

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: Beisan

As they walked, they discussed the diary. Pride poured from Horis and Skoog as they talked about its author. “Wirt is the greatest prophet ever. All his prophecies have either been proven true, or have not come to pass yet,” said Skoog.

“I hope I’m alive to see the rest of them fulfilled,” said Horis.

Fenton asked, “Is he still alive?”

Glip replied, “Some think he has passed on. But I believe he is still with us. As Skoog said, many of the things he wrote in the diary that you carry,” he pointed to Sam’s pack, “have not happened yet. Some are very important to Decapolis as a whole. Some are important to the Grinks. And others are not understood by anyone and are possibly the most important of all.”

Fenton asked, “Can I see the diary, Sam?”

“Sure,” said Sam. He reached into his pack, pulled it out and handed it to Fenton.

The familiar blue glow emanated from the book when Fenton opened it. He flipped through the pages until he came to one with a lot of writing. “Ok, Glip. Tell me if this one has been fulfilled.” He cleared his throat and then read aloud:

Wings give flight if you enter his lair

Draw close to him, but only if you dare

Violent flames erupt around

Death will come...you it will hound

The air seemed to grow colder as Fenton finished reading. He slowly closed the diary and tied the string around it. He handed it to Sam who replaced it into his pack. Only then did Fenton notice he had stopped walking. The others, too, stood still — fear having frozen their feet to the

ground.

Glip broke the silence, “To my knowledge, that one has not happened. But it may not be prophecy at all. It is possibly just poetry.”

“Great!” snapped Darius placing a hand on his sword. “Pick the one about dragons killing people.”

“Do not worry,” said Glip. “Dragons have not been seen in Decapolis for hundreds of years.” He motioned toward the path. “We should continue.”

Reluctantly, the other six began plodding along the path, all conversations finished.

The next couple of hours continued this way as they each retreated into their own thoughts. The thought of sneaking into the fortress of one of the scariest people to ever roam this world became more nerve-wracking as they dwelt on it. They continued walking through the forest, heading toward something that caused each of them to feel a great weight growing heavier and heavier on their shoulders. None of them could put into words what they felt.

Fenton broke the long silence, whispering to Sam and Alexis, “Are you guys scared?”

“Terribly,” came the combined voices of Horis and Skoog ahead of them. “But with The Four Warriors leading us, we won’t fail. I’m sure of it,” said Horis with confidence.

“Yes,” said Skoog. “Listen to the small one’s voice, it repeats itself so you make the right choice. And Horis says to let you lead and we’ll be ok...so I’ll let you lead. I trust Horis, Horis trusts Glip, Glip believes the council, so that’s it. You’re The Four Warriors, you will lead us and we will be ok.” Skoog paused and then blurted out, “Hey! I’m not scared anymore.” Everyone laughed at this, except for Darius who was too far behind to hear.

Glip stopped the group and pointed off into the distance. “There it is,” he said. “That is where Kendra is being held.”

Skoog's voice squeaked. "Never mind. I'm scared again."

They stood on a small ridge overlooking the forest. Off to their right they could see what appeared to be an old stone building. It reached above the tops of the trees, so Sam judged it to be at least a couple stories high. It was as solid as anything he had ever seen and appeared to be growing right out of the forest itself. The walls that were visible butted so tightly against the trees that Sam couldn't make out the entire structure. But he could tell how massive it was, because of the *number* of places it reached above the treetops. It covered an amazing amount of ground. And there appeared to be tall towers in each corner.

He determined that it stood roughly square, with each corner built higher than the rest of the walls. The roof of the stronghold was all stone and the portions of the upper wall that poked through the trees displayed parapets that ran around the four sides of the structure.

Skoog shuddered visibly when he spotted the fortress. "Are we sure we want to do this?" he quaked.

Darius slapped a hand down on Skoog's shoulder from behind, causing him to yelp loudly. "Sounds like fun to me," he said. "Who wouldn't want to attack an invincible fortress!"

Skoog backed away from him and moved over behind Sam and Alexis.

"He speaks," taunted Fenton.

Darius spun on Fenton, his fists balled, ready for a fight.

"Enough," commanded Glip. He pointed a finger at both Fenton and Darius. "Now is not the time."

"All right," conceded Fenton.

"Whatever," muttered Darius. He smacked Fenton across the head as he turned away.

"Jerk!" snapped Fenton, who instinctively responded with a swing of his own, missing

badly. Sam watched the pent-up frustration and anger in Darius explode and knew he couldn't stop him this time. Darius spun, using his whole body to propel his fist. He connected squarely with Fenton's face. Fenton crumpled into a heap, holding his left eye. Without any remorse, Darius turned to leave.

Faster than any of them thought possible, Glip stepped around in front of Darius, cutting him off as he began to walk away. Unseen by anyone, Glip managed to pull Darius' sword from its sheath and now held it pointed directly at Darius' chest. Sam and Alexis both gasped in awe. From the ground, Fenton whispered, "Whoa." Horis and Skoog froze, their mouths hanging open.

"You have something to say to Fenton," said Glip.

"Uh...I...uh..." Darius stammered.

"Say it." Glip moved the sword tip closer to his chest. "Now!"

"I'm...I'm sorry." He lowered his eyes. "I'll back off."

Glip poked him lightly with the point of the sword. "You are going to do more than back off, young one. I have put up with your insolence long enough. No more scaring Horis and Skoog. And no more turning your back on your companions." With each statement, he poked Darius with his own sword. "As you have just experienced, not everything is as it seems. You would do well to remember that. You turned your back on an ally and were disarmed. Imagine if, through your arrogance, you turned your back on an enemy. He would do more than remove your sword and lecture you."

Glip turned to the others and said, "And that goes for the rest of you." Glip faced Darius again, flipped the sword in the air, deftly grabbed the blade as it spun and held the handle out to Darius. "So I ask you again. Do you understand?"

Darius slowly took the sword from Glip, wide-eyed and humbled. He carefully replaced it in its sheath and said, “Yes, I understand.”

“Good,” replied Glip. “You will cease to antagonize each other until this is over.” He looked from one to the other. “Are we clear?” There was no mistaking the tone of his voice. This was not a question—it was an order.

Immediately, Glip turned to Sam, “What does the diary show about the secret entrance to the fortress?”

As if a spell had been broken, the others all snapped their attention from Darius to Glip. Sam paused, registering what Glip asked, and then looked at Fenton, “You figured it out. Where do we need to go?”

Fenton got off up from the ground took the diary from Sam’s pack and flipped through the glowing pages back to the map. At the bottom of the page, drawn with a careful hand, was a rectangular shape labeled *Beisan*. Trees closely surrounded it, exactly like the fortress in the distance. A river ran through the trees, with the head of the river starting in a pond formed by a number of waterfalls cascading off a steep cliff. The map showed a path that ran alongside the river, appeared to go behind the waterfalls and then continued until it reached the end of the page.

“The tunnel comes in on the far side of the fortress. It goes under that huge field in the distance.” The others squinted and peered toward the sun. “Then it winds its way toward some waterfalls out there.”

“I know where that is!” exclaimed Skoog.

The group peered down at the excited little Grink. “When I was young, we would go there and jump off the waterfalls into the water. It’s so much fun! We’ll have to do that when we

get there. I'll show you the best jumping place. And the water is so deep that you feel like you're going down forever. And if you float on the surface, you can slide from one pond to another. And there are paths behind the waterfalls that let you see what the water looks like from the other side."

Alexis placed a hand on his shoulder and he stopped talking. "Skoog," she said sweetly, "we probably won't have time to play. And we really need to get there quickly. Can you show us the way?" He nodded vigorously.

"And then show us where this rock formation is," said Fenton, pointing to the first big "X" next to the face-rocks.

"Of course!" Skoog looked toward the fortress, squinted toward the horizon, then pointed down the ridge toward the left. "We'll go this way. If we go across that field, someone might see us. So we'll run around the edge of it. It will take us across the dry channels, so I can show you how we used to get to the top of the waterfalls. And we'll use the paths behind the waterfalls to get to the face-rocks." He bounded away, leading them down the path. "You're going to love it!"

"Where's the entrance?" Alexis asked Fenton.

"We think it's right here." Fenton pointed at the first "X" below the face-rocks. "We just need to look for the opening somewhere by this group of boulders. The underground tunnel leads from these rocks to the fortress."

Alexis looked over his shoulder and asked, "How do you know it's an underground tunnel?"

Fenton looked at her disapprovingly, "Because on a map dotted lines *always* represent areas that are concealed or underground."

Alexis rolled her eyes. "Boys," she muttered.

“As I recall, you’re the one who didn’t want to play Dungeons and Dragons with us,” Fenton said. “If you had, you’d know that.”

Sam laughed, “Ok then. Let’s go find the entrance to that tunnel. It shouldn’t be too hard to find.”