



**T**he old woman smiles into the darkness.

Her cloak is already drenched, but still the rain beats at her back, drips from her hood, and streams over her hands, which cling to the cold tiles of the rooftop.

Port Fayt. At last.

She closes her eyes and breathes in deep, savoring the familiar tang of salt, sweat, and rotten fish that haunts every twisting, cobbled street.

*Ten years.* Can it really have been so long?

Port Fayt.

A flash of lightning reveals the town to her. The

bobbing mass of masts in the bay, where galleons rock beside wavecutters, hobgoblin junks, and dhows, half-scaled for crews ofimps. The clutter of buildings sprawling out from the harbor, clinging to the headlands on either side; their skyline a jumble of red-tiled roofs, chimneys, and wooden cranes. In the midst of it all, the gray dome and spire of the town hall in Thalin Square, and high up on the cliff top, the lighthouse, striped red and white like a child's lollipop.

The wind howls, and the rain batters the tiles. And still, the old woman smiles.

Port Fayt.

*The jewel of the Middle Islands*, they call it. A safe haven in the vastness of the Ebony Ocean. Each day, more creatures dare the long voyage here from the Old World, and every one of them can be sure of a welcome. Human or troll. Imp or elf. Here they are all just Fayters. Here they are all equal—or as equal as their wits can make them.

Port Fayt.

Crouched on the rooftop, the old woman drinks it in, recalling every detail. She remembers the chatter of the fairy market in the Marlinspike Quarter, the bragging of the merchants in the town hall and the bustle of Mer Way, Port Fayt's main artery, snaking more than a mile from

the docks to Thalin Square. She licks a drop of rainwater from her lips, and still, she smiles.

*How she hates it.*

Port Fayt.

She has come for it, at last.