

Thikal watched as the cloaked man picked up the key, unimaginable colors filling the entire room.

“Now, now, boy. Where did you get this?”

Thikal didn't know how to react. The colors were unlike anything he'd ever seen before. Blues mixed with yellows and reds mixed with green, like it was every color all at once, but at the same time something entirely new.

“It was given to me by a friend,” Thikal grumbled, the pain shooting down his leg.

“And what do you intend to do with it?”

“Give it to me,” Thikal shouted.

“Recklessness will get you nowhere with that leg, boy.” The man reached into his waistband and pulled out a small glass vial of bright blue liquid and handed it to Thikal. “Drink it,” the man ordered as he placed the key on the ground in front of the boy.

Thikal opened the vial and the odor was immediate. “What is it?” he asked.

“It's a simple tonic.” The man revealed a dozen or so more vials on his waistband.

“Tonic?” Thikal looked at the viscous blue liquid, moving it back and forth and watching the goopy mixture cling to the vial.

“I suppose they aren't common in rural areas. They have different properties based on the herbs used when brewing them. The one I gave you will help ease your pain, but it won't do much about your broken leg.”

Thikal drank the vial, trying to avoid the mixture from touching his tongue. He fought the urge to vomit as the goopy liquid slid from the vial into his mouth. The taste was awful, and the fragrance filled Thikal's mouth and nose. After he emptied the vial, he looked at the man again.

“How will we get out of here?” Thikal asked. The man pointed to the key.

“What you have there is called a signet.” He pulled out one that looked similar, having the same two prongs. “Its a fairly simple mechanism. You can open any doors that have two or more prongs. Signets are extremely rare, not to mention forbidden by the federation.”

Thikal picked up the signet and examined it. “How do I use it?”

“You've gotten yourself this deep into the temple and you still don't understand how it works?”

Thikal looked up at the magnificent ceiling, an ever revolving landscape of gears, and saw no signs of an entryway. He had fallen, broken his leg while he was at it, and had somehow ended up in this place. None of it made any sense.

“What do the gods call you?” the man asked.

“Thikal,” the boy replied, holding out the vial.

“They call me Ursamis.” The man took the vial and placed it back in his waistband. He extended his hand. Thikal reached up to grab it, and tried to pull himself up. The pain was immediate and terrible, but once he was standing, it wasn't as bad. He still couldn't put any weight on the broken leg, and Ursamis helped him hobble to the grand door.

As they approached the door, the signet in Thikal's hand began to react, as if it were all the colors in the spectrum. The door resounded with a hum, filling the room with deep resonant sound.

With the door now just inches from Thikal, he could see more of its intricate details. Its surface was transparent, and behind was an intricate network of gears that seemed to glow white in color. In the center of the arched doorway was a keyhole with three notches, one on top, bottom, and left side.

“Go ahead, boy, we haven't gotten all day,” Ursamis said, his scruffy grey eyebrows poking out from his cloak.

Thikal brought the signet closer to the keyhole, and it sang a beautiful melody as he placed it inside. The mechanations inside of the door matched the signet's song with a harmony unlike any the boy had heard before. The door seemed to vanish in front of him, cogs spinning and twisting into themselves as it receded into the walls in the blink of an eye revealing a hallway. The walls of the hallway seemed to glow with a similar white as the door, giving lighting to the hallway as they hobbled down it.

“Why did that room sound like there is something beneath us?” Thikal asked in the silence of the hallway, footsteps between the two echoing in a clunky rhythm.

“It is a resonance chamber. I believe the ancients would worship their deities here.”

The two continued down the hallway, the pain in Thikal's broken leg throbbing for rest.

“Where are you from, Thikal?” Ursamis asked, one arm around the boy.

“I live in the mountainside near Gathkon with my family.” Thikal looked down, thinking of the medicine his grandmother needed.

"We're a long way from Gathkon. Longer still with that leg of yours, and once the tonic wears off, I doubt we'll make any progress for at least a few days."

"Couldn't you give me another?" Thikal asked, the pain in his leg still livid

"It doesn't work that way. If I give you another, the effect wouldn't be as strong as the first, and the side effects would worsen. Not only that, but you could form a dependency."

"Why do you have so many?"

"For when I find boys with broken legs such as yourself deep within the temple."

"Temple?"

"The Temple of Night. I am an emissary, sent here to keep watch over this place. Now really, boy, how did you get here?"

"Like the Princess of the Night?"

"Yes, like the Princess. Now answer my question boy." Ursamis listened as the boy gave him a retelling of events, "And you're sure you want to go back there right now, child, with the federation after you?"

"It's my grandmother, sir. She is sick and she needs medicine from the village."

"I will see to it that she is taken care of. Right now, we need to do something about your leg. There should be a resting area up ahead. We'll be able to take shelter for a few days, as long as you're okay with that."

Thikal thought about the situation, and his silence was enough of an answer for the old man. They continued down the long hallway, stopping only when the pain became too much for the boy. They made it, to Ursamis's estimations, about half of the way to the resting area, when a headache came over Thikal. Light thumping swelled to exorbitant pain, and he felt a rush of heat flood his head. Before he knew it, he had collapsed on the floor.

Thikal awoke in a cot wearing a white gown. His broken leg was encased in a glass-like, filled with fluorescent blue fluid. Tubes connected to the cast, laid across the floor and met with a hole in the wall. He looked around the small white room, finding all sorts of tools and contraptions, none like any he knew. What he did not find, however, was Ursamis.

Thikal did not know how long he had been unconscious, not this time, not the first time. Was his grandma okay? And what of the shopkeeper and his friends and the rest of the townsfolk? His mind struggled to focus on just one of the questions bothering him, and the glass cast on his leg did not help his restlessness.

Rather than let the worry consume him, he thought of the other questions on his mind. Why did the door sing as it opened? What does Ursamis have to do with the princess? And what is causing the deep hum underneath them? After what seemed like hours, Ursamis returned carrying berries and a loaf of bread.

“My apologies, Thikal,” Ursamis said, “I do not carry any Fohgrakkian currency. I hope this will do for now.” Thikal hadn't eaten since the morning he left for the village, and he hadn't thought about it between the adrenaline and the pain.

“What is the thing on my leg?”

“I do not know how the mechanism works, but it should speed up the recovery process. The *N'jrazin* are wondrous things.”

“N'-jra-zin?” Thikal asked confusingly. His brain felt like it was at capacity from all the new words Ursamis had been using.

“It's an old term for technologies that have been lost to time, and it seems the word itself has been lost. It's probably best if you don't remember.” Ursamis pulled a folded piece of paper from his belt and handed it to Thikal.

Thikal opened the paper revealing a map of Fohgrakk. On it, lines were drawn in black ink with instructions scribbled on each side. “So long as you follow the instructions, you should make it home safely.”

“Why do you have to leave?” the boy asked.

“I've been called for an important task. I can't say much more than that. Should you be here upon my return, I will gladly guide you, but it might take me a month or more. I've done work to replenish the food stock, berries and a couple of bread loaves, but it will last you so long as you are frugal.”

“How long will it take before my leg heals?” Thikal moved the broken leg with relative ease, the encasement nearly weightless.

“That I am not sure. I'm a scholar, not a physician nor an ancient. The tubes should reach the next room.” Thikal nodded. “I've sent word to a follower in Gathkon. I have not received word back from them yet, but I can't delay any further on leaving.”

Thikal took in the situation, thoughts scattering in all directions. He couldn't wait that long to start his journey home. “I won't be able to wait for you, sir. My grandmother needs me.”

Ursamis curved his lips into a smile. “Is there anything else you need before I go?”

“I don't think so.” Thikal watched as the man left. There were so many things to worry about. The man left almost as fast as he came, and left him here alone in this unfamiliar world, with more questions than he would ever learn the answers to.