going to dispose of it,” Sig said.

“Stop them,” Nele said. “I must examine it.”

Professor Herman pulled out a cellphone and his finger raced over the keys. “Hello, Giselle, what have you done with the griffin? ... I see.” He held the phone away. “It was

## Dragon Eye by C.M. Lance

butchered. They are burning it on the bonfire with the dead trolls. They wanted to dispose of the remains as soon as possible before they attracted unwanted attention.”

“Can they save the claws?” Nele asked.

The Professor repeated the question to Giselle, then relayed, “They saved them to make a necklace.”

“Bring them here,” Nele said. “Be cautious. They may be dangerous.”

Giselle arrived a half hour later with a large Tupperware container that rattled when she set it on the kitchen island. “Two of our ladies became sick after nicking their hands on these. They’re extremely sharp. You can keep the container. I don’t want it back.”

Daisuke picked up the container. “I’ll take this to the basement where Grandmother can examine them. She may need to see the sick Amazons.”

Sig, Rick, and Giselle adjourned to the dining room to finish the meal they had abandoned when they were notified of the attack on the Amazons. Nele, Daisuke, and Grampa arrived to find them working on the final course, a chocolate mint cake they’d sliced into three pieces.

“Did you find out anything?” Giselle asked. Sig’s and Rick’s mouths were full.

“The griffin’s talons were coated with a potion which weakens magic,” Nele said.

“Someone must have spelled the poor beast to work in conjunction with the trolls—natural enemies of griffins,” Daisuke said. “But whoever—or whatever—did it also applied a potion that cripples magic—the griffin’s magic as well as that of anyone it attacked.”

“So Sig’s healing powers have been disrupted,” Rick mumbled while swallowing a mouthful of cake.

“And the griffin was weakened as well,” Sig said. Although concerned about his recovery from the attack, he’d taken satisfaction in defeating a griffin. Now that victory was tainted, too.

“The poison will continue to weaken you until it removes your ability to change,” Nele said.

The expression on Giselle’s and Grampa’s faces reflected the horror that overwhelmed Sig’s core.

“Grandmother can prepare an antidote,” Daisuke said. “But it will be difficult. The poison is steeped in black magic and the counter spell requires rare ingredients.”

Sig felt whipsawed. Despair overlaid hope. “I don’t want you to endanger yourself.” He said to Nele. “Is there anything I can do to help?”

“Or me!” Rick and Giselle echoed together.

“The difficulty lies in the components,” Daisuke said. “Two are rare indeed. One can only be found at the source of the Amazon—in the rain forest at the foot of the Andes.”

“Then send an Amazon to fetch it,” Giselle said raising her hand.

Sig struggled to smile at her.

## Dragon Eye by C.M. Lance

"The other, a crimson rose, must be sought in the valley of the Siachen glacier," Nele said.

"We can do that," Rick said, surging to his feet.

"But I estimate you have no more than five days to assemble the ingredients, before the loss of magic becomes permanent."

A few moments ago, Sig hadn't thought he could feel any worse.



"Why do you get the tropical location and I have to climb a glacier?" Rick asked Giselle after they finished Googling the ingredients Nele wanted.

"Werewolves have a natural fur coat," she said. "Besides I'm an Amazon. The plant we need is in the Amazon...duh. My name is all over this job."

Sig knew his friends were using humor to try to keep his spirits up and he appreciated it, but it wasn't working. "We have to go to a pair of faraway, fairly inaccessible locations and don't have much time. It makes sense to split up. How do we get there?"

"Nele has offered her private jet," Dorje said. "I'll drop Sig, Grampa, and Rick as close as I can get to the glacier then Giselle and I will continue to the Andes. The rest of the journey to the glacier will be the most difficult. It is in the center of disputed lands between India and Pakistan."

"A little disagreement over land shouldn't cause problems," Rick said.

Dorje offered a chilling smile. "This dispute involves soldiers, artillery, and great hatred. Thankfully, neither has yet used their nuclear weapons. Besides the Hindus and Muslims not getting along, one never knows when the natives at the top or the bottom of the glacier will launch war on the others. It is a land of continuous, creeping war surrounded by snow, ice, and bitter cold. It is called the White Hell."

Professor Herman and Grampa came into the dining room which had been converted to a war room. "We've discovered a better route to the glacier," the Professor said. "There's a link to the wizard express."

"Through dimensional gateways like those we traveled to fight Heathcoat's demons?" Giselle asked.

"I hope it's a smoother trip than that one," Sig said. "Some of our people were killed."

"Every time I hear the rumble of a train going by I think of the dinosaur stampede," Rick said with a shudder.

"Smoother, well..." Grampa said.

"It hasn't been used in over fifty years because of the conflict," Professor Herman said. "We're not sure what it's like on the far side."

"My concern is the amount of time left may not be enough to recover the ingredients both in Asia and South America," Dorje said.

Sig nodded. "You're the pilot. You call it."

## Dragon Eye by C.M. Lance

"If you have an alternate route, Giselle and I will fly today to find the flowering moss Nele needs."

"Times a wastin', go," Grampa said. "We'll find the crimson roses in the White Hell."



Giselle, Dorje, and Daisuke departed for the airport, leaving Sig, Rick, and Grampa huddled with Professor Herman. "The dimensional portals you'll use for rapid long distance travel, which we nicknamed the wizard express, is straight forward until the last jump into Siachen valley."

"Straight forward doesn't mean without danger," Grampa said.

"Any trip into another dimension has risks, but travel is regular enough that the danger is known, quantified, and disseminated," the Professor said. "But no one has been through the last portal for decades because of the India-Pakistan dispute." The Professor raised his hands as if to frame the last word.

"So no one has traveled that dimension recently," Grampa mused. "The trip past the glacier to where the roses grow is also lengthy, which increases potential exposure to the warring armies."

"I have something to help with that," Nele said as she entered the war room. She held two pendants suspended from necklaces. "Concealment charms. I had these in my luggage. Never know when they'll come in handy."

"Just two?" Sig said. "Three of us are going."

Nele nodded to Sig. "Your grandfather, although no longer a battle wizard, is still a wizard. He can perform his own invisibility spell." She looked to Grampa Thor, who nodded. "A bit rusty, he said, but I'll practice on the way there."

"These two are for you," Nele said to Sig, "since your magic is compromised, and for Rick. While werewolves wear a four-legged disguise. This charm is an added precaution."

"Thank you, Nele," Grampa said and gathered up the notes he had taken showing the route to the roses. "We're ready to get your antidote components."

"Hurry, Sig doesn't have much time. Each day it will become harder and harder for him to change, until the ability stops forever."