

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: Finding the Tunnel

“This is impossible,” griped Darius. “Are you sure this is the place?”

Sam wiped sweat from his brow and looked at Fenton, “For once I agree with Darius. We’ve been looking for over an hour and we haven’t found anything that even *resembles* a tunnel entrance.”

Fenton shook his head, “It has to be here. The map shows the tunnel ending at these rocks. Stand back over there and you can see the profile of the face formed by the rocks. It’s the same one the map shows. We’re just missing something.”

“It did say that we had to wait until twilight, right?” asked Alexis. “Maybe we can’t see it until then.”

“Why are we even looking if it won’t show up until the sun goes down?” snapped Darius. He threw his hands up in the air. “We’ve been wasting our time.” He turned and walked away, muttering to himself. “Plus, I’d hide it behind the waterfall, not out here in the open.”

“It doesn’t say the sun has to be *down* to find the entrance,” Fenton said. He read aloud from the diary:

‘Ere twilight will be the time

The stars will show the way

Placed correctly, a door you’ll find

Enter the rear you may

Glip asked to see the diary and Fenton handed it to him. Glip looked at the page with the

picture of the fortress and the underground tunnel for some time.

He turned to Sam and asked, “What does this line about ‘placed correctly’ mean to you?”

Fenton jumped in and answered for Sam, “We thought it meant that we needed to be in the right place when the star appeared, so we could see what it was lighting. Then we’d find the entrance.”

“I’ve been thinking about that,” said Alexis. “You don’t *place* stars. They’re always in the same location. But over time they appear to move across the sky. So, it can’t be the stars in the sky. “Things change too much depending on the time of year. It has to mean something else.”

“You’re right,” said Sam. “Whoever wrote this would have been wise enough to make sure that whatever pointed to the entrance *wouldn’t* change.” He looked around for an answer. “It says to place a star.” He looked at the sky. “What else could it be?”

Fenton took the diary back from Glip and flipped through it until he landed on a collection of loose pieces of paper.

“What are those?” asked Sam.

“They were on the map page,” said Fenton. “But they were in the way, so I moved them. I thought they were just bookmarks or something. But I’m guessing they’re more than that.”

The paper appeared to be made of the same material as the diary pages, but only half the size. The pages contained no writing; just a section shaded in black ink on each page. Some displayed a lot of black, while others had as little as a corner darkened in. And every page also had a small hole burned into it.

Fenton dropped to his knees and set down the diary. He slowly pulled the pages out and shuffled through them. He separated them and laid out eight pages on the ground. Sam watched as he carefully took each one and overlapped the burned holes. When he placed the eighth one on

top, he slowly rotated the pages, one by one. As he did this, the others all gathered around and watched. They stood there silently, not wanting to break his concentration.

Fenton stopped rotating the individual pieces and sat back with a loud sigh. "It's not working," he muttered.

"What's not working?" asked Sam.

Fenton jumped at Sam's question. "Oh...uh...stupid idea. Total long shot. I thought the holes would overlap each other and then the pages could be arranged to make a star that could be placed over the map to show us where the entrance was," he rambled. "You know, '*The stars will show the way...Placed correctly...*' But it won't form a star. Nothing even close to a star."

"Maybe all the holes don't line up," interrupted Alexis. "Only some of them."

Fenton's eyes squinted. He focused on something beyond the pages, then slapped himself in the forehead and quickly spread all the pages out again. Then, one by one he overlapped the pages again. He talked to himself as he worked, "Place the star correctly...duh!" He continued to lay the pages down on top of each other. A couple times he slid a page in between two others. As the rest of the group watched, they saw the shaded sections slowly taking the shape of a star.

Sam pointed to one of the pages off to the side and opened his mouth to help, but Glip rested a hand on his outstretched hand. He smiled broadly at Sam and shook his head. Sam understood and lowered his hand. He glanced at Alexis and saw a wide grin spread across her face as she watched Fenton finish the puzzle.

Fenton placed the last page on top and a complete star lay on the ground in front of them. In addition, the eight half-pages now aligned as a full-sized page from the diary. They could see the ground through one set of burned holes that lined up. Fenton flipped back to the page with the dotted-line map and carefully laid the star-page on top of the map. Fenton picked up some

dirt and sprinkled it over the one shared hole. He lifted the star-page away and pointed to the pile of dirt lying in the middle of the dotted-line path. Directly behind the waterfalls.

Fenton beamed. "That's where the entrance is," he said triumphantly.

"Right where I told you," mocked Darius. "Hmmm... 'more important than the rest of you...'" he said quietly.

Fenton looked up into the sky and saw the sun was starting to fall behind the tree line. He placed the loose pages back in the diary, closed it and stood up. "By the looks of it, we don't have much time," he said. His enthusiasm had clearly faded as a result of Darius' comment. "We'd better hurry if we're going to be there when the sun goes down." He turned without another word and started running down the path toward the falls.

Sam looked at the others, shrugged his shoulders and said, "Well...let's get going."

Everyone but Darius ran toward the waterfalls as fast as their legs would carry them. Sam glanced back and saw that Darius jogged at his own pace, intentionally avoiding the others.

Once there, the others looked up at the sheer cliff face rising hundreds of feet above them. Water cascaded over the top edge of the cliff and dropped about fifty feet onto an outcropping of rock. It then ran down a channel carved into the face of the cliff until it split. Some of the water dropped another ten feet, while the rest continued down the channel until it came to another drop. The water continued this pattern, separating and zigzagging its way down the cliff, climaxing in a series of a dozen booming waterfalls that crashed into the small pond in front of them. The mist at the bottom of the falls filled the entire edge of the pond, obscuring the path that ran behind the falling water.

The path bent around the waterfall and ducked under a portion of the cliff. It almost looked like a section of the cliff had been carved away so the path could continue behind the

water. The “ceiling” over the path stretched at least twenty feet high and, like the cliff face, was solid rock. A similar path ran behind each individual waterfall.

“How about we split up?” said Sam. “Fenton, Alex and I will look behind the first waterfall for the entrance, and the rest of you look behind the last one,” said Sam. “If we don’t find it quickly, we’ll move on to the next one. Hopefully someone finds it before we meet in the middle.”

“Sounds good to me,” said Horis.

“Me too,” agreed Skoog.

Glip nodded, “Good idea, Master Sam.”

Darius folded his arms and gritted his teeth, “Fine. I’ll go with the munchkins.”

The Grinks and Darius walked to the far waterfall and disappeared behind it, while the three friends stopped behind the first one. After a few minutes of fruitless searching they moved on to the next one. They crawled on their hands and knees, scouring the damp ground and the cliff face for anything that looked like an entrance.

Alexis paused in her search and sat up on her knees, looking at the waterfall. The sun’s rays cast an eerie glow through the mist. As the sun went down Alexis watched the sunlight begin to morph. It changed from a dim light into brilliant colors that danced as the mist swirled around. She followed the colors as they formed individual prisms that moved in the air and landed on the rock wall behind her. What she saw made her freeze. She reached over and tapped Sam’s shoulder.

“Sam,” she said in barely a whisper. “Look at the wall.”

Sam raised his head and glanced at the wall. He too froze. “Fenton...Alex found something.”

“Good, I was beginning to worry that Darius might—” Fenton stopped in mid-sentence.

The three knelt on the path, watching the individual prisms of light, slowly moving around on the wall. Rainbows of light covered the wall. They waved back and forth as the cascading waterfall reflected the sunlight in constantly changing patterns. As the sun dipped lower, the lights rose up the wall and began to be less scattered. They shimmered against the stone wall and gently moved toward each other. They gathered in six groups of lights forming a rough circle high up on the wall. They slowly slid along the rock wall toward the center of the circle, joining together and completely illuminating one fist-sized rock. Even as the sun continued its downward trek, the lights remained on that one rock. The three looked back and forth from the wall to the water cascading into the pond behind them.

“It’s beautiful,” said Alexis.

“How’s it doing that?” asked Sam.

Fenton narrowed his eyes and pursed his lips. He looked intently at the prism, and then stared for a great while at the mist all around the base of the waterfall. “I don’t know. It’s got to have something to do with the curve of this wall. It’s refracting the light onto the wall as the mist swirls around.” He pointed back toward the other cut-outs. “Look how different this one is from the others. Those all look like someone chopped out just enough to make a rough path. This one is smooth and symmetrical. Whoever carved out this path knew what they were doing.”

He pointed at the rock highlighted by the prism of light. “That must be the way to open the tunnel.”

“But how are we going to reach it?” asked Alexis.

Sam pulled his sword free and stabbed for the rock but couldn’t come close. Alexis unslung her bow and stretched as far as she could, but still came up short. “This isn’t going to

work,” she said. “It’s too high.”

Fenton rushed out from behind the waterfall and came back a few seconds later with a handful of rocks. Darius and the Grinks followed him. They stood back and watched as Fenton, Sam and Alexis threw rocks at the wall. After a dozen missed shots, Darius shook his head, bent down, picked up a stone, wound up and threw it at the rock embedded in the wall. His aim was straight and true. But inches before it hit its target, one of Fenton’s stones collided with it. They both careened off in different directions.

“You dork!” said Darius. He turned and walked away in a huff.

“Loser,” muttered Fenton as he picked up another rock and threw it.

Unseen by anyone, Glip slowly stepped behind Alexis. He slowly reached into the quiver of arrows on her back as she knelt to pick up another rock. He pulled a few arrows loose and held them at his side and waited.

They soon depleted the pile of stones and Sam held the last one. He tossed it in his hand a couple times, then pulled back and let it fly. It whistled through the air as it headed toward the target. Horis and Skoog held their breath, eyes wide with anticipation. The stone connected with the very edge of the rock in the wall. They waited...and nothing happened. Sam hung his head in defeat.

“I thought that one would do it,” he said. “Let’s get more and keep trying. Unless someone else has any bright ideas.” He looked expectantly at Glip as he said the last part.

Glip looked at him, then at the back of Alexis. She stared intently at the lone rock in the wall. Glip took one of the arrows by the point and held it over Alexis’ right shoulder, then slowly began to lower it. When it touched her shoulder Alexis’ right hand shot up and grabbed the arrow between her first two fingers. At the same time, her left hand brought the bow up from her side

and met the arrow as she whipped it down. She instinctively notched the arrow into the bow, pulled back and let it fly faster than anyone could blink. Everyone's heads turned as one to watch the arrow fly straight and true. It struck the rock in the exact center and pushed it partway into the wall. As the arrow fell to the ground they saw a second one streaking toward the rock. Sam turned to look at Alexis as he heard the second arrow strike its target. He watched as Glip held out the third arrow, Alexis took it without ever taking her eyes off the rock, notched it and let it fly just as easily as the first two. Sam spun back to watch the third arrow fall to the ground after hitting the rock. The rock was now depressed almost completely into the wall.

"How...? When did...? Have you always...?" Fenton kept interrupting himself trying to get a question out, but Sam didn't say a word. He just looked back and forth between Alexis and the rock wall.

A squeak from Horis grabbed his attention. He turned to see Horis holding Skoog by the shoulders.

"The prophecy! The part about the bow."

Skoog's mouth slowly dropped open and he started nodding faster and faster.

Horis continued,

"When The Four return

How will you know?

The tallest of them

Will be great with a bow"

Skoog kept nodding, his smile widening as he stared at Alexis. And then the ground began rumbling and his grin evaporated. The entire group backed away from the waterfall as the ground shook and the volume increased.

To Sam's amazement, the water cascading over his head gradually reduced to a trickle. When he could see through the water, he realized that every waterfall was slowing. However, the river running away from the pond continued, causing the water level in the pond to lower quickly. The decreasing water level revealed steps at the water's edge, just inside the impact zone of the waterfall he stood behind. And as the water receded he saw what caused the rumbling. A large slab of rock, no more than two inches thick, rose from the bottom of the pond, separating the rest of the water from the steps. When it had risen well beyond the level of the water, it stopped.

Not sure what to do, the seven stood at the edge of the pond, staring at the water gently sloshing back and forth against the steps. As if enough hadn't already happened, they watched as the water suddenly fell away like a drain had opened below it. The steps no longer led into the water, but underground. "I believe we have found your secret tunnel," said Glip.

Fenton said, "This is so cool. Nobody is ever going to believe us."

"I don't believe it," said Alexis.

Sam looked at the others and took a step toward the tunnel. "What are we waiting for?" He turned and walked down the steps, but nobody else moved. He looked up at them, "My dad only has one day to live. Come on!" That snapped everyone out of their shock and they followed him.

Alexis descended directly behind him. As she walked down the steps she looked over at the large slab to her right, then up to the top of the cliff where the waterfall should be crashing down. She whispered, "How was all this built? And by who?"

"Whom," said Fenton.

"Huh?" said Alexis.

“It’s *whom*,” said Fenton. “By *whom*. Not, ‘By *who*’”

Darius smacked Fenton on the back of the head, “Whom cares?” he said sarcastically.

“Just get down there. I don’t want to be standing here when that waterfall starts back up.”