**Journey to the Firelands**

by Mr Franklin

It was almost ten o'clock in the morning by the time Kres and Gelia had packed their hoverbike packs and were ready to leave their home in Elmereth. It was the day of the great market in Dustcreth and the perfect opportunity to sell the flintstone their family owned. At least that's what their mother hoped. The family were in need of money - a lot of money - to buy supplies before the icy season set in.

 As soon as they were ready, Kres and Gelia set off, riding their hoverbikes out of the village into the valleys of the Great Red Desert. The sky was clear and both suns cast overlapping shadows across the mountain-like dunes, providing cooling shade for the two children. It wasn't long before Gelia was up to her usual tricks and sped off into the distance, leaving Kres to trail behind.

 By the time he reached the market in Dustkreth, the suns were beating down hard. Kres weaved wearily in and out of the market stalls in search of water. His mouth was as dry as the desert he was standing in and nobody seemed to want to help.

 Just as he came to rest on a tent pole, Kres heard a sound behind him - the sound of splashing. Turning around, he saw a large rhinel slurping water from a large trough. Without hesitation he ran towards it, dropped to his knees and began scooping the brown, murky water into his mouth. The taste of it made him gag, but he was far too thirsty to care.

 Meanwhile, Gelia was having problems of her own. She had arrived an hour earlier than Kres and had been trying - but failing - to sell the flintstone. Every seller she took it to had laughed and told her there was no need for fire fuel in the centre of the Great Red Desert. She felt stupid and sunk to her knees with her head down and her eyes to the floor.

 Kres walked over and found her sobbing. He had good news.

"I spoke to the owner of the rhinel and he said that he didn't want any flintstone."

"That's what everybody has said. Why did we come to the middle of the desert to sell something to start fires with?" Gelia replied, wiping the tears from her cheek.

"Not to worry," Kres responded. "He also told me that beyond the horizon is the Firelands. He has just arrived from there and they are desperate for fire fuel like flintstone!"

 A glimmer of hope came across Gelia's face. She stood up, brushed the sand from her clothes and both the children made their way back to the hoverbikes. By now, the suns were almost setting. Kres and Gelia rode out of Dustkreth in the dim light along a track lined with lightpoles. In the distance they could see a bold, orange glow illuminating the sky where it had already become night.

 The lightpole track guided them the rest of the way, and when they arrived at the Firelands, the first thing that hit them was the sheer heat of the air. Back in Elmereth they were used to cold nights but here it was even warmer than daytime in the middle of the sun season. The whole village was surrounded by fire pits, each about the size of a lake, bubbling and smoking and crackling. The locals were frantically rushing around carrying buckets of blackrock and pouring it into the pits. It didn't seem to be doing anything though.

 It wasn't long before one of the locals had noticed these two outsiders standing and staring at what was happening. He rushed over, lowered his cloak hood and greeted them.

 "Hello younglings!" came a friendly but impatient voice. "You have come at such an awful time - our fire pits are dying down and it is ever so cold. We are trying desperately to reignite the fire beneath the ground but all we have is blackrock. As you can see, it is not making much of a difference."

 It was then that Kres realised what the rhinel-owner had meant. He plunged his hand into his bag and pulled out the flintstone. The local's eyes immediately widened and a great cry came from his mouth.

"Where did you get this?" he asked in amazement.

"We have brought it with us to sell. Our family are poor and we need money for the..."

"Well it's exactly what we need!" interrupted the man as he exchanged the sacred object for a heavy bag of coins and notes. Before there was time to count the money, the man was already running back to the pits.

 A crowd gathered around him and a great rejoice could be heard from where Kres and Gelia were standing. They decided not to stay and join the celebrations. They had got what they wanted and it was very late.

 "Mum will be worried about us," Kres said.

 "Not when she finds out how much money we have," Gelia responded, stuffing the bag into the pack on her hoverbike. "Now come on, it's a long ride back. Let's see if you can keep up this time!"