

PROLOGUE

Three figures emerged from the old wooden barn. They stood no more than four feet tall which, by itself, wouldn't be anything out of the ordinary. However, their bluish-gray bodies and long pointy ears would definitely be cause for alarm. Thankfully, the fading daylight hid their features. The barn sat tucked just over a ridge on a small hill, and as the creatures walked toward the edge of the hill the first one spoke.

"We must move quickly, while it is dark," he said. He reached up and touched one of his ears, "This land does not have Grinks and its people would not react well if they were to see us."

"But The Warriors will be glad to see us, right Glip?" asked the second, the tallest and thinnest of the three.

"I do not believe so," replied the first. "They will not know us. They have not been to our land before."

"But what about the histories?"

"And the prophecies?" asked the third, a stocky version of the other two.

"The Warriors they speak of lived long ago. These ones are young - only thirteen years old."

They reached an area where they could look down the hill toward a small city in the distance. The leader, Glip, motioned toward it. "This world is very different from ours," he said. "It is much more advanced. And there are many more people than in Decapolis."

The other two Grinks stared down at the city. Glowing lights outlined homes, shops, and dozens of other buildings. A small baseball field blazed with light as children played and parents cheered. The illuminated steeple of a church's bell tower shone for blocks. And just beyond the church, flickering lights outlined a footpath that wound through a large park.

But separated from everything else, between them and the city, stood two homes. They were at either end of a dirt road that stretched around the hill. The homes weren't far from the city but had obviously been built with the intent of living away from the hub of activity.

"They are down there," said the leader, looking at the two houses. "I will get the three."

"And we will gather the fourth," said the shorter creature.

"Yes, Horis. The portal you need is located at that park." He pointed to the park on the far side of the church.

Horis nodded, then froze, "That building with the tall spire. It looks like the chapel at King Adair's castle."

"Yes. There are many similar things." He pointed to the barn they had just exited.

"Whoa," said Horis. "It's just like the one in Decapolis." Horis looked toward the city and across to a larger mountain in the distance. His eyes grew wide. "Whoa," he said again.

Then the third Grink whispered his own, "Whoa..." Glip and Horis turned to the tallest of the three. His head slowly swiveled back and forth, taking in the entire scope of the town. The numerous lights captured his attention most of all.

"There are so many torches. How do they make them burn so bright? And how are some of them burning downward? Are they wizards? Do they have the ability to make fire burn in any direction?" He looked into the distance and saw a coastline. "Can they make it burn in the water? Under the water?!"

His mouth dropped open. "And what are those?" He pointed toward a line of cars moving down a road. "How do they make them move without horses?"

"Skoog," said the leader. There was no response as Skoog's head maintained its constant motion, trying to take it all in. "Skoog," Glip said again as he stepped in front of him, blocking

his view. Skoog tried to look around him, but then stopped and made eye contact. “There is much wonder in this world,” said Glip. Skoog nodded. “And the Warriors will think the same when they reach Decapolis.”

Skoog took a step back, “They will see our world like I see theirs?”

“In a way, yes.”

Skoog’s head started bobbing up and down. “Then we must hurry. I want to show them everything!”

Glip smiled. “Go with Horis.” He looked at the bag slung over Horis’ shoulder. “He has everything you will need. And remember, you must not be seen by anyone other than the one you are retrieving.”

Skoog nodded. “Of course! You know how good Horis and I are at spying on people and staying hidden. We will get The Warrior and meet Fingal at the park, just like you asked.”

“Good. Now go. I will meet you back at the barn.”

Horis and Skoog hurried down the hill toward the city. Glip gave them a few minutes head start, then turned toward one of the lone homes on the hill. He took a deep breath and headed toward it.

CHAPTER ONE: Beginnings

“NO! Leave me alone!”

A young boy crashed to his back, sliding on the grass. He looked up scornfully at three boys, each larger than him. He tried to get up, but one of the trio shoved him back down. The boy scrambled backward, trying to put some distance between him and the three brutes.

“Stay down, *Fenton*,” the bully said. He wasn’t the biggest of the three but was clearly the leader. “*Fenton*,” he mocked again. “It even *sounds* stupid.”

He stepped toward the boy, kicking aside a butterfly net as he did. “Did your parents not have the brains to come up with a normal name?” He lashed out with his foot, kicking Fenton in the stomach. “Oh, that’s right. You don’t have real parents. You’re *adopted*.” He glanced at the other two bullies and they laughed approvingly at his taunting.

Fenton lifted his chin, a smirk visible through the pain, “Seriously? That’s how you’re going to make fun of me? That I’m adopted, and my name sounds funny? You’re an idiot,” he laughed. “You don’t have parents either. And your name is *Darius*.”

Unprepared for this brave response, the bullies froze. The other two, Flat-top and Rings as Fenton thought of them, due to one’s haircut and the other’s numerous rings in his left ear, looked to Darius for a reaction. Fenton used this distraction to get to his feet. Darius stopped laughing, grabbed Fenton by the front of his shirt and shoved him against a tree. Fenton’s head made a hollow *thunk* when it connected.

Darius’ face twisted into a snarl and the shadows made his eyes appear completely black. “That’s right. I get to do whatever I want. No stupid parents telling me what to do.”

Holding Fenton against the tree, he pulled back his other fist to hit him in the face. But as he started his swing, a hand grabbed his wrist and stopped him

“Wha..?” Darius spun around and found himself face to face with another boy his age. A girl stood beside him.

“Stay out of this, Sam” he growled.

“Ok. Then stop picking on my friend,” replied Sam. He released Darius’ wrist and looked him in the eye. “Leave him alone and go pick on someone else.” Sam’s arms hung loosely at his

sides, but each hand balled into a fist, ready if needed. Sam walked around Darius, never breaking eye contact, to stand next to Fenton. “Better yet,” he said, “don’t pick on anybody.”

Darius blew out his breath in disgust and jerked his head toward the street.

“Come on guys, let’s get out of here. It just turned into Dorksville.” He walked around his two followers and headed across the grass.

Flat-top shouldered Fenton, knocking backward into the tree again, and followed Darius. Rings, who was walking past the girl, laughed as Fenton yelped.

With a gentle tap of her left foot, the girl bumped Rings’ right foot as it came off the ground. His foot swung behind his left leg, colliding with his ankle as he took his next step. Tripping himself, he lost his balance and tumbled forward, grabbing the back of Flat-top as he went down. The two of them landed in a heap on the grass.

Darius looked back and glared at them. “Get up you morons.”

Flat-top pushed Rings off him and jumped to his feet, his hands clenched. Rings looked back at the girl as he picked himself up. She cocked her head and smiled sweetly at him.

Fenton knew the kid was stuck. He couldn’t say or do anything. He had just been bested by a girl but couldn’t admit it in front of Darius. Rings turned away quickly and pushed Flat-top toward Darius.

With one final dig, Darius looked at the girl, “Hey, Alexis. Too bad *you* weren’t the one who grabbed my hand. I would have liked that.” He winked at her and turned away.

“You wish!” she said.

Darius just laughed. “Someday,” he called over his shoulder. “Just wait. You’ll realize how awesome I am.” His two buddies slapped Darius on the back in agreement.