

LILITH'S GIFT
& THE PLAINS OF
ZENORTHAR
CHRONICLES OF DRAGONDOM &
BEYOND SERIES

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LESLEY M. LAWS

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Cosmic Challenge



The Riddle for this Challenge.

*“Entrusted now to you, for you be the one
To carry this prize of a birthing clan.
You shall ride the vortex and surf the plains of Zenorthar.
Then enter within the void in space, where few may pass and
many perish in this foreboding place.
Here you will find the one you seek
Beyond the furthest reach.
Once you have that space attained,
The prize you’ll pass to the others hand.
Here you will be given something in return,
This will aid you to your journey’s end.
Yet here a warning we must give
That others wish you not to live
For this you carry, is a sacred vial.
New birthing something others will hail.
And so, to speak, there lies the rub,
You must succeed and they must completely fail.”*



Challenge Number 2 Begins.

I could feel the fire inside. Always the moment before a mission was the same, and I knew this time I was going to have to be my very best, or I would not be coming back alive. No longer dressed in a beautiful gown, I was a warrioress again, fully clothed from the top of my head to the soles of my feet now in the full lightweight Elven battle suit. My sword, walking staff and also my short sword and other weapons were all ready. My cloak over one shoulder, but secured so in an instant I could change it into the cloak of invisibility. I was ready, and my animal friends were just being put back in the little silver box when Jenni asked me to check on the table, she had sent a gift. I looked and knowing time was short I picked up the gold charms. One was a spider in the center of a web and the other four were of different dragons.

“Jenni?”

I was questioning, openly but leaving it for her to explain.

“When I heard and saw your friends I spoke with Araknia and she suggested that from Arakus you need to carry her with you. She also suggested the dragons but we did not know which would be best, so we created a group. I hope you like them and that they can help.”

I smiled and was just thanking her and Araknia when I was moved. Now I was spiraling through the galaxies; vortexing like a small boat being thrown around the inner wall of the eye of a hurricane. Time to prepare because I had no knowledge of how long it would be before presumably I was dropped on to the Plains of Zenorthar.

I manifest my personal Merkabah into place. This main protection shield and ship would act as a buffer between me and the land, or wherever I landed up, again I set the shielding to maximum and instigated the cloaking at the same time. I rarely used it going in on missions, but then again, having been warned by Padord of what he had seen in the archives I was not taking any chances. I glided my hand across the unseen console in front of me and fine holographic system charts appeared. Now, I had a full arrangement of three-hundred-and sixty-degree views, plus, I could drive this personal craft using my mind for it was all connected. In fact it was a part of me.

Movement stopped. A plop was the audible sound, and one I had never noticed before, then I was floating on the water between tall grasses, in a twilight world. I had arrived.

Hovering had seemed to be the best means of getting my bearings. I needed to see what was around and find some dry safe land to start this journey on foot if needed. I knew that I was here for a reason and sitting, invisible in my Merkabah was not what would get me to the next stage.

As I looked around I saw many islands, small mostly

but a few were well established enough to hold a few half dead trees covered in the flowing tendrils of what looked like the parasitic plant on Earth we called old man's beard. Looking further out across the zone where I had landed I could see the distant outline of mountains and felt that would be the end of this part of the journey.

A voice crackled into the physical hearing now and vibrated around inside my seating zone.

"I believe Nee-shar-tar you have arrived; I have been asked to give you the next clue so you do not waste time dilly-dallying around like a kindergarten child on the first day of magic school."

"Who are you?"

The voice replied.

"One as I said who has been told to give you the next clue, then the rest is up to you. I am in the black tower far off across the water to your left. Come if you wish to have a chance to live and to succeed. I don't bite, nor behead my guests, but you have limited time before all see you and know you are the latest high scoring prize in the Games. If I was you, I would come across water slowly, or just above so you don't warn the ones below who await you, nor do you break the lattice of radar beams which right now you are only inches from doing. Yes, just above you."

The hair on the back of my neck was prickling, but, so in truth was the movement of the gift from Athena making me doubt myself as it was pointing in the direction the voice had suggested I go, to meet and receive council.

I took my bearings and slowly lowered to a few inches above the still, inky black surface of the water. There did not seem to be any movement in the air, and if the voice was right, then they either knew I was happy in water or on land, or it was a lucky guess. However it was the reference to the Games which chilled me to the bone. I had heard talk of such sport, but never expected myself to be part of one.

Circling the island before going on to it, I managed to get a rough, yet useful survey and found there was only one safe line between the beaches and the castle grounds. That was on the far side. That was my first obstacle safely navigated. So I chose the spot and as I dematerialized my Merkabah craft, I installed it once more simply as an invisible auric protection shield that would move and bend with me.

Taking a deep breath and asking for protection from all I could think of invoking I started to carefully walk up the driveway. The tower, was more like a very large haunted house from the horror movies back on Earth, and there were very few lights on, in fact only one light was on inside and that was down stairs. The ancient wooden steps leading up onto the porch squeaked and moaned as I walked, one step at a time up them towards the door. Somewhere in the darkness below the trees I heard an owl call and then with a flapping of massive wings it came in to land quite close before morphing into a tiny old woman who now beckoned me to hurry and follow her inside.

The door quietly closed and clicked once we were in and now I could see that the light was coming from a small but tidy study room with maps and books lining the walls and a large scrying bowl center-stage, however this was not where I was being led. Instead I followed the silent figure into a room under the large staircase which led us to a secret door and then, through a portal. Only then did the tiny old hag turn to speak. However now she was at least half her age.

"Thank you for trusting. I had hoped you would, but as few listen when they arrive, it is many times a thankless task to prevent their deaths. You, thankfully listened, however, for you, my hands are tied on how much detail I speak."

She shook her head and then produced out of thin air her scrying bowl.

"I chose this method, to show you, as I know you too

can read the mirrors and other divination tools which will help you understand and know what I say is indeed truth. We only have a short space of time before the challenge and games begin, so please watch, listen, and heed.”

Together we watched the pictures begin within the inky scrying pool. The space we were shown was an automated computerized wall of faces, the prey, the trophies to be caught and dispatched. There were twelve and yes, I was one of them. Alongside was some history on each and then the bidders could choose to buy time in the hunt and in doing so could also choose which quarry or prey they wished to designate for their choice.

Then the voice I heard chilled my bones for I could swear it was the renegade Time Lord, the Professor.

“Before you make your final choice, the Ace in your hunting bag, so to speak, let us show you some of those whose lands, and thus who’s help you can call on, however, if you do not pay for their aid and they catch the quarry, then, either you lose, or you pay their ransom. Is that clear? Do you all understand this rule?”

There was murmured agreement from those seated in the darkened room or on the screens being run separately by agents below the main display.

Now a map came up and my attention was complete for this would serve me well on this quest. My military training as well as all I had learned from Dralinmer and the other masters now kicked into overdrive.

There were six sectors and thus six main ways or tracks which could lead fully across the Plains of Zenorthar. Each took the traveler through at least two if not three of the different sectors. None were straight and all, except one, ended on the far side at the main hub which I presumed must be a city.

The final one, the odd one out had a beginning but no end. It was a spiral and thus at different intersections it

crossed and re-crossed all the others.

Then the pictures and the basic details of main local groups who aided in the hunting within their own designated zones and as mentioned for a fee or a ransom would catch and hand over the prey if the hunter was outwitted by the hunted.

Now I listened to the computerized AI voice.

First in the largest sector there is the King of the goblins, and his insidious and less than pleasant group; also known as the hell dogs although there is nothing canine about them except, their uncanny sense of smelling fear and homing in on it...

They work in small groups; tag teaming each other and appear to be telepathic within their own kind. They do not seem to be able to think independently, they for all their distasteful ways are only doing their master's bidding. With them but in a separate area of the sector, in the highlands are the bat like creatures. These only you the hunters are being told about. They do not move but colonize both the main path and certain locations, cave entries. They are very large and may indeed be likened to Venus Flytraps. It is suggested that if you wish to remain a hunter that you go nowhere near these creatures, and if you find yourself in their domain, you give them a wide berth.

Sector Two, on the map is the realm of the vampiric essence eaters who drain the body of life. They are shape shifters and can be very useful, however also very dangerous so have tokens ready, for that way you can buy your life as well as having a ransom for the quarry if needs be. They also pay their due to the true master in as much as one third only of all essence can they themselves hold the rest is for the collective body of the brain.

Sector Three and as you will see it encroaches into the far end of sectors one, and two; is the Dark forest. We suggest unless you have extreme magical powers this zone is bypassed

even if your quarry enters. We advise you use the nearest contact point and thus get a ride to the main refreshment stop and wait for news or proceed to your next choice of prey.

Sector Four is the Marshlands with the quicksand and other traps. Numerous different monsters live within the waters and there are also vast snakes. Interesting hunting territory and boats are available with a guide for hunters.

Sector Five takes you underground and through the ancient mines and caverns eventually bringing you out, should you not get lost, back here. However this is a veritable maze and has ways to the surface at intersections through-out the Plains of Zenorthar. Should you wish you can collect a special coding before you leave which will grant you a color coding chart and activate the path lights should you wish to enter? The lights will light only the color path you indicate and only in sectors of three-hundred rods at a time. So be warned. This one is full of booby-traps and is also the domain of a dragon who is not particular as to who he eats or incinerates.

The last sector is the smallest, this is the final doorway to freedom for the prey and home for you, the hunters, but here the passage takes all through the kingdom of the Medusa. Part snake, part human this vile species are masters and mistresses of evil. Be warned for like all snakes they are very persuasive with their silken words.

The pictures of the twelve-prey returned, each picture was brought forward in turn and their skills were easily seen. The hunters could press their preference; also bet on others or themselves to how fast they could win against each one. With my picture, I looked at what skill they gave me and was quietly surprised. They knew very little, or I was in a time, a dimension that was in the past.

Aisha – Captain. Pilot with extensive military training. Believed to have some magical skill but this is classed as negligible. Favors the use of sword and staff, comfortable with

ray guns and also stun ice laser guns. Survival trained to Special operations classification and has a calculating mind.

It was then I heard a laugh I knew all too well.

“I wager a bet, gentlemen, against all of you. Yes, all of you who go up against her. She I wager, will overcome each who cross her path, and come out victorious. Who gentlemen will make this fun; I will make the wager worth your while? Who will wager that he can beat her?”

Now his face, and that of his chess playing partner filled the screen. It was Ares and Hades, so, it would seem this was their doing; and their challenge I was on, or at least this part of it, before and probably into the void.



The Survival Games Begin.

I walked through the portal and this time stood in a narrow, bare room where the other faces I had seen in the scrying pool were now standing around waiting to be processed. I was the last to arrive.

Part of me just wanted to use the best of my skills and circumnavigate most of this. I knew I could, but also knew deep down that to do so would forfeit the whole challenge. Every challenge I knew was given in a space where there was something, or someone who needed my help, or, whose life being with me would be changed if they so wished by their own free will at making those changes.

A metallic sound was followed by a small hatch opening and each one of us was called forward individually. All were handed a map, a leather skin of water and a key on a

chain, the latter we were told was to a locker where we would be able to retrieve things which may be of use. Then there was a hissing sound and part of the wall opened to reveal a corridor with twelve lockers.

Unlike me, the others did not carry their own weapons. In fact they seemed to be totally oblivious in their conscious minds about what was happening. As one of them passed me, a striking warrior, more beef than brain, sadly, I noticed how glazed his eyes were. His leather water bottle was already half empty. A warning of sorts.

Basic survival things. Some rope, but not more than enough to climb a large tree. A hunting knife, needle and thread, a small axe, a snare and a blanket. That was all that was in each locker. I heard one or two of the others grumble about this being a crazy way to gain their freedom. Three of us were humanoid, the others were from different far-flung groups, part animal, and part human. They believed they had a large advantage and bragged about this even as the whole wall slid away and we were on the edge of swampland. I waited and watched to see if any would pair up, or if any was ready to work as a team to actually survive. At the same time I opened my intuition to feel which of the others were basically good and which were more selfish and dangerous. None were dark, but, the majority were so afraid they covered it with bluff, except for muscle-man, but he was totally neutral to all. Strange.

Then the horn was sounded and they all moved off, some walking, others at a brisk jog, and all in different directions. I unrolled and glanced at the map. It was missing some elements of what I had seen earlier, so in my mind I pulled up that first image I had seen in the scrying pool and to my horror I saw that each one of us was carrying a tag. I could see, as would any hunter, where each one of us was.

I thanked Athena and asked for directions. Touching my arm rather than looking at it, I felt her gift move and I

cautiously moved off in that direction. Part of me wanted to let the others know they were being tracked, but, somehow I didn't think they would be very receptive to listening. I pushed the idea down and started to plan. The direction I was being sent in by Athena was directly towards the realm of the goblins, however I had a feeling I was going to end up either going underground or into the hills and the zone of the bat like beings. Call it a hunch, but I knew I was expected.

The continuous twilight sent eerie shadows as I went into the cover of what felt like a woodland more than a big forest. I knew this couldn't be the dark forest as that was the other side of the zone. Out of the corner of my eyes I caught occasional movement, both in the trees and near the path at ground level. I felt out to see what they were and found nothing dark, simply the grey shades of creatures that called this their home, and also found they feared the goblins being brought to this normally quiet area by the games being staged. Time to go into a different mode I think, I knew my position would still show up, but they were looking for me as I was in the picture they had, not as a timber wolf.

I started to jog, moving off the main path and zigzagging across it, then back into the trees to cover my tracks more, and also the metamorphosis as it happened. As I did I centered myself in concentrating on the wolf in all aspects and breathed in, changing my heartbeat and literally changed as I strode forward, changing from a jog to a four-footed lope without breaking a stride.

The changes in my eyesight and hearing and smell clicked in simultaneously and the difference was as always incredible. A whole new dimension to the world around me opened up and I growled quietly knowing others close by would pick that sound up. I could feel confusion in the energies in the air.

Having felt nothing dark close at hand maybe I could use the local inhabitants to glean some extra knowledge. As a

wolf to all who saw me I knew that this in itself would confuse either goblin or hunter if they were tracking me and visibly got close. Time thus was on my side. Ahead and to one side there was a dark shadow of a hillock. This was where I would head and get my bearings from its mount.

I was aware that others were not far away and following me, parallel to my track, maybe this would give me that first contact I needed. So as I took a stance on the top of the mound I reached out telepathically to the nearest being, I needed to see what it was and listen to its thoughts and thus language so as to be able to communicate.

Immediately my mind was bombarded with flashing pictures as its mind raced. Darting from one thought to another. She was one of a small colony. A matriarch who because she was partially handicapped by a foreleg which was malformed and partly useless she travelled on the edges of the group as a lookout. Her handicap instead of making her a target to goblins and the likes, for some reason gave her more protection as it seemed they believed she was bewitched and thus steered round her rather than attacking.

I felt deeper and tuned into her language, which was very similar to elemental on Zor so that was a great help, yet the creature herself was more like a monkey or ape than an elemental but, now gently I reached into her mind and seeded peace. I wanted her not to be afraid and I suggested she come closer as I would not hurt her. Then I lay down and rested my head on my forepaws and watched.

Tentatively she approached and came out of the nearest tree line directly in front of me.

"How did you get into my mind and how come you speak elemental? Are you a sorceress?"

I stayed still and simply answered her telepathically, using mind-speak seemed normal to her, so I was following her lead.

"Yes, and no. Sorry if I frightened you all before, it is

not my intention but as I have just arrived, so to speak, I need to get my bearings and now I know I am tagged shape shifting seemed to be the best method of becoming invisible from hunter or goblin. Is there anything else in this sector I need to be concerned about as I am on a mission and have to get right across these plains and into the void to continue what I have to do."

I felt her confusion and then she sat down, about three feet away from the hillock and looked up at me. I slowly lifted my head, but other than that made no move; I didn't want to scare her.

"Whenever the Games are run this zone which normally is peaceful becomes a very dangerous place. Once all who participate leave, then we can return to our lives. As I presume you can sense, there are others here not just my people, but to be honest the shape you chose is not going to help you much as there are none like you here, so even the goblins would soon work out you must be part of the games. Can I make a suggestion?"

Internally I smiled, I had been right in thinking the locals could help. Now I answered her.

"Please do. Anything I can learn to enable me to get through faster and safely will be gratefully received."

Now she was visually showing me alternatives as her thoughts once more became flashing pictures, however she was also giving me a few details on each creature so I could better choose something and become similar to it in its basic mannerisms if not totally.

There were many, some large, some small. I smiled when I saw one similar to Bigfoot. She picked up on that and told me these were her people; it was only her being special that made her appear different. While it was tempting, and may be what was needed right now, it wasn't the form I needed to be able to move through the area undetected.

I made my secondary choice. A creature that seemed

to be as agile in the canopy as it was fast on the ground, and then I saw a final flashing image. It was a black panther. Everything stopped. My mind and every sense were frozen for a split second as I was taken back to the ancient secret space with my dear teacher, the tiny shaman Baba Mfupi in the astral realms that I had frequented so often, as I grew on Earth. Could she be here?

Pulling myself together I was now thinking clearly and also had hit full survival mode. It's funny, but she always triggered that sense in me, her darker side seemed to haunt me. The panther here, may not be her, but now that trigger had been ignited I would be ready. Quietly I spoke into her mind.

"I am going to transform back into myself to check the map and also to see if I can locate and remove the tag. I do not wish to bring undue trouble to you and your clan, yet, I must learn more from you before I move on. Can you sense goblin anywhere near?"

I had to ask as things, energies here were not as they had been elsewhere, for one, I knew the energy of Bigfoot having been with them many times in different dimensions, yet, I had not been able to see her as one of them. Maybe that was also true of other species.

"No, not yet, but thank you for thinking of us. Indeed your tag will keep all in this section of the sector in danger until you are gone; or it is."

I morphed back to myself and retrieved the map from my hidden pocket in my cloak along with the miniaturized blanket, water bottle and other things we had been given, and my little silver box.

I first looked at the map. I was well behind the others and while three were still not too far ahead, they were well spread out and probably out of the initial zone where I still was. I noted with some interest that two others were underground using the maze as their means to get past the

goblins. Another two were in the marshlands and the rest, three, were traveling via the vampiric zone. I re-counted. That with me was only eleven. Someone had already been terminated and then as I watched, another light in the marshlands extinguished.

Now I carefully opened my little silver box. Having found I was not picking up energy signals as I would normally I wanted to be one-hundred percent sure I found that tag and thankfully I had dragon senses here with me thanks to Jenni and Araknia. I would allow one to choose to come forward.

"Hello friend I have a need to use your skills to do a deed.

*For dragon sense is my need, that is clear;
Then a carrier to remove the mischief and thus confuse
the seer.*

*Bring me first a dragon true, to miniature size when
you appear*

*For it is true, your sense I need in this dark place
To find a tag and confirm my senses true.*

*I promise it will be only so I know what's safe
So you do not get stressed too much by this place.*

*As I pass my hand above you now,
Show me which will share their power now."*

I felt a heat come from one of the golden dragons and I welcomed it as indeed in miniature form, it emerged and flapping its wings alighted on the ground next to me before growing slightly, until it was in total big enough to be carried on my arm, if I had so wished. Now it coughed and a small puff of smoke came from its nostrils. Then the dragon heart connection was completed.

"Miss Aisha, you have need of my service?"

Again a cough and another puff of smoke but this time

a small flame also emitted from its mouth.

“Ugh. I hate the feel here, why are you traveling in this dark space?”

Then it turned and saw the one I was speaking to. I knew it was doing an automatic search for darkness within her.

“She is clear and wears no tag, ah; but something you have does indeed bear a tag that is active now, several in fact.”

There was a pause, then she continued.

“Let me see what I can do about that. Oh and by the by, where are we?”

I placed all that I had been given down on the ground and then I stepped back, before telling her this place was the plains of Zenorthar. The feel I had from this, at present small dragon was one of a matriarchal demeanor with a very definite streak of doing things fully and to the conclusion no matter what.

Before I knew what was happening she blew a flame and everything that was in the pile; the map, water bottle, knife and other items where ashes.

“There, problem solved. Each held a tag and this way they will simply believe you are no longer in the game. I do believe we have some breathing room to find out more from your new friend over there. No need to thank me. I shall stay as I am no longer; the air is to ugh and dark but, call me when you wish. Leaving me loose in your pocket would probably be best, unless you wish the whole box to be incinerated with me coming to your aid.”

Then before I could say a thing, she was once more a golden charm in my hand.

However the deepest dragon connection for communication was now open and I felt her warm laughter and her name. Santi.

“Well, you said you were a sorceress kind off, but you

did not say you were beloved by good dragons. Oh my, what will we do, they will send searchers to find how you died and there is nothing but a small pile of ashes.”

I could feel the nerves in the Bigfoot who I had been talking with. Yes, she was right, so I had better leave a holographic me and get her and myself away from this place and to her clan as quickly as possible.

I no longer existed on their maps. Ares and Hades would expect this, but none of the others for they thought my magical powers were not highly tuned, but I was not going to take any chances. Not with a renegade Time Lord in the mix.

“How far to your clan? Or where are they now?”

She nervously looked around her, then replied.

“There is a hidden portal near here and the others have already returned through it; I sent the alarm when your dragon appeared. I’m sorry, but I was afraid.”

She bowed her head sadly and when she looked back up I was changed again, this time into one of her own kind and a holographic me lay on the ground. She looked at the holographic me and gasped. Then she felt out with her good hand and went to touch it, but withdrew and touched me, in the form of one of her kind. Finding I was indeed flesh and bone she glanced again at the form on the ground and grunted.

“Come, let’s get away from here and maybe, if you don’t mind you and your clan can tell me a little more before I leave on my quest for now there is no more danger here.”

She nodded and led the way. Running in a crouched position, she zig-zagged between the trees and bushes, keeping away from the track and winding deeper into the woods at an angle of probably forty-five degrees to the route by which I had arrived. Twice she stopped and nearly dragged me to the ground behind either a thick bush or a rocky outcrop. On both occasions I heard footfall not long after we had stopped and I waited for her obviously very

keen senses to confirm it was once more time to move and then with a tap on my arm she indicated the direction with her head movement and again we were moving, but I was also aware that each time this happened we in fact made a large detour which in retrospect took us in almost a complete three-sixty circle.



Meeting the Wee-Noka

She continued running in a crouched position; I had taken up the same stance and found, actually, the gait was incredibly easy and we had covered a lot of ground. The trees now had increased undergrowth and then long hanging vines, which cascaded down the sides of a narrow ravine. This was where she simply shimmered in front of me with no warning. I followed solely on trust.

The whole atmosphere was different on the other side of the portal. Yes, the visual was basically the same but there was a much lighter energy, even though there was a mild undercurrent of nerves. I watched as she moved a boulder, quite large and definitely not something which looked as if it was not part of the landscape, then touched

something below before replacing it exactly as it had been. I heard a very slight click as it went back into place.

“Come, follow me, it isn’t far now, and by the way the one you feel out to the side of us, is my brother and means no harm, so please you have no need to worry.”

Again my guide weaved her way through the woodland and undergrowth, yet not along a well-worn path. Suddenly the ground sloped down and we had to zigzag to prevent the momentum of our forward movement from taking over.

About half way down she stopped to let me see the view, and to make sure before we went further that I understood a few basics about her clan.

The view was not what I had expected, it was the inside of an ancient crater with a lake and luscious vegetation with several small volcanic sand beaches scattered around the water’s edge.

“What name do you go by? I will have to introduce you by some name so maybe it is time we both introduce ourselves to each other, I certainly can’t simply say the prey who survived and knows good dragons. I don’t think the clan fathers would accept that as true. Mine is Tah-Kaw-ga.”

I felt her laugh. It was a beautiful laughter from the heart, not superfluous as so many hypocritically use.

“Greetings, Tah-Kaw-ga, and then I shall give you a name which is not known within the games just in case at any time someone on the outside picks up the name, it will not mean anything to them. Call me Nee-shar-tar, the name given me when I first started this quest.”

“Then let it be so, and indeed it is a name that in our language is easy on the mind as well as on the tongue if needed. Now, as to my clan, we are not very large and our forefathers, and some of our elders were originally bought to the plains of Zenorthar to be hunted as prey. Like you, they, the survivors were not allowed to return to their own world.

For a time they lived within the dark forest where hunters, and indeed most fear to tread. Here they learnt to survive and then one day they met a being, who granted them and their offspring this space in-between realms. A place to call their own home. We have all been born here and our clan, the Wee-Noka, has also assisted others over time, but choosing with extreme care. Our survival and that of others depend on that protocol never being broken. To break it; is immediate expulsion."

I looked at her. She was risking her own life to bring me here and now I realized just what a risk she was taking, I respected her even more than I had previously.

"I will not let you, nor your people down, Tah-Kaw-ga. I promise you that. Thank you for helping me, and for trusting me."

She simply grunted and we were moving again. While we descended I could feel her in a shielded conversation. I had no doubt this was with her clan leaders or someone to tell them about me and what she had found out, and, probably what she had witnessed.

As the land started to flatten we slowed our gait and then we came to a small clearing. Here already waiting was what I would think was not so much a welcoming committee, as the elders wishing to vet me.

Tah-Kaw-ga motioned for me to wait and she walked forward to the tall grey elder. He was a good head and shoulders above the other three in height. His hair, and indeed his entire body was covered in salt and pepper shades of grey and dark brown. A fur draped across his body similar to the wearing style of a Roman toga.

After some moments I heard his voice, in vocal speak which surprised me a little, he was also using a form of Elemental as Tah-Kaw-ga had.

"I understand from my daughter that you are named Nee-shar-tar, in our language which I also understand you

are basically familiar with, this means The Seeker and Carrier of Truth. Have I your permission to scan you?"

I gave my approval and he entered, the strength of his own being was very apparent, yet, he was not forceful, just meticulous in his investigation. However, he did not enter deep, simply checking who and what I was, good or bad and where the dragon connection originated. Satisfied he once more retreated.

"Thank you. It would appear as my daughter has said, that you are indeed on a mission, a quest for which you must first get through the Plains of Zenorthar, this tells me either you are very well trained, or you have enemies who wish to see you fail. Or maybe; both, so I shall vouch for you with my people. I also note that you are acquainted with our kind in different realms, and may I add, you carry our likeness very well. So, how may we help you on this section of your quest, without endangering our people unduly?"

Tah-Kaw-ga who was still standing next to her father hugged his arm in a show of both affection and I presume, relief. Now I spoke, following his lead and speaking in voice speak.

"Thank you. I understand from your daughter, and also from residual memories I witnessed earlier that some of you are survivors of the games. If it is possible, I would like to gain an insight as to how it works and more importantly, as I am sure you have had time to understand many zones of the Plains of Zenorthar; the route, or melding of routes which would give one a better chance of completing, and, something you may or may not know; which exit leads to the void, as that is my aim next."

I heard both an audible and mental gasp. No one would venture into the void, while the games was a death sentence to most, the void was a place of no return, no matter who you were.

"Then The Seeker has come to the right place, yet, I

would hate to be the one who aids you walking to your destruction. However, yes, we can aid you in the safest routes across the Plains, with the least problems but you will still have some encounters which you alone can overcome, of that I am sure. Let us move to somewhere less open and speak of these things.”

Now I was aware once again of shielded conversations, but I also noted that each was only between two, and not simply a collective open telepathic conversation. Lastly he suggested to me that I transform myself in to the true me so as not to confuse his people too much. Interestingly, he suggested I did this behind the nearest bushes as he did not wish any to have a heart stoppage watching me morph from one to the other, he laughed and said the other elders were not as open minded as he or his daughter.

I answered him directly in mind-speak and included his daughter at the same time. When they both laughed simultaneously the picture of astonishment in his eyes and in his mind, was beautiful. Everyone else simply looked confused.

I changed, and did so into the me that was elven and toned down slightly by miniaturizing my long sword and keeping instead my walking staff. As an afterthought, I added a mid-calf wrap around in rustic rock and green. Once the initial shock was explained away by Tah-Kaw-ga and her father we started walking towards the village.

Built into the very sides of the crater, the homes and indeed the clan village for a better word was exquisite workmanship. On the outside the windows or exits simply looked like weathered holes, or small, in accessible cave entries yet inside, they had re-created an entire network of beautifully carved caves of varying sizes. There were the homes and the central zones which were communal. These

unlike ordinary cave dwellings as I said, had exquisite carved entrances and also the main walls on both the outer sides of the main spaces; and the external wall of the main columned entry corridor which ran maybe two football pitch lengths from the main entry at right angles to the interior, were pictorial historied carved in three-dimensional reliefs. All areas had natural light from openings which at certain times of day allowed light to cascade in, this was backed-up with well positioned flame torches.

I stopped and let my hand run over the pictures, softly feeling the immense skill with which they had been carved and noticing that from right to left they created a story board.

I looked up when I felt someone touch my arm, it was Tah-Kaw-ga, I had been lost in thought and the others had already disappeared leaving me alone, she had obviously been sent to get me. I apologized and quietly followed.

Her father stood alone in a large space, with a map which was carved out of a single massive rock surface and was at an angle back to front of around thirty degrees, making every relief stand proud to be seen from any of the three open sides. The light fell on it from a large opening which let in the light, yet, this was also covered by a very fine meshing. He now wore a full-length, long-sleeved robe, similar in style to the one Aznar wore.

He never raised his head, simply called me over to look at the map with him and asked his daughter if she might bring some refreshments for us all.

The map was a representation of the land, showing the mountains, the hills, rivers and woods. Each zone had carved creatures showing the rulers of each sector who aided the hunters and indeed ruled viciously in many cases over their zone. Next to each of these on a raised block made to look like a desk-top, was a code. This I was told related to, and was also visually key in the relevant section of the

pictorial history book, carved on the wall.

Moving around the map as he described the different areas and the track through, the worst and the least dangerous, I knew firstly I would be here some time and secondly I would need to bring up my own holographic map so as to integrate all this new information into it.

We had stopped for a drink as he told me of his own escape while in the zone of the goblin king. It was now I asked my host two things. First, if there was a name I could call him by, or would Elder, be as far as I would get to know him; secondly, for permission to use my crystal technology to aid this understanding of the routes.

“To your first enquiry; everyone calls me the Wise One, except my daughter, yet if you wish you may call me by that precious name my mother gave me. Teti-Kar-dei, it simply means One of Great Promise. My daughter’s name means, in our language, Magical Broken bird.”

He smiled.

“As to the second request. Crystal storage is something I have witnessed very little, before I was captured and bought to the games, but, if it will aid you then please and maybe you can explain it to me more while you do so, we are always in need of learning something new or we would wither in life and cease to be.”

So it was agreed and now both my crystal records and his maps linked with the pictorial wall history were giving such clarity it was incredible. Having explained the use, basically of crystals and what type was good for this and size for storage. I can’t say I was surprised, when one of the clan arrived with a woven cloth in which nestled a large and very exquisite emerald. Not a shard, but a full crystal still embedded in its original rock bed. Its girth at the base being that of a man’s forearm and in length, or height, maybe the same as a barn owl standing at full height. I was asked if I could put all this knowledge into this crystal and teach him

and his daughter how to use it, and how to access the records and project them. Sort of a favor; for a favor if you will. We both laughed.

The light started to fade and someone lit some torches on the walls so we could still see. Not long after Teti-Kar-Dei suggested we take dinner with the others and resume this in the morning for there was no way I could return into the goblin infected zone during the dark time and survive.



The Ancient Wolden.

The first rays of weak sunlight were coming through the skylight window into the room I had been given to rest. After the beautiful meal and meeting all the approximately one hundred members of the clan, I had waited until all had gone to rest and then quietly, re-entered the map room and sliding the large emerald out of its woven cloth, I had manifest into existence a projection and saving console. I kept it simple and crafted the crystal to fit. I also, for some unknown reason, made two other smaller portals for smaller crystals to be housed.

I had then, uploaded in order each section from the wall carvings to match the map and ensured, as it was in my own, that Teti-Kar-Dei's voice spoke over the whole record explaining as he had, all aspects. Then I slept and set my