

Prince Ivan and the Fire-Breathing Dragons

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There once was a great kingdom guarded by three fire-breathing dragons. The king of this land had long ago made a deal with the dragons. In return for their protection, he agreed to give them his youngest daughter when she reached marriageable age. But when the time came to hand over his daughter, the king refused. She was very kind and beautiful and the king had grown quite fond of her. Instead, he offered the dragons his best cows and a portion of his kingdom. The dragons were very angry and did not accept the king's offer. They turned the entire kingdom into ice, including its inhabitants. Many men tried to rescue the princess but only the fire from the dragons could melt the ice.

In the thrice-ninth land of the thrice-tenth kingdom, there lived a young prince named Ivan. Ivan had heard of the ice kingdom and the beautiful princess frozen inside. He asked his father's permission and set off to rescue them. After traveling a long time or a short time, the prince lost his way. He came to a hut on chicken legs and said, "Little hut, little hut, stand with your back to the woods, and your front to me!" The hut turned around and Prince Ivan went inside. He found Baba Yaga asleep on the stove. She awoke and was very angry that Prince Ivan had disturbed her.

Baba Yaga warned the prince that if he did not leave immediately, she would cook him in her stove. The prince refused to leave until Baba Yaga told him how to get to the ice kingdom. But still she refused and told him to sit on her pan. Prince Ivan sat on the pan with his feet on the floor. “No, no that is not the way,” screeched Baba Yaga. “I do not understand. Show me,” the prince said. So Baba Yaga jumped up onto the pan and just as Prince Ivan was about to push her into the stove when she shouted, “Stop, stop! I will tell you where the ice kingdom is.” Prince Ivan released her and Baba Yaga told him how to get to the kingdom. She also gave him a magic sword to help him on his journey.

Prince Ivan set off again and, after a long time or a short time, he encountered the first dragon. The dragon had three heads and refused to let Ivan pass. Ivan said, “I am Prince Ivan. My father is King Petrov and I am here to find the mightiest dragon to guard his kingdom. In return the king agrees to give the dragon his youngest daughter.” The dragon said that he was the mightiest and would accompany Ivan back to his kingdom. But Prince Ivan told the dragon that he must prove his strength first. The dragon agreed and followed Ivan toward the ice kingdom.

After a long time or a short time, Ivan and the first dragon were stopped by a second dragon. This dragon had six heads and also refused to

let them pass. Ivan said, "I am Prince Ivan. My father is King Petrov and I am here to find the mightiest dragon to guard his kingdom. In return the king agrees to give the dragon his youngest daughter." The second dragon told Ivan that it was *he* who was the mightiest dragon. But Prince Ivan told him that he must prove his strength first. The second dragon agreed and followed Ivan and the first dragon toward the ice kingdom.

Again they travel for a long time or a short time before reaching the ice kingdom. But before they could get close, a third dragon brought them to a halt. This dragon had twelve heads and refused to let them pass. Ivan said, "I am Prince Ivan. My father is King Petrov and I am here to find the mightiest dragon to guard his kingdom. In return the king agrees to give the dragon his youngest daughter." The third dragon told Ivan that he was surely the mightiest dragon. Ivan told him that he must also prove his strength first. The third dragon agreed and asked Ivan how he would decide which of them was the mightiest. Prince Ivan said that whoever was able to melt the ice off the castle in one breath would return with him to guard the king's land.

The three-headed dragon tried first. He was only able to melt the ice off the surrounding crops and forest lands. Prince Ivan pulled out his magic sword and cut off the dragon's three heads in one slice. The six-headed

dragon went next. He was only able to melt the surrounding village but not the castle itself. Prince Ivan pulled out his magic sword and cut off the dragon's six heads in one slice. Finally, it was the twelve-headed dragon's turn. In one breath, he managed to melt the ice off the entire castle. But before he could claim his victory, Prince Ivan cut off his twelve heads in one slice.

The king of the ice kingdom was so grateful for Ivan's rescue that he offered him his youngest daughter in marriage. They were wed and there was a great feast for all. I was at that feast too, I drank mead and wine there; it ran down my mustache but did not go into my mouth.