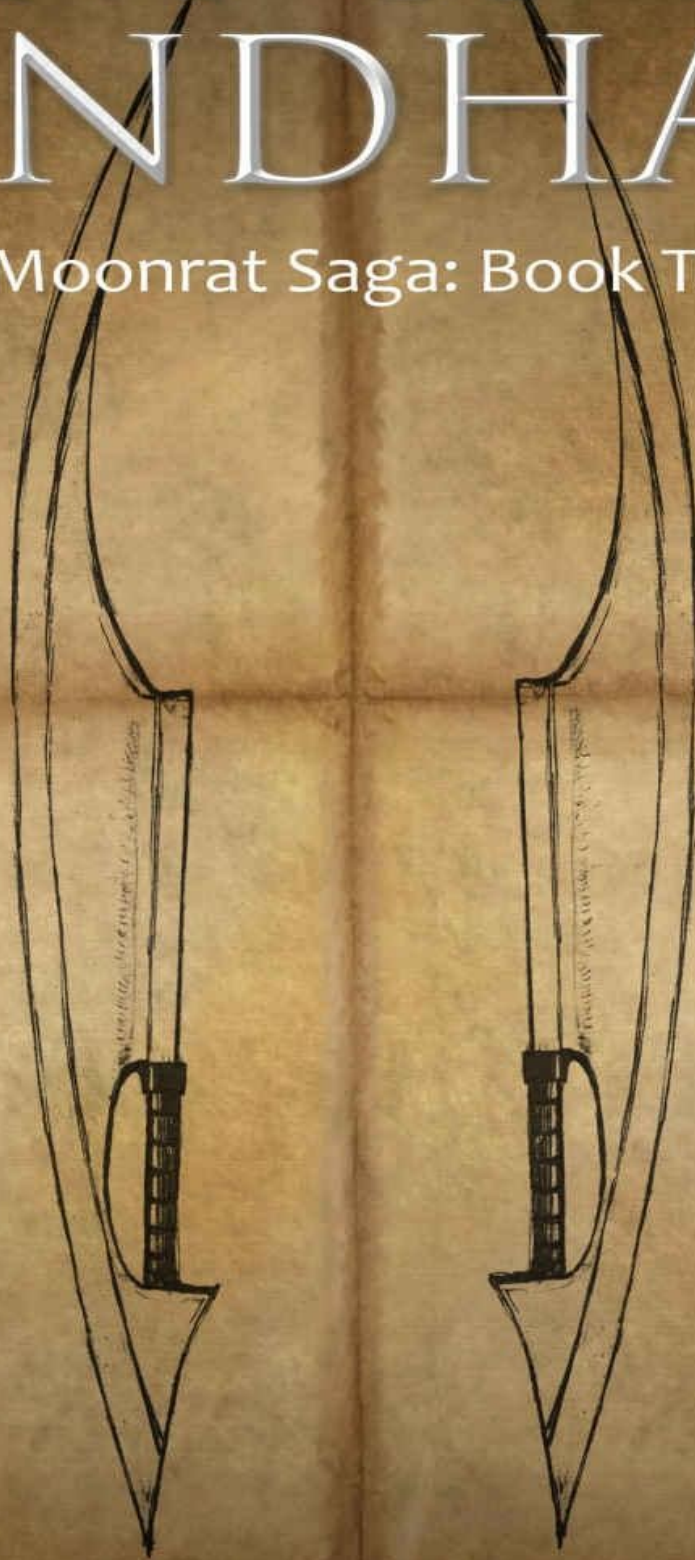


HUNT OF THE BANDHAM

The Moonrat Saga: Book Three

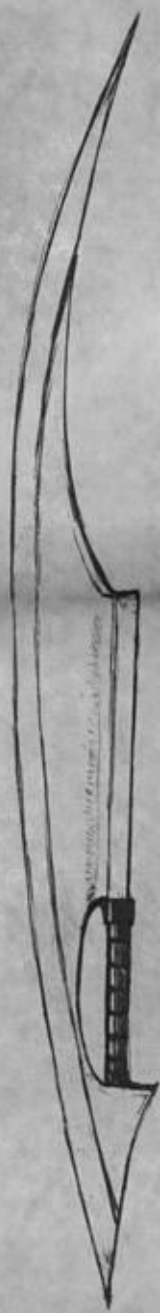


TREVOR H. COOLEY

The Bowl of Souls: Book Three

HUNT of the BANDHAM

By: Trevor H. Cooley



The Bowl of Souls Series:

The Moonrat Saga:

Book One: EYE of the MOONRAT

Book 1.5 : HILT'S PRIDE

Book Two: MESSENGER of the DARK PROPHET

Book Three: HUNT of the BANDHAM

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The Jharro Grove Saga:

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Book Seven: **Protector of the Grove**

Book Eight: **The Ogre Apprentice**

Book Nine: **The Troll King (2015)**

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to you. Yes, specifically you, the reader who has taken a chance on a relatively unknown author and spent your hard-earned money on my first two books. Here you are back for the third and . . . I love you.

I tried for years to get my book noticed, but I couldn't find any agents or publishers that were interested. Some friends encouraged me to publish on my own, but I felt like my books wouldn't be successful unless I had a publisher's name on the spines like the fantasy novels I grew up reading. The story and these characters had been living in my mind since I was a teenager. I wanted to give them the chance they deserved, and I worried that by putting them out there on my own I would be devaluing them somehow.

One night in May 2012, I was researching about publishing books on Kindle. I downloaded the instructions and it felt right, so I just did it. It was a whim. I didn't even have a cover at the time. I had no idea what to expect. I told my friends and family about it and downloads started to trickle in. When I put out the second book two months later, that trickle became a stream.

I am blown away every time I think about it. You noticed my book. You read it. Some of you care enough to tell your friends and write reviews. Those reviews are the lifeblood of an independent book series! Thank you, and please keep doing what you're doing. I'll get going on the next book.

Trevor H. Cooley - 09/04/2012

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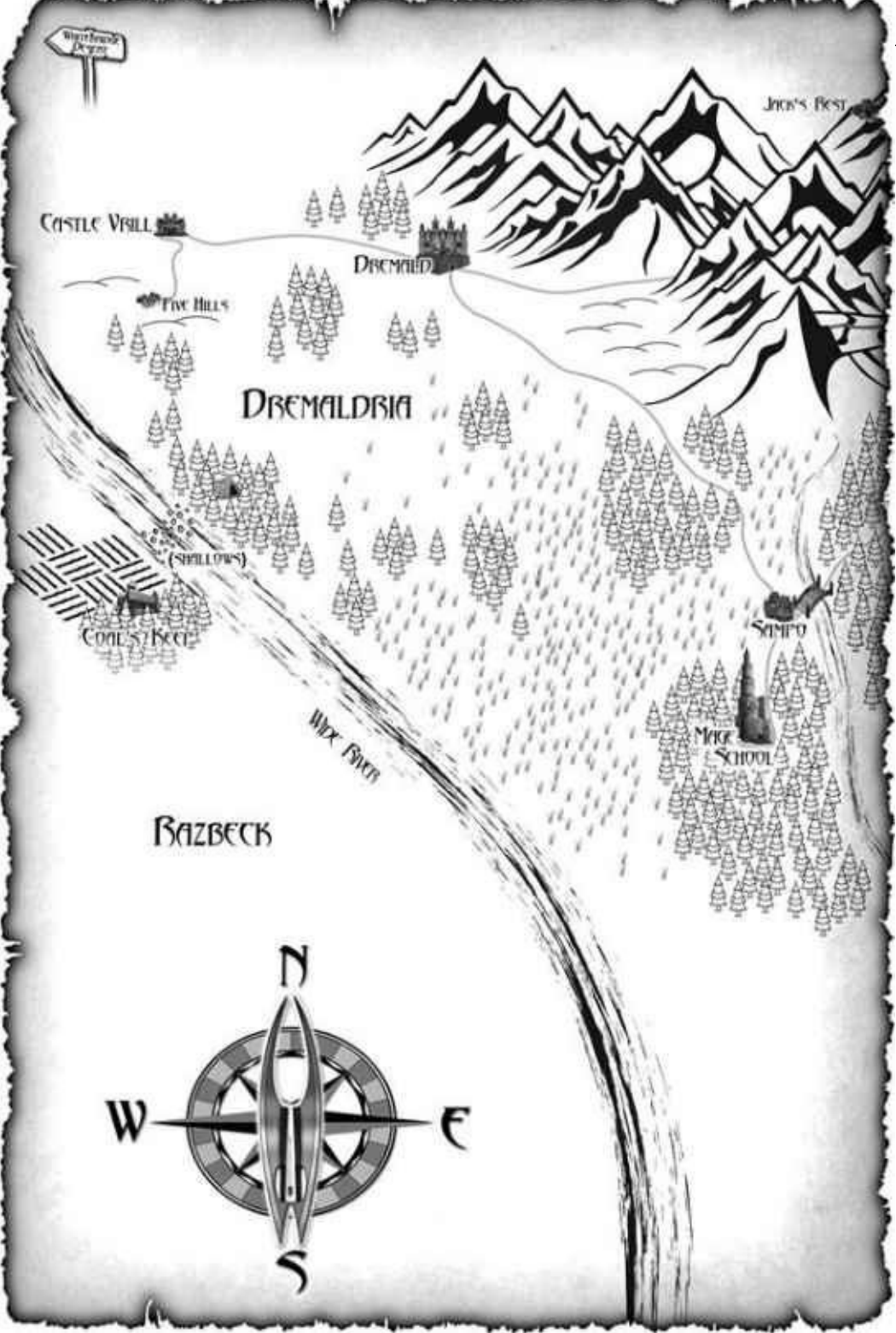
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Prologue

Deathclaw and Talon darted through the winter-frozen forest. Their lithe, scaled bodies glistened in the beams of sunlight that pierced the boughs of the fir trees. Their claws left behind deep trenches in the snow, but they didn't bother covering their tracks. They didn't fear pursuit. The scent of freedom filled Talon's nostrils, while Deathclaw was simply elated at finding her. They frolicked through the daylight hours, racing each other and putting as much distance between them and the wizard's castle as possible.

Once they had been part of a pack of raptoids, wingless dragon-like creatures that hunted the desert dunes of the Whitebridge Desert. The wizard Ewzad Vriil had come upon their pack looking to create soldiers for his army. The changes caused by the wizard's cruel experiments had killed the others, but Deathclaw escaped and his sister had been taken back to the wizard's castle.

It had taken over a year, but Deathclaw had found the wizard's castle. He fought his way through the mutated monsters that Ewzad Vriil had created and now, despite his wounds that were still healing, Deathclaw felt no pain. He was happy for the first time since the wizard had changed his body. Though he would never again be able to return to his old life as leader of a raptoid pack, the new life ahead of him looked to be full of promise. He wasn't alone any more.

As the sun sank behind the horizon and darkness crept in, they caught the scent of a herd of mountain elk. Deathclaw let forth a throaty chirp and the two transformed raptoids fell back into their old familiar hunting pattern. When they came upon the herd, they stayed downwind so as not to frighten the animals. The elk had stopped for the night in a clearing. The females and young were huddled in the center while the males stayed around the outside for protection.

Deathclaw had his eye on one particularly old buck that would provide more than enough meat for both of them. He was excited. Prey this large stayed away from the dwellings of the humans and he had not eaten a meal larger than a rabbit in weeks.

He chirped a command to Talon, telling her to circle around for support. Then he snuck up as close as possible. When the time was right, he pounced. Deathclaw leapt onto the back of the old buck. The beast reared and thrashed its head back and forth, but Deathclaw nimbly avoided its pointed horns. He tore out the elk's throat from behind with his wicked claws and leapt from its back as it fell, dying.

Deathclaw screeched in triumph. But Talon wasn't satisfied with the single kill.

In the brief second of uncertainty caused by the suddenness of Deathclaw's attack, the herd froze. Talon darted into the center of the clearing and began slashing about with her claws, teeth, and tail barb, cutting throats and disemboweling does and young elk. By the time the herd thundered away, four females and three younglings lay dead around her. From the thick trails of blood left behind the fleeing animals, Deathclaw knew that several more would die from their wounds.

Deathclaw watched his sister with his head cocked as she tore at the corpses and screeched with pleasure. What she had done didn't make sense. She had ignored the hunting instincts that raptoids had been born with for centuries. When attacking a herd, it was best to bring down the weak, the old, the infirm. They were easier kills and the survivors would live to grow and breed and produce more food for the hunting pack. Not only had Talon cut down the wrong prey, she had killed far more than the two of them could ever eat.

Deathclaw chirped at Talon questioningly. She ignored him as she continued to rip the bodies

apart, destroying the meat as if he weren't even there. He watched her reveling in the blood and chaos. She hadn't killed for food. She had killed for pleasure.

Deathclaw was suddenly wary of his brood mate. The wizard had done more to her than just alter her body. Like Deathclaw, she was no longer a raptoid, but something different. Something terrible.

Chapter One

Wincing, Justan reached out with one foot and prodded the pile of richly embroidered clothing that remained where Ewzad Vriil had once stood. Part of him expected a hand full of squirming fingers to reach from the pile and grasp his leg. But nothing happened.

It had been nearly an hour since the wizard's apparent death and Justan was the first one to approach the spot. He didn't know if it had been fear that had kept the others away, or just the fact that everyone wanted to move on. Perhaps it was a mixture of both.

Though the wizard's body had disappeared completely, Justan's mage sight showed some trace of magic left in the stain upon the ground. He moved the pile of clothing with his foot to get a better look at the stain and heard a clang of metal.

He carefully moved the pile again to reveal the dark bladed dagger that Princess Elise had plunged into the wizard's arm. Justan crouched down and reached to pick up the dagger, but paused. For some reason, he didn't want to touch it. His mage sight didn't show anything magical about it, but something about the dagger seemed . . . wrong.

Justan shook his head. Yet another mystery to add to the daunting heap that already surrounded him. There were too many questions and not near enough answers.

He ripped a piece of silk from Ewzad's robe and wrapped the dagger in it, careful not to touch the metal. He tucked it into the back of his ragged pants. Perhaps he would ask Qyxal about it later. The elf was much more experienced in magic than him.

Justan stood and looked across the throne room and once again found himself impressed with Captain Demetrius' organizational skills. The captain had taken charge of the chaos immediately after the wizard had disappeared, directing any men that would stop and listen. Things were already moving smoothly and efficiently.

The wounded were lined up in a row against the back wall of the throne room. Qyxal was busy healing the men most severely injured, while any other men with medical skills had been set to work tending those with minor injuries. Ewzad Vriil's serving staff had come to the captain with clean water and bandages and offered their services. None of them looked sad to see their master dead.

This was going to be a long process. The wounded were still piling up as the dungeons emptied. The old keep had belonged in Ewzad Vriil's family for generations and the nobles had never stopped expanding the dungeons. There were prisoners who had been in there for years. Many of them were so close to death that there was very little the elf was able to do.

The captain had commandeered the contractors building the castle and set them to digging holes for the graves of the dead prisoners. He was determined to give them all a proper burial, even the soldiers and guards that had died trying to keep the prisoners from escaping. After all, they had only been following orders.

One person in particular was being given a place of honor. The misshapen remains of Sneak Pete's body rested under a clean white sheet to the side of the throne room until he could be given the burial he deserved.

The dead goblins and orcs, on the other hand, were to be dragged into a great pile to the side of the castle to be burned. Fist and Gwyrtha were helping dispose of the bodies now. The ogre had torn a large ornate tapestry from the wall and he and Gwyrtha were busy piling the bodies of the beasts on top of it.

Justan was about to join them when he felt a hand on his shoulder.

“Been busy chasin’ down that last orc or else I would’a been here to see you sooner. Durn thing was slippery. Chased him fer durn near a mile into the forest.”

“Lenny!” Justan enveloped the dwarf in a warm embrace. He almost burst into tears, but forced them down. It would only embarrass his friend.

“Hey now. Hey now.” Lenny half-heartedly tried to push him away, but finally patted him on the back. “Calm down, son. No need fer a scene.”

Justan pulled back and laughed at the sight of the familiar red handlebar mustache and gap-toothed grin. “Thank you for coming after me.”

“Hell, I didn’t do nothin’. It looks to me like you had everthin’ well in han- . . .” The dwarf’s eyes widened. “Wait a gall-durn minute! What’s that on yer hand, boy?” The dwarf grabbed Justan’s right hand and pulled it closer. His bushy eyebrows rose in surprise and his jaw dropped as he saw the warrior rune. “I’ll be dag-gummed.”

Justan covered the warrior rune up with his left hand. “Well, I . . . er. I don’t understand myself. It was a bit of a shock.”

“Well, tell me all about it, then!” Lenny exclaimed.

Justan looked around and no one seemed to be listening in. He told Lenny about his time at the Mage School; how he had been given the new name Edge and marked as both warrior and wizard; how Gwyrtha had been captured; and how he had been forced to leave the school in order to protect her. The dwarf leaned forward and listened intently, hanging on every word, twirling the end of his handlebar mustache with his forefinger. When Justan showed him the wizard rune on the palm of his left hand, Lenny whistled through his missing tooth.

“The council seemed to think that what happened was impossible.” Justan said. He looked down at the runes and shook his head. “They may be right, too. I don’t have the skills or powers to go along with this new name, Lenny. I . . . I don’t feel worthy of it.”

Lenny looked hard at Justan, his lips pursed thoughtfully. “Then maybe you ain’t.”

“What? Really? You think so?” Justan hadn’t expected such a quick agreement. Everyone else seemed to think he was being childish to reject the name.

The dwarf wasn’t finished. “But that part ain’t up to you is it? The magic of that bowl ain’t like normal magic, son. There’s powers behind that thing beyond anythin’ you or I ever seen, mark my words on that. One thing’s fer blasted sure. There’s somethin’ special inside you and that bowl don’t see it.”

“Like what, Lenny?” Justan’s frustration over the naming bubbled over. “What’s so special about me? I haven’t done anything yet! I’m still just a trainee who hasn’t gotten into the Battlemage Academy. I wanted to earn my way, not have it given to me!”

Lenny raised a finger to his lips in warning and Justan saw that people had started to stare. He had grown so agitated that Fist and Gwyrtha had stopped momentarily in their work wondering if he needed help. *It’s okay*, he assured them through the bond.

Lenny gave Justan a look that told him a lecture was coming and yanked a thumb toward one of the side doors. The dwarf led Justan out of the throne room into a long hallway. He pushed open the first door they came to and dragged Justan inside what looked to be a guest bedroom. It was lavishly outfitted with rich furs and silks. Justan instantly felt out of place in the rags that were left of his travel clothes.

“Use that thick skull of yers, dag-gum it! People out there are lookin’ up to you. You helped

save their lives. This ain't the time to be complainin' where folks might hear!" Lenny poked one thick finger painfully into Justan's chest. "Maybe yer not worthy of yer new name yet, who knows? But you got a new name all the same. Who're you to decide when yer worthy, or when you ain't? Yer name's Edge. That's who you gal-durn are whether yer gal-durn worthy of it or not!"

"But it doesn't seem real to me!" Justan retorted. "I mean, in my heart I still see myself as Justan, son of Faldon the Fierce."

"Of course you do." Lenny snorted and partial grin reappeared on his face. "Part of you always will be that angry kid who couldn't fight. Hell, son, part of me's still the wild young dwarf who didn't know a smith's hammer from his own arse. But things change. When I last saw you, you was jus' startin' to turn into a man, but when I came into the throne room durin' the fight, I almost didn't recognize you. I mean, look at you, dag-blast it!"

The dwarf grabbed Justan's shoulders and turned him to face a full length mirror that was mounted on the wall beside the bed. What he saw surprised him. Standing in that mirror was not the gawky youth that had failed training school. He had grown in the last two years. His frame had filled out. The work Jhonate had put him through along with his obsessive training at the Mage School had turned his weak body into one a warrior would be proud of. The man looking back at him was well-toned and imposing. If not for the ragged clothing, the warrior rune would have looked fitting on the back of the hand of this new man.

"I-I . . . I see what you are trying to say Lenny. But I still don't feel worthy and . . ." He shook his head and looked down. Part of him knew that Lenny was right. He shouldn't be ashamed of his new name. But still, he couldn't help but feel awkward about it. "I just don't like having my life changed for me."

Lenny patted his shoulder.

"Sometimes you gotta accept the things you can't control, son. Yer Edge now, like it or not. You can worry about bein' worthy of it later."

Justan nodded his head and looked back at the man standing in the mirror before him. Underneath his ragged shirt, he actually had pecs.

"Well that's enough of that fer now. You could durn well use some better clothes." Lenny began rustling through a wardrobe at the side of the bed. He swore a few times and tossed some fancy apparel aside, but finally pulled out a plain shirt, a fine padded leather jacket, and a pair of long baggy pants that didn't look too frilly. He handed them to Justan and patted him on the back. "C'mon, boy, put 'em on and let's get outta' here. I wanna show you somethin'."

They walked back through the throne room and out the front doors into the bright sun-drenched air. Justan had to put a hand up to shield his sensitive eyes. He hadn't seen the sun in four days. He took in a deep breath and smiled. Despite the bitter cold of the winter breeze, the sunlight felt warm on his body. It was a sensation he had doubted he would ever feel again. He followed Lenny down the long stairway to the courtyard where two familiar warhorses stood calmly chewing the grass.

While Justan scratched Albert and Stanza behind the ears in greeting, Lenny fumbled with a strap to the side of Stanza's saddle and pulled out two sheathed swords.

"These're replacements fer the swords Hilt gave you. Be a bit more careful with these-un. Okay? No breakin' 'em on orcs or nothin'."

"Thank you." Justan unsheathed the swords and stared. He had grown up near the premier warrior school in the known lands and he had rarely seen this level of workmanship. The pommel were etched in silver and the handles wrapped in soft leather for an excellent grip. A goofy grin stretched his lips and he whirled the swords about him, testing their balance. They were excellent.

“Sorry, son, but this was the best I could do at such short notice.” Lenny mumbled.

“No, Lenny.” Justan shook his head. “You have outdone yourself. These swords are even better than the ones Hilt gave me.”

The dwarf shrugged. “They may be, but they still ain’t fittin’ fer a named warrior. Don’t matter how well made they is if they don’t sing.”

“There’s plenty of time for making magical ones later.” Justan assured him. An excited gleam came into his eye. “I even have a great idea to put past you. I was doing some research in the Mage School library and I came upon the most fascinating weapon. I have some sketches of it in Gwyrtha’s saddlebags.”

A shadow passed over Lenny’s countenance and he seemed as though about to say something more, but he was distracted by the sight of Fist and Gwyrtha pulling something out of the entrance to the castle. Slowly, the ogre and the rogue horse began backing down the stairs.

Justan looked up to see what the dwarf was looking at and was puzzled until he realized that they were dragging a tapestry loaded down with over a score of dead goblins and orcs. Fist had both of his gigantic hands wrapped around one corner of the tapestry while Gwyrtha was grasping the other with her razor sharp front teeth.

Justan almost laughed aloud at the strange sight, but a shout pierced the air.

“Hey you! Ogre!”

Fist looked up in puzzlement as a man dressed in worn travel clothes ran down the stairs and stood before him breathing heavily. There was anger and despair etched into the man’s face.

“Are you Fist?” Zambon asked.

The ogre nodded, and Justan could sense that Fist wasn’t sure why this man would know him. Then again, something about his face seemed somehow familiar. It didn’t take long for him to figure out why. The memories Justan had shared with him through the bond came to the forefront of his mind. A grin split Fist’s face and he dropped his corner of the tapestry. The bodies of several goblins rolled free and tumbled down the stairs.

Fist clasped one hand on each shoulder of the man and gripped him warmly.

“You are Zambon, son of Tamboor!”

Zambon pulled out of Fist’s grip.

“Yes. My family has written me about you,” he said. Desperation filled Zambon’s dark eyes. “Tell me. Were you there when Jack’s Rest was attacked?”

Fist nodded hesitantly, unsure of the man’s intentions. This man was Tamboor’s son and Justan’s friend, therefore part of his adopted tribe, but Fist still did not know him. Was he angry that he had not been able to protect his family? Would he attack? Fist did not want to have to hurt Tamboor’s son.

“Hey Zambon,” Justan said.

“Tell me what happened to my family!” Zambon demanded.

Fist hesitated. “That is for Tamboor to tell.”

“He won’t tell me anything!” Zambon shouted, frustration thick in his voice. “When I found him, he was lost in some sort of rage. He was hacking away madly at the body of an orc and screaming. He wouldn’t stop! When I finally shook him out of it, he . . . he pulled me to his chest and wouldn’t let go. I asked him over and over where they were, but he wouldn’t tell me! He wouldn’t say anything! He wouldn’t even look at me! He just turned and ran down into the dungeon.”

“Please, Fist,” Zambon pleaded. “If you are truly a friend of my family, tell me. Where is my mother? Where are Cedric and Lina?”

Fist looked down. He felt inadequate with his speaking. He had learned a lot of the human’s way of using the common speech from Tamboor’s family and since bonding with Justan it seemed a bit easier, but how could he say all the things that Zambon needed to know? He opened his mouth but no sound came out. Justan’s voice echoed into his mind, sending soothing thoughts.

It’s okay, Fist. He is my friend. I’ll tell him.

“Tell me!” Zambon yelled.

Justan arrived at Fist’s side. “Zambon.”

Zambon whirled to face him. Tears were in the guard’s eyes. “Why won’t anyone tell me what happened?”

“Zambon, I am sorry, I-”

“No,” Fist said, his deep voice rumbling through the air. “I will tell him.” The ogre grasped Zambon’s shoulders again in his gigantic hands and said, “They are killed.”

Zambon looked into the ogre’s sad blue eyes and stood still. His lips quivered. “I . . . I thought so.”

“Your father and me and Pete, we tried to stop them but the wizard, he . . . froze us. The orcs they . . . we can not move . . .” Fist searched for the words. His voice trembled and great tears rolled from his eyes. “The orcs did bad things and . . . and Efflina, Cedric, Lina. I-I am sorry. They-they were my tribe and I could not save them.”

Fist dropped his gaze in shame. Zambon nodded. The guard’s face was pained, his eyes red-rimmed.

Fist’s hands fell from Zambon’s shoulders. “Your father. Tamboor, he is . . . hurt. His head and heart are . . . broken. The wizard made him watch.”

Zambon slumped in understanding. “I must go find him.” He stepped back from the ogre and walked away from them, ascending the steps towards the castle.

“Zambon!” Justan called out as the guard reached the top of the steps. “It was your father’s sword that slew the wizard.” Zambon froze for a moment at his words and Justan saw the guard’s head nod once before he continued into the castle.

“Poor boy.” Lenny shook his head. He squeezed the handle of his hammer until the leather creaked. “Dag-blast it! I wish there was more orcs around to kill.”

Chapter Two

Justan had hoped to leave the castle right away, but there was too much to be done. By the time the dead were cleared away it was late afternoon. Then he found out that there were still a few more that Qyxal had not finished healing and Captain Demetrius asked them to stay the night.

Captain Demetrius had the castle staff prepare a feast for all of the escapees that still remained. It was the best meal that Justan had eaten since leaving the Mage School and he enjoyed it immensely. Fist ate more than any two men, while Lenny raided Ewzad Vriil's private wine stores.

"All that money and it still ain't as good as my pepperbean wine," the dwarf grumbled after emptying a dusty old bottle and tossing it aside.

After the meal, Captain Demetrius gathered any that would stay. Fist excused himself politely and Justan wanted to leave with him but Lenny's pointed gaze compelled him to remain in his seat. Tamboor still hadn't come out of the dungeons and Zambon had given up the search for his father for the time being. The guard sat at the table quietly, a full wine goblet sitting unnoticed in his hand.

The captain cleared his throat. "Thank you for staying here with me a bit longer. What I wish to discuss could have repercussions for all of us. I am going to have to put together a full report for the king. He and Duke Vriil were close. He won't be happy to hear that his best friend is dead. You need to understand that if he is not satisfied with my explanation, we could all soon have a price on our heads."

Justan winced. He hadn't thought about that.

"Come on. King Muldroomon's got to understand considerin' all that happened here," Lenny said.

"I am confident that under normal circumstances the King would understand," the Captain said. "But from what I hear the King has been, well . . . unstable lately. What I'm saying is when you leave here, stay inconspicuous and keep an ear out for the King's decision. If I am unable to convince him, you will need to stay out of Dremaldria."

There were several murmurs among the group, the loudest among them being Lenny, who openly grumbled about the worth of a king who couldn't see reason. Captain Demetrius cleared his throat and turned to Justan.

"Sir Edge, if you please, I was hoping you might answer a few questions. You see I need to learn as much about what the duke was doing as possible if I am to make a convincing case. Can you do anything?"

Justan told the captain everything he could think of that would help. He told him of the duke's men that were hiding along the roads posing as brigands. He told him about the altered orc he had killed and how he had seen the duke use magic to seduce the princess into going to the castle with him.

"What does the princess say about all this?" Justan asked. "Surely she could convince her brother that Duke Vriil was in the wrong. She did say that he killed her father after all."

"I've asked, but she refuses to speak of it and I'm afraid I can't force her to tell her brother anything. She just wants to go home." Captain Demetrius placed a hand on Justan's shoulder. "You have filled in some of the missing pieces, though. Thank you, Sir Edge. It is indeed fortunate that the duke was destroyed before he could bring whatever he was planning to fruition." He looked into Justan's eyes. "Will you come with me and present this information to the King?"

“Uh, w-well,” Justan stammered. He hadn’t been expecting such a request. “No. I mean, I am sorry sir, but it is not my place. Um, I have a quest of my own to complete and it really can’t wait.”

“I see,” said the captain, looking disappointed.

Justan thought about it some more. Was he being selfish? He needed to continue to Master Coal’s as commanded by Wizard Valtrek, but could it wait a little longer while he helped the captain?

No, he decided. He thought back to the night they had left the Mage School; how he had fallen too deeply into the bond and what he had almost done to Gwyrtha. Now he was bonded twice and he needed to learn how to control the magic before things got out of control. The wizard’s threat was gone and the captain could figure out what to do on his own.

“I think you are ignoring the real danger here,” Qyxal said. The elf had remained at the table despite being exhausted from the heavy use of healing magic. “You heard him, didn’t you? Ewzad Vriil called himself ‘The Messenger of the Dark Prophet’.”

There was silence for a while. Of course they had heard what the wizard had said. Everyone in the throne room had heard. In fact they had all been avoiding the subject. If the Dark Prophet were truly back, then a price on their heads would be the least of their worries. Captain Demetrius assured the elf that he would tell King Muldroomon everything and quickly dismissed the meeting.

Captain Demetrius invited Justan to stay in one of the luxurious castle guest rooms. He was certainly tempted by the thought of a warm bed. Lenny and Qyxal had agreed readily enough, but Fist didn’t want to spend another night inside the castle and had decided to sleep in the stable with Gwyrtha. So Justan declined the captain’s invitation. He took some extra blankets with him instead.

As Justan carried the load of blankets through the courtyard on the way to the stables, though the thought of Ewzad Vriil’s true purpose weighed heavily on his mind. What if Qyxal’s fears were right? What if the Dark Prophet was back? The prospects were frightening. It had taken decades for the world to recover the last time the Dark Prophet had awakened.

The smells of hay and manure soon filled the air and Justan reached the stable door. He stepped inside and sighed. The stable was only slightly warmer than the courtyard outside. The thought of a soft bed still tugged at his mind.

The stables were dark and quiet. Gwyrtha was already asleep, curled up on her side very unhorselike in the straw. Justan reached down and ran one hand down her side, feeling the patchwork mix of scales and horseflesh beneath his hand. She looked a monster, and fought like a monster, but inside she was the sweetest creature he knew. He had missed her.

Fist was still awake. Justan could sense that the ogre’s thoughts were full of indecision.

“You could have stayed for the meeting with us,” Justan said.

Fist snorted. “They did not want me. They do not trust an ogre.”

“Of course they do,” Justan replied unconvincingly. Even though everyone had been cordial to the ogre once the fighting was over, it was obvious that the humans had avoided him when possible. “Well, okay, not everyone is used to having an ogre around.” He was still getting used to the idea of himself, in fact. Justan changed the subject. “I brought a blanket for you.” He set them down and pulled out the largest comforter the servants had been able to find. He handed it to the ogre.

“Thank you,” Fist said. The ogre sniffed at it and squeezed the material as if wondering how it was going to keep anything warm.

“Um, you just cover yourself in it. Here.” Justan opened the blanket up and draped it over the ogre. It barely covered Fist’s large frame.

“Like a fur.” Fist said. He sent Justan thoughts of huddling under a pile of furs with the other

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