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The Plight of Time

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BY KIM OVERHOLT





The Meeting of Worlds

It had been a long hot and hazy afternoon and Talon, the Centaur, had become dizzy and tired from the heat and felt that a good splash of cool ocean water would do the trick to ease his tension. He ran from the edge of the forest to the dunes of the beach, jumping over logs and stumbling on tiny pebbles on his way. When he reached the banks of the ocean, he bounded into the waves sending sprays in every direction. He was right, this *had* to be the most excellent way to cool off, and he waded in deeper towards the reef. Suddenly, he heard a sound and raising his head towards the sky, he stood at attention, waiting – listening

“Ryan, don’t forget to come right home afterwards! I want you to help me take your sister, Janet, to her dancing lessons! I want to leave here by four at the latest!”

“Yes, mom!” Yelled and sighed eleven year old Ryan Lowe as he quickly made his way out the back door. He was really in no mood to argue. He had two old library books tucked under his arm as he made his way down the stairs.

‘What a way to enjoy a PD Day!’ thought Ryan sourly, ‘returning *stupid* library books for my mother! This is supposed to be *my* day off; *my* short vacation break from school, but I have yet to enjoy it!’

Throwing the books in the front basket, Ryan grabbed his bike from out of the garage and made his way down the driveway.

“– Oh and Ryan,” squawked his mom from the open kitchen window beside the driveway, “Don’t be doing any day-dreaming on your way back, understand? I don’t want Janet to be late. I hope you have your house-key on you, in case we leave without you.”

“Yes, mom!” He could see her wagging her finger at him inside the kitchen window, he sighed again.

“Good, I don’t want to find out you went out without it because...” her voice was trailing off. She was making her way towards the door to give her speech. He had to get away fast. The back door was beginning to open as he began to peddle.

“Bye mom!”

He could hear her yell behind him: “You can get yourself a book with my card! Only one!”

‘Gee thanks!’ thought Ryan shaking his dark brown hair out of his face and rolling his eyes skyward as he turned off the driveway and down to the end of the block. Stopping at the corner of his street he checked for cars and looked at the books in the basket a second time, lifted himself to the seat of his bike and made his way into town.

Ryan rode past construction work, the bustle of cars, skateboarders, in-line skaters, and people; it was another warm autumn day and he was always watching and looking around himself making sure he didn’t miss any action packed minute. ‘Action

didn't happen often enough in Carson Town', thought Ryan, and as he was looking around finishing that thought he caught a slight glance upwards toward the sky and found something extraordinary: it was a brilliant white dove with a rainbow of colours following behind it; as if it were made of light itself. Ryan skidded to a stop using his feet, shook his head as it flew overhead and when he looked again – the dove was gone. Ryan shook his head...He searched the sky half wishing to see the bird again, half doubting his eyes. There was nothing around but the sound of wind whistling in his ears and traffic. Could it be that it was just glare from the sun?

From the air slowly came a sound that reminded Talon of a pulsating heartbeat, then the wind made a strong sudden turn, and out of the blue sky Mora, the Dove, came. Not noticing Mora soaring from behind him, Talon was startled when she was about to alight on his shoulder. Caught by surprise, Talon yowled and flung his arms wildly out at the white bird. She jumped back from his shoulder and ruffled her feathers as she floated above him.

“Hey, what's come over you Talon? Don't you recognize me?”

Talon stopped with his arms in mid-swing and looked up:

“Mora? Oh, Mora. You startled me, I'm so sorry; I hope I didn't hurt you.”

“I think you wounded my pride more but I'll forgive you this time. What are you doing at the waters edge anyhow? You don't usually come here until sunset if my memory serves me correctly.”

“Well if you were as hot as I, you'd do the same. I am truly sorry for lashing out at you. Come and rest here upon my arm, it's been a long while Mora, how are you? You know I haven't seen you, friend, since last year when we went to the mid-summer fair. You had quite the crowd gathered around when you told the story of your ability to direct yourself into different areas of time and space. Do you still do this strange time travelling?”

“How do you think I got here? It's exciting! Although I must admit it isn't as easy as it once was. Just as I made my way here today I accidentally ended up somewhere else. It was similar to this place, but there were no forests. It was all stone columns!”

“Really!” exclaimed Talon excitedly trying to picture it in his mind. “Was it big in area?”

“No, not really, it went by so fast I barely saw much, but I'd say it was similar to our own fair city Corsington, excluding the ocean. There is a fair sized lake and streams but the ocean is farther away. It was strange this place, it had moving cubes, lots of noise, dust and smoke...I saw something else fascinating too –”

“What's that?”

“I saw some of the creatures there.”

“No, I can't believe it, really? What type of creatures?”

“Creatures that looked similar to you. These were strange beings with two hooves rather than four. Some of them were riding on pieces of wood with rolling disks; some had disks on their hooves and one I briefly saw had two big ones on a strange contraption of some kind. It was very peculiar. The one creature with the two big disk contraptions saw me too, I think. It looked startled see me as I was to see it, but it was only for a second and then I was here.”

“That is interesting!” Talon thought for a moment then his eyes grew wide and he snapped his fingers. “Hey – could it be the fabled people that lived here long before us called the Sons and Daughters of Creation?”

“It could be, now that you mention it. I remember the stories as a fledgling.”

“Imagine, seeing the fabled Sons and Daughters of Creation.”

Ryan had made it to the library and returned his mom's library books to the front counter and was now heading through the library to his favourite section – the one that dealt with Folklore, Myth and Fantasy. He had often tried to imagine what it must have been like to meet an elf, unicorns, fairies or centaurs. Anything unusual and magical appealed to him. He had actually tried to do magic when he was younger but nothing would happen; his mom told him that it wasn't real but maybe it was all stories and slight of hand. It didn't stop him from enjoying it. He ran up the stairs to the second floor of the library and at the back wall he found the books that he was looking for.

Ryan's hand idly skimmed the spines of the books as he searched solely for the book entitled 'LEGENDS'. He couldn't recall how many times he had taken that book from the library and had many outstanding fines for keeping it past its overdue date. As he looked he happened to accidentally knock a book off the shelf. It fell to the carpet with a loud slap that he could hear echo through the library. His heart raced as he went to retrieve it off the floor; the sound still ringing in his ears. Ryan quickly looked around; picked up the book and with relief found no one around to complain of the noise. He looked down at the book in his grasp before he placed it back upon the shelf and was mildly surprised that he hadn't seen this interesting looking book before. Both the feel of the cover and the title, 'DRIFT TIME', made him want to sign it out right away from the library. He flipped open both sides of the book and found neither a sleeve nor a bar code on the book for the library to reference from. Flipping the pages he found no metal detector either in the book so he knew no alarms would go off if he wanted to take it from the library...But why did he want to take it from the library? Something inside him was excited about the find but he didn't know why. Perhaps it was the cover artwork or the artwork inside the book itself; perhaps the colours of the book.

"This is strange", thought Ryan as he again skimmed through the pages. It was similar to an astronomy book, but had many names and pictures and writings he had seen in the LEGENDS book, and many he'd never seen before. He quickly closed the book, wide eyed and excited.

"How am I going to get it out of here without the librarian, Mrs. Maplewood, seeing me? That woman is like a hawk! She's always watching me it seems whenever I come in here! N-no problem, I'll just look for the book I originally came for and be on my way..."

Ryan looked around nervously now, still no one in sight. He wandered back down the aisle of books and spotting 'LEGENDS', with a sigh of relief, he immediately snatched it from the shelf and headed back downstairs to the entrance where Mrs. Maplewood, with her black hair and cats-eye glasses, sat humming idly to herself as she typed in names and references into the computer.

She looked up and smiled her wide toothed smile which quickly vanished when she realized who was now standing in front of her. Ryan laid down the books upon the counter and stuck out the library card to sign out his book with.

"Well, hello *Ryan*, and what are we signing out today? Need I ask?" She swiped the card with her laser pen.

The familiar book now flashed its raised letters at her laser pen as she scanned its bar code.

"LEGENDS' again, how unoriginal is that? How could I have guessed! Don't you ever want to read something useful like non-fiction or biographies? What about Shakespeare or an audio book!"

Ryan could feel his anger rise. He hated the way she said his name, he hated being told what to do and most of all he disliked Mrs. Maplewood. He stood there silent because he knew she was just talking out loud just to hear herself talk. Finally she stopped to get the printout from her computer and Ryan walked away with both books in hand.

"Wait a minute, what about the other book?"

"What other book?"

“The one you just stuck under your arm with the other one?”

“Oh this one, here... Yes, well this one is mine.” He shook his arm where the book was lodged along with the ‘LEGENDS’ book.

“I didn’t see you come in with one when you entered.”

“You couldn’t see it with all the books I had to return for my mom!” Ryan smiled and changed his expression to seem forgetful, “Oh, I’m sorry Mrs. Maplewood, I would have shown it but I was in such a hurry to find my favourite and compare them. You see, my grandmother gave me that one for my birthday. She said now I wouldn’t have to go to the library anymore but I told her it wasn’t the same book! I was going to show her what the difference was.”

“Oh...hmmm, well alright then...” Mrs. Maplewood seemed lost trying to listen but Ryan knew his words and his adoring smile would kill any suspicion, and he was right. She pushed up her glasses on her nose and smiled her small sour smile as she cleared her throat. “Yes, here’s your printout. ‘LEGENDS’ is due back November 22nd...Now pay close attention and we can avoid it being late again.”

“Yes, Mrs. Maplewood.”

“And tell your mother I’ll be seeing her at the next city board meeting this Friday.”

Ryan smiled.

Outside the library Ryan sighed with relief. He was already sweating despite the cool autumn breeze. Making his way to the bicycle rack, Ryan pitched the books into the basket, unhooked the lock, attaching it to seat stem and pulled the bike off and aimed it back toward the street, he was going to go home but now his mind wandered toward a place Ryan could go to read his books without interruption, without being disturbed by mom or Janet. Why would they care if he never made it in time to go to some dumb lesson? At least he wouldn’t have to sit through his uncoordinated sisters stumbling through her Jazz class. He was curious – he had to know what he’d found.

Meanwhile, in the world of Ga’sa, where all unicorns, fairies, centaurs and extinct magical beasts ran free – including such creatures as Talon & Mora – there lived a heroic dragon by the name of Nontramar Somtara. Nontramar had not only become the most feared in that world because he was so overwhelmingly mysterious and powerful, but also because he was the last Golden Dragon left in that world. It was no wonder all creatures lived in harmony because of their great leader!

When all Golden Dragons still existed, Nontramar was said to be one of the greatest warriors of his kind. Often his duties were called on when battling with his enemy Apophis, the Black Dragon, and all his evil followers. It was believed that Sons & Daughters of Creation existed way back then, but this was all just legend. For in the last great battle, called the Battle of the Deep Green, Apophis had destroyed the last of these fabled ‘people’ with a great wind of fire. No trace of these beings was left behind. As for Apophis, Nontramar, at long last, had beaten him; with magic and might he weakened Apophis and exiled him to another dimension with his entire minion. Thus was Nontramar’s greatness passed into legend; but Apophis had left a curse behind him. He vowed that while he was gone from Ga’sa the remaining Golden Dragons would slowly die off. Neither would they be able to have any fledglings from then on. Golden Dragons were known to live for several thousand years; so the curse was no real problem at first. But when it came time for the royal dragons to choose the next successor they realized that there was no more dragons of royal blood left and had to pass the crown onto their military. Soon all that were left were Nontramar and an elder by the name of Contaog. Contaog Spellbender was a great shaman and his magical powers were enough to train Nontramar on how to keep Apophis at bay for as long as he could and eventually destroy him at long last. So, for the last thousand years of his life Contaog taught Nontramar to be a great and skilful warrior and shaman in case Apophis was to return. Several times Nontramar argued that there was no way for Apophis to return but Contaog insisted that it was not the end with the curse. There was more com-

ing, he could sense it but could not see what it was but insisted that he needed to be ready for anything. Nontramar didn't argue, he could feel something too although he never said anything aloud.

Contaog's teachings showed Nontramar links to all parallel universes in the galaxy. Nontramar had to keep a close eye on everything, so he was given a great sceptre in which to watch and reflect upon. This sceptre had a magnificent ball of purple crystal encased in a great sculpted staff. The staff depicted scenes of the Battle of the Deep Green, as well as faces of happiness, sadness, hate and fear. All that would be witnessed in life as well as death.

Nontramar had also been taught by Contaog how to slow and speed up the time – even suspend time in order to observe a particular world more closely. Unfortunately Nontramar could never travel into the parallel worlds or interfere with the fates, and this saddened him. In his last days the ancient Contaog was no longer able to aid Nontramar, he was frail and his scales had begun to wilt and fall off. It seemed the ability to speed or slow time didn't stop time all together and Contaog could not suspend his own age – he was going to die. On a misty unsettled morning Contaog gave Nontramar this verse:

“What lives forever, child

The glorious trees?

No, they too die away

With Time...

What lives forever, my son,

The luscious foliage?

No, it all just regenerates again

Life from death.

What lives forever, my friend,

You or I?

No, but there are dreams

And dreams are forever.

Don't live forever, my pupil,

We are strong today!

Just live and love for now

Memories and experiences will never fade away.”

These words were Contaog's last, and it didn't seem so painful now to recall as it first did. Nontramar was the last of the Golden Dragons left in that world. How ironic that somewhere Apophis would finally have revenge! Many years continued to pass until Nontramar was too feeling tenuous by the decade. His legs were becoming weaker and the once great warrior was now

slowly being confined to his own bed chamber of the castle he dwelled in. He still ruled all though his days were now spent with his servants – the elves and centaurs – bringing him his meals and magical items at his request.

There is always something like a ray of sunshine that can break the dark clouds of sadness. Nontramar was working hard on something new – a spell he had just found that gave him hope that he'd never imagined. Why he hadn't seen it before he didn't know. It had to do with time, that allowed him to actually see months even years ahead into the future, it was not a great spell but it was enough to allow him the point to try and fix things before it was too late..

It was something that would change Corsington, and if Nontramar could see far enough ahead into the future and prevent certain things from happening then this was going to be the last attempt he was going to try. The effects could change everything in all the parallel universes. Ryan was heading to his private spot in one of these worlds, and Nontramar could sense something great that had great significance with this boy, the one of many sons of Creation, who would be able to break the curse forever if he could just bring Ryan to this world. Nontramar looked fixed upon the image of this boy's face and thought he'd do Ryan a great favour and change his outlook by providing adventure in Ryan's life. Something Ryan would never forget. Ryan was about to become a hero. Nontramar transported DRIFT TIME into Ryan's world and hoped he'd be curious enough to want to read the book.

Ryan sped along towards the lake. He decided to go to his favourite spot and read his new book. He cycled along the winding sidewalks that led to the harbour where he could lock up his bike and continue on foot towards his secret place. The ground was damp from the previous day's rain and yellow, red and brown leaves now covered the path to the beach. Ryan ran with wet shoes on the sodden shifting sand with his books under his arm looking out towards Lake Sirena. The sun was getting lower in the sky, so he'd have to hurry if he wanted to have enough light to read by. He ran towards the trees by the beach, jumping swiftly from the rocks to where an overhanging willow now bent into the lake's shoreline. Ducking between the low hanging branches, Ryan came to a small clearing hidden by foliage on almost all sides. It was dry here. To his left were a circle of medium sized rocks. Inside the circle was a small collection of gems and odd plants and tangled weeds. In the past it had been a secret fire pit spot for teen bush parties but now it was so overgrown with weeds that it was misplaced and forgotten. Ryan placed the books inside the stone circle and looked around to make sure nothing had been moved. On the inside of ancient willow tree was a hole where there were more gemstones and candles and odd trinkets he'd found and placed into the area so it was like a small secret place where he could stay warm from the candles heat and read more of his favourite books when it started to get dark. A thick root of the willow jetted out of the ground and into the water but was still hidden by the hanging branches and seemed to resemble a small bridge. The sun shone through onto the arched water-bound root; picking up his books Ryan walked toward the root and carefully sat down upon it, it bent but held its place. The day was growing shorter and he wanted to only hear the water and nature and that was all.

Ryan got comfortable and let his feet dangle over the water. Sunlight shone bright with the books upon his lap Ryan now stared at his new book. The letters for DRIFT TIME seemed like they were clouded and hazy – a new special effect they could do with printing new books these days it seemed. It almost looked like a bedtime storybook but the colours on the book were very vibrant and the lettering was raised where he could feel the edges of the letters with his fingertips. In the colours seemed a misty shape that looked like a kind of stop-watch that if the book was angled more towards the sun you could see it a little clearer. It almost looked like a kind of watch he saw in an old painting once, but couldn't recall the artist. Its arms were pointing straight up to the 12 o'clock setting. He opened up the book and on the first blank page were letters sprawled in old script which read:

'To the human whose only knowledge of time and space exceeded the realm of his own world - '

Ryan turned the page. The next page introduced the reader to the knowledge that this was a true book of magic, and the spells inside were very potent and able to work and to use with caution. The next few pages were indexes which also included maps of sorted worlds. This must have been the bits of strange astrology he had glanced at in the library when he took a peek inside.

“This is wild...” Ryan whispered under his breath. “This can’t be real!”

Ryan flipped the book back to the index. He had noticed a section dealing with magical and mythical beasts and he knew where he wanted to try out some of the spells that may transport him somewhere else. If this book was for real he was already prepared to test it out, at least here no one would be able to see him try it or make fun of him if it didn’t work. He looked through the subtitles and let his finger come to rest upon the place he was looking for and turned the pages back until he found the correct page and the letters of the place he was going to try for: Ga`sa.

His heart leapt as he read the spell, not yet speaking it aloud. Ryan swallowed hard and looked at the water below his feet. There were no small fishes or tadpoles swimming around today. It was getting too cold outside now. Neither was there a boat upon the lake or a person at the water’s edge except for Ryan. The wind moved the willows tendrils. He closed the book using his finger to mark the place to re-open the book at and stared at the cover again. With its floating hazy words: DRIFT TIME and the stop-watch which hands pointed straight to the – left? No, that can’t be correct! Yet it looked as if the arms had moved to the 45 second spot now. The cover rippled and stirred as if something disturbed their water-coloured eternal rest. Ryan looked up at the willow branches as they swayed in the breeze. He must be feeling a little unwell or maybe it was just the light from between the branches. He looked again and the book cover looked solid once more. He opened the book once more to the page that contained the spell. It was getting darker it must be going closer to 4pm. He’d better read faster if he wanted to try it out. He hopped off the great gnarled root of the willow tree to the shoreline. His feet splashed the sandy shoreline as he stood there. Something great was about to take place.

A breeze from the east now dried Talon as he knelt upon the shore alone. Mora had flown towards the town and Talon was drifting into a dream. It was warm days like today that brought back memories of Talon’s mother, Adrenia, and father, Bolton, when they were all playing together at the water’s edge. His father would teach him how to spear fish as his mother would wade closer to shore. It seemed only yesterday for Talon but they were long gone. He sighed as he breathed in the ocean air. The sun got lower in the sky. He closed his eyes and then something tickled his nose. A strange scent he’d never smelt before and he looked around in bewilderment. He got up from his kneeling position and stared out across the ocean. There was nothing different that he could see but he felt uneasy.

“There’s magic afoot somewhere...I can feel it.”

Ryan now read the words aloud:

“To reach the world of Ga`sa recite the spell and the portal will open. This doorway may be hard to find, but when found, you will need the timepiece. Without the timepiece set in the correct time of your world you will not be able to return. Don’t forget to wind the time piece at the stem every day. Once set – repeat the following spell:” Ryan read the spell again in his head, “... and there, within that world you will be. To return, repeat the spell again.”

How does the timepiece get set? Where was the timepiece? Was it the stop-watch on the cover? Ryan looked at the cover again and the watch had changed again to have both arms facing the 30 second mark. Would he have to put his hand into the cover? It seemed unreal but as he touched the front of the book it seemed like a clear film stirred the colours and he watched as the timepiece moved again to the 15 second mark. Ryan held his breath and tapped his fingers on the cover and pierced the film. Like plastic wrap in water his hand sunk into the cover of the book.

“Oh, yuck!” he exclaimed as he opened his hand in the coloured waters. He was up to his wrist in liquid and he hadn’t yet gotten hold of the timepiece. He stuck his hand in further until he was up to his elbow through the cover of the book when he

could feel the timepiece in his hand. The water rippled and swayed with colour but Ryan was still holding on to the watch. He pulled his arm out, and as soon as he had the timepiece torn from the book cover, the waves instantly stopped. The cover was solid again. Ryan's heart raced and his hands shook as he felt the timepiece now ticking in his wet hand. Turning the book over and looking on his other wrist where his digital watch was on his wrist he read the time. It was 3:45pm and when he looked again at the timepiece it didn't look like a stop-watch anymore. It resembled more a golden etched pocket watch worn by someone from another century. He manipulated the dial by one of the little knobs on the top of the watch and changed the time to forty-five minutes after three. He looked inside the book to recall the spell in his head and closed the book again.

“Here goes nothing...” he thought to himself. He had the timepiece in one hand and the books, DRIFT TIME and LEG- ENDS, in the other and with his feet now planted firmly on solid ground he said the spell aloud. He closed his eyes and...wait- ed...He opened his eyes...

Nothing... Maybe he didn't say it correctly. It could be a different way of speaking. There was no doorway when he opened up his eyes. Ryan looked around...nothing. No portal, no doorway only it seemed the wind was blowing warmer and one other thing that he never noticed until that moment...The birds had stopped chirping in the tree above. He slipped the timepiece into his pocket of his jeans and sighed. He would have to go home and listen to his sister laugh at him for getting muddy shoes and soggy socks for getting too close to the waters edge. Ryan slipped the books once again under his arm, he took one step forward toward the water's edge when he suddenly realized that the magic was real and that it had actually worked. He had unknowingly found the portal and had stepped into it and through it. In one swift second the portal, (under the water, near the shore beside him) had dragged him under the water. With his free hand he tried to rise to the surface, but he only got dragged further under. His eyes were open and filling up with water and sand. A cry for help gargled from his throat and he struggled in the endless black. He had to get air into his lungs soon or he'd drown. Then suddenly he saw light and kicking his feet and moving his free arm swam urgently toward it. It was a struggle with the books still in his grasp but he jumped to the surface and with a huge splash Ryan made it to the surface gasping in all the air he could.



The Search for Nontramar

Talon rose awkwardly to his hooves pushing his black matted hair away from his green eyes. He sniffed the air and looked around himself. The hair on his back rose and he shifted uneasily although everything looked the same as it usually did, there was something different.

Talon now wished he wasn't alone on the beach and that Mora was still perched on his shoulder. He wouldn't seem so strangely uneasy. He looked towards the ocean as he heard a rumble in the air. Slowly, dark clouds began to gather twenty feet away from shore although the rest of the sky was still blue. The clouds grew bigger and darker and began to lower towards the waters until they hovered five feet from the water's surface. The wind then began to stir the water into a small whirlpool. The clouds boomed with thunder as a crack of lightning hit the centre of the whirlpool. The lightning then became a ring which spun in the opposite direction of the whirlpool hovering inches above. Another boom of thunder crackled from the clouds was heard and then as suddenly as it had come it had retreated back into blue sky. The water still boiled but it was no longer a whirlpool, and Talon watched as a figure immersed from the bubbles, thrashing and gasping in all the air it could. Talon whinnied, went on two hooves and kicked at the air, backing away from the shore in fear. The figure seemed dark, and it seemed to have found stable footing because it was now rising from out of the ocean coming closer to shore... Closer to him. Talon backed away to a large jutting rock so that he may spy on whoever this thing was coming towards him. He angled his body so that he could not be seen observing this creature that was carrying something in its arms as it made its way to shore. It coughed and sputtered and shivered as it walked to the water's edge. It fell forward onto shore when it had reached the dry sand and not letting go of what it carried collapsed upon the sand. It closed its eyes. Maybe it was dead.

Ryan thought he'd drifted into an undertow of Lake Sirena and with his eyes unable to focus straight had managed to find his way back to the shore. He grasped the books tightly in his arms and stumbled onto the shore where he decided to rest before trying to find his way back to his secret spot again. How crazy he felt for getting caught in the water like that. He'd now have to explain to his mom why he was soaked to the skin because there was no way she wouldn't let this go un-noticed. He lied there on the sand shivering, thinking about how much trouble he was going to be in... The books were soaked but at least he didn't lose them or the timepiece. He was exhausted, cold and tired.

Talon watched the creature for a few moments as it lied there, and finally got enough courage up to venture from behind the rock and toward the trembling figure in the sand. Its clothing was strange. It was not part animal like himself nor did it come close to resembling any creature of this world, although it was perhaps slightly elf-ish looking. Another strange thing was its feet were clad in white leather encasings which elves did not wear. It wore blue leggings and a white over shirt that had a strange symbol on the sleeve and strange lettering was covered by the books it held in its grasp. Talon had to touch this creature to see if it

was real, for he wasn't really sure if he was dreaming or not. His leathery finger jetted out and pushed against the creature's arm. The creature stirred and began to rise. Talon backed away as it slowly sat up and blinked its brown eyes...and looked at him.

Ryan could not believe what he was seeing. He felt someone touch him and when he opened his eyes found an odd-looking man gazing down at him in fear then back away. He didn't know why until he looked a little further down and saw – horse legs?

All too soon he realized where he was but was too scared to believe it. He blinked and then quickly rose to his feet. The creature stared as it backed further away and Ryan knew all too well what this thing was...a centaur!! He felt his feet go from underneath him and fell back to the sand the whole time his eyes were wide, he muttered, "Unbelievable!" under his breath.

Ryan took his gaze off the centaur and looked around...This was not the beach of Lake Sirena, this was somewhere else. The sky was darkening from light purple to an amethyst as Ryan watched another sun setting in a different sky. The clouds were dissipating and seemed like wisps of pulled cotton candy. The books had fallen out of his arms when he rose and now lay open on the beach. Ryan quickly scrambled, scooped up the DRIFT TIME and looking at the centaur picked up the other book LEGENDS and held them tightly against his chest. He knew the timepiece was still in his pocket, and quickly fished it out of his pocket and pressed it against his ear never taking his eyes off the centaur. Its eyes were the greenest eyes he'd ever seen – almost like the colour of the water he'd come from. This was too strange for words. The watch was still ticking – this was a good sign. Ryan wound the watch and shoved it back into his pocket.

This creature was intelligent, as Talon could see by the way it stared with wonder at his face, although he may have been making the same expression too. It was all so strange. What was this thing? It looked as though it was trying to get its bearings to its surroundings. Did it mean to be here? He could smell its scent and thought there was something familiar about it. Talon stood his ground and watching it slowly approach he heard sounds coming out of its mouth:

"Uh, um, do you speak English?"

The centaur stood there silent, listening.

Ryan sighed and shifted again. He tried again:

"This is so weird...I don't even know where I am...Could you help me? I don't know if you know what I'm saying but I have to get back home somehow. Oh wow! This was supposed to be an experiment, it wasn't supposed to work. I didn't even believe that it *would* work...I can't believe I'm talking to a centaur! Do you understand me?"

The centaur frowned slightly and it stood there silent before it spoke, it took a few steps away then turned and looked at Ryan.

"Strange beast!" Talon growled, "What kind of creature are you that you know what I am and speak my language, yet I know not what you are!"

Ryan was breathlessly thrilled. "You spoke! You understand! Wow, that's great, you can help me!"

"Perhaps, but tell me what kind of creature you are."

"What?"

"What type of beast are you?"

“I’m human, my name is Ryan.”

“Human?” he grimaced in thought, “Human...hah! – I don’t...” he turned away and then swiftly turned around again and stared wide eyed at Ryan. “Human! No! That isn’t possible; you’re not supposed to exist! What kind of magic did you use to get here?”

“Magic?”

“It must be magic, how else would you be here. There are no such things as humans – not for millions of years. So...Ryan, how did you get here?”

“This book and this watch, a few words and suddenly -- “

“It *is* magic, human! Were you not aware of what you were doing?”

“Yes, but I didn’t believe...”

“Didn’t believe eh? Well now you know! How do you come to speak *my* language?”

“You are talking in English.”

“English? By colt’s delight, you are human! English? Really...” Talon began to ponder this.

“Is this Ga`sa?”

“The correct pronunciation of this world is Gazsha.” He watched the human mouth the words.

Talon’s face lightened and he extended a hand to Ryan. “Human! Ryan! I am Talon the Noble, let me apologize for my apprehension and extend welcome to you.”

“Thanks.” Said Ryan relieved as he shook Talon’s huge hands. “I’m grateful for your welcome but I think I should get back before it gets too late. My mother, in my world, is expecting me home before the street lights come on.”

“Street lights?”

“Yes I come from a world that has lots of big roads called streets and we have a power called electricity that provides us light from the darkness of night.”

“Magic no less!”

“No, it’s not magic, it’s electricity. We use it to power everything in our world. Our world...My world! I need to get back soon I think.”

“The only thing I can suggest is that you climb upon my back and we will ride into town and I will see what I can do to help you get back to whence you came.”

Ryan stared at Talon for a moment realizing what he was about to do. Was this like getting a piggyback ride or a horsey-ride? He looked around as the sky grew deeper purple and stars shimmered above. It was beautiful. This was exactly the type of day he had in mind when he started out!

Talon helped Ryan onto his back and held onto Ryan’s books as they rode upwards toward the summit while Ryan clung to his mane and tried to stay on. Ryan decided it was like a horsey-ride and it was a long way to fall. Ryan squeezed his eyes closed and held on as they rode on.

“Ryan, may I ask you a question about your humankind?”

“Yes of course!” Ryan replied.

“You said earlier that we were fabled creatures in your world, when we are described in your legends, are we fierce or are we weak?”

“You are physically powerful, immense and influential on mankind. It was said that your kind taught us to be marksmen!”

Talon smiled proudly as they rode toward a nearby entrance.

The air was filled with scents, sights and sounds that overwhelmed Ryan’s mind. The path continued on, to an open field with tall thin trees. Up ahead was a great stone wall with open doors leading to the entrance. Talon strode up the path with Ryan on his back, and immediately was greeted by the first passer-by they saw in the town as they entered. It was seconds later that what they were seeing was finally registering in their brains. The creature...What was that?

Ryan couldn’t get over all he was seeing! They were giving him second glances and smiling at him. This was quite the dream; he must have pinched himself several times as they rode...Fortunately, this was no dream!

“Welcome to the town of Enswathe” spoke Talon, “I must speak with my friend who is at my hut at this moment...Just over here.” He quickened his pace towards his doorway. There were several markets set up in the distance and music lingered in the air as they approached.

“Talon! Who’s your rider? What is that strange animal?”

Ryan held tight as Talon picked up the pace through the marketplace. Talon realized how nervous he was becoming and thought suddenly it was a bad idea for this human to be out where everyone would see it and him together. Mora would know what to do about this. He now realized he was in more trouble than he originally imagined.

When they reached his hut, he quickly hurried Ryan inside seeing the crowd following up behind him. The sun was setting now and Talon reached out and lit a nearby lantern and placed it on the table inside.

“Mora! Are you here Mora? Please answer me, I’ve got a big problem ---“

“Yes, sure Talon...When do you not have a problem!” She answered perched upon her stand just outside the window. “What happened?”

“Please Mora, just come see for yourself.”

Mora’s head turned to look at Talon and it fell upon the face of Ryan.

“You! I saw you!” squawked Mora.

“I saw you! I thought I was imagining it! You can speak!!”

“Talon, this creature it’s...”

“Human – the legend of Creation is true! Now he needs our help.” Talon couldn’t hide the excitement in his voice.

“What can we do to help you? Just use your magic to go home!”

“I’m sorry but I realize I would like to find out more about this place before I return. It’s a beautiful place!”

“If this human has got into our world...Who’s to say that Apophis isn’t too far behind?”

“Apophis?” asked Ryan.

It was then that Talon quickly re-told the story of Ga`sa and of Nontramar’s battle with Apophis. Hearing the story unfold suddenly worried Ryan that there was a reason he was suddenly there.

“Where is Nontramar now?”

“Of course, he’s in the Great Cavern to the North. I believe now that he has summoned you for a quest Ryan, of which I am not certain the course but I am sure it will perhaps finally answer some questions you may have.” Talon rose onto his hindquarters and whinnied loud. “And I will aid you on this quest! Please if you will, I will prepare to ride tonight to the city of Corsington and be at the Caverns by morning...There we will be aware from Nontramar Somtara of how things will unfold...I...I must prepare!”

Ryan stood dumbfounded, stared at the nearby lantern; looked away in thought...He could hear Talon rattling things in another part of the hut. It was incredible that this was happening. This was a quest! Who would have believed such a thing to unfold before him? Mora watched him intensely reading his expressions when he looked towards her again. She looked out the window then shivered and radiated a rainbow around her as she fluttered her wings and looked at Ryan.

“Human – Ryan – those lanterns are getting closer and we can’t remain here too much longer without causing too much of a panic.”

“Then let’s go...When you’re ready, I’ll be ready.”

“Just let me grab some more things...Will the crowd be here soon?” asked Talon.

“Yes,” Mora looked towards the window, “yes, very soon...Merely paths away.”

“Come to my shoulder Mora and Ryan jump onto my back and we shall ride out this very moment. Here, I have what I need in this sack and I found an old riding seat for Ryan to sit upon for the journey. Let’s go out the back door.”

The crowd grew louder as they snuck through Talon’s garden to the field Talon could hear the first knock upon his hut door. They were crossing the meadow at a gallop. The meadow led them into the direction they needed to ride to the northern caverns by route of a few fields and hedges where they could pass by without notice. Ryan gripped tight to the saddle and double checked his pocket for the watch. It was still there. He was relieved; he wanted to make sure he could still get home with everything he needed. Talon had placed Ryan’s books in the pouch beside his left leg so he knew everything was safe. They trotted to the road where Mora flew up and surveyed the area and landed back to let Talon which direction they should move to reach Corsington.

“How far away is it?” asked Ryan. Talon didn’t answer and was silent but kept moving forward. The night continued on and they stopped occasionally through the night to rest but didn’t really sleep at all. Ryan found a centaur wasn’t like riding a bike at all! It was quite unusual, especially when the face in front of him spoke and reached out to push branches of willow trees out of the way and kept glowing insects from landing on him. Or were those pixies? It seemed everything was aware of him. And vice versa! Who would believe him if he went back home now and told of what he’d seen. His sister would call him a mental case and his mom would have him in therapy before he could protest. No, there had to be a reason for him being here. He’d have to see Nontramar Somtara and find out why he was here. The skies were now starting to lighten across the east a pale yellow into blue. The morning was coming. Perhaps they would rest before they got to Corsington.

They passed a great clearing with tall grass and through the trees Ryan caught a glimpse of Corsington and his heart almost leapt. This place was just like he’d imagined it with another great barrier castle wall but it looked worn by battle and time and there was ivy now growing between the cracks in the stone that made it look majestic. The leaves of ivy had begun to change colour for autumn and the green leaves were now turning shades of red, orange, and yellow. It was an amazing sight to behold in the early morning light. He’d wished he had a camera and in the back of his mind Ryan made a mental note to himself for next time...Hopefully there would be many next times. The flags of blue and white flew at the archway with a golden dragon symbol on the center of them with a red outline Ryan could see clearly as they approached closer to the gate. The portcullis was open wide and the great wooden doors, full of ivy stood permanently opened it seemed.

“Ryan, in my pouch to the right is a cloak, just to be out of harm's way it would be best if you put it around yourself and keep your head low. There are no humans here and if we enter some may be startled even threatened.”

Ryan reached into the pouch and retrieved the cloak throwing it quickly over his head as Talon continued to talk:

“Mora will sit on your shoulder and will keep your face well hidden with her magic. Right now the entrance look pretty empty but out of old duty, they still have a captain posted at the doors. Hopefully we’ll pass without suspicion. Let’s move on...”

“I thought this place was peaceful...”

“It seems lately many are becoming uneasy. There is a lot of magic here as I’ve said before and many folk have had premonitions of future events but aren’t quite able to have complete accuracy. There had been talk of something strange in the air...”

“Lucky I came along!” Ryan added sarcastically smiling.

“Perhaps it is, but we’ll know when we speak to Nontramar. For now we need to find a place to rest for a while and it’s not going to be easy but since the light is low you may get mistaken for an elf... Curse your brown eyes!”

“Why?”

“No elves have brown eyes...They have amethyst eyes.”

“Oh. Yes that’s right.”

“You knew that?”

“Yes, I’ve always enjoyed reading about mythical creatures.”

“Ryan, you are a mythical creature.”

“Really?”

“Yes that is why you need to be careful.”

“Right.”

“Now be quiet as we ride to our lodgings for the evening.”

Ryan nodded and kept his head down as they passed the archway with the flags. Mora was now on Ryan’s shoulder and fluttered her wings as they continued inside. The streets of Corsington were empty save a few strolling Dwarves and Halflings heading towards the local pubs for the day after a day of mining in the caverns nearby. The streets were cobblestone and Talon’s hooves clicked on the ground as they rode. No one paid attention to them and they made their way to a nearby path that led to a hovel to rest. It was a spot Talon had stayed in as a colt, it had no real cover from rain, but it still made for a place to sleep for a few hours before heading to the Caverns of the North. A nearby bale of hay was enough for Ryan to lie upon and rest as they waited for the remainder of the sun to rise. Ryan pulled out the timepiece from his pocket and wound it, when he couldn’t turn it any farther without force; he admired it and placed it back into his pocket. Talon stood nearby but rested his head upon a higher bale of hay to sleep.

Soon enough Talon could feel the warmth of daylight begin to warm his mane and he was aware of his surroundings as the sky turned a fuchsia colour with the rising of the sun. Looking over to the sleeping figure of the human made him very excited with anticipation of meeting the Golden Dragon, Nontramar, at long last, he pushed the boy’s shoulder to wake him. At first Ryan wanted to continue sleeping until he realized he wasn’t sleeping in his bed, and then felt how painful his shoulder was pressed up against his ear. Looking toward Talon he too at first was strangely excited and then confused.

“Where are we?” Ryan asked as he rose and sat up on the bale of hay.

“We are in the city of Corsington, amid the battlements of the last great war for Ga`sa. As you can see by the walls of this place Corsington is several thousand years old but has not given up it’s post for establishing itself as a Watchtower if evil should rise up against the peace that was established here so many years ago.” answered Talon with a stern look. “We should be leaving - it will take to mid-day to reach the Caverns... We should be leaving once Mora returns.”

“How do you know how far to go?” Ryan asked as he stood and stretched.

“I always went with my parents when I was young to view the Caverns and they would always re-tell the story of The Battle of the Deep Green. I could almost close my eyes and imagine the battles that took place in that very area. Not to mention the spot where Apophis was banished is still stained black as a reminder of his evil. If you look out to that black outcropping, you can almost see it.” Talon pointed out the window toward the mountains. Ryan could see a dark spot on the rocks. “Anyways, we should be heading out so hop on Ryan and let’s get Mora and go.”

Talon and Ryan rode outside and waited at a nearby oak tree for Mora. She returned relaying what she’d seen adding that they should get whatever supplies they needed at the nearby bazaar then ride until they’d arrive at the Caverns; which would be slightly before nightfall. The trail before them was clear and without fail there were now more beings awake and going about their daily routine, some of them noticed their presence and were getting closer out of curiosity. Mora reminded them although it seemed safe; the importance of getting there as quickly would keep them from any problems. A small fairy flittered around Ryan smiling at him; taking notice that he was no ordinary elf she buzzed in his ears and tickled his nose touching his face with her hands, then kissing his cheek. Ryan felt as if he’d been licked by a puppy and felt the tickle of her kiss on his cheek. She winked at him, looking into his right eye and then flew off. He felt very happy almost giddy. What would his mom say about that?

Ryan had recalled to mind a time when he was nine and his mom had taken him out shopping at the mall. There was a local store that was trying to find homes for abandoned dogs and there had been a dog that Ryan had spotted outside and was immediately drawn to the poor mutt. It wasn’t very old and had a curly tail. The beige and brown spotted dog had a brown patch around its eye almost in the shape of a clover and the eye was askew. It sauntered up to him and Ryan felt a strong liking to it. He bent down and picked it up and the dog immediately made for his face licking Ryan’s cheeks and trying to bite his nose. He asked and asked his mom and begged the best he could to have the dog but to no avail. Thank goodness she wasn’t there thought Ryan. She’d give him a sour look probably.

They trotted toward the bazaar with all its beautiful flags and banners flying in many different colours. Ryan wore the cloak and tried to hide his eyes as much as possible while Talon purchased fruits, nuts and some strange flasks that contained some strange liquid inside that Talon gave to Ryan to hold. It was warm to the touch and had a pinkish-white hue.

“You have a very quiet passenger my centaur fellow...Is he not wanting to sample some of our wares?”

“He’s uh, he’s just new to the area and is just taking in the surroundings.”

“Yes, I find this place very beautiful.” Ryan piped up and smiled.

“Thank you fine sir, perhaps I could interest you in a potion or two.”

“A what? No thank-you.”

“Thank you very much for your help,” Talon interrupted, “We must be going now.”

As they strode out of the bazaar Ryan noticed a few people were watching them leave, obviously catching sight of Ryan’s face and realizing he wasn’t a local elf or wizard at all.

They continued north through Corsington city and made it out to the road leading to the outskirts to the mountainous caverns. As they got closer the dark stain on the mountain seemed to get larger and wider; by nightfall Ryan could see the blackness on a quarter of the mountainside. It must have been a great struggle to free the world from Apophis. The thought of something so evil made Ryan shudder at the stain. The sooner they were there, at the caverns, the better.



Attacked!

The journey into the caverns was quiet and the path was now darker in the dense woods; there was anticipation in the very air they breathed. Everything around them was silent with only the clop of the underbrush stones off Talon's hooves and the wind whistling in the trees to remind them that they were still moving. None of them had spoken for quite a while. Ryan, wearing the cloak again to keep warm, was astonished at the size of the caverns as they began to climb up to the summit. Talon was the first to break the silence by explaining to Ryan there was a legend written on a nearby boulder that would lead them to Nontramar's castle and to the very mystical dragon himself.

"Not very many of us know the location of Gudrun, except for Mora who has flown over several times."

"Yes, it's quite beautiful actually." Mora whispered in Ryan's ear.

"Gudrun, what's that?" wondered Ryan.

"It is the name of Nontramar's castle. Gudrun is a hidden castle inside the caverns to the east of us... We shouldn't have too far to go before we come to the boulder which will show the way."

When they arrived at the summit of the eastern caverns they came upon a large stone covered in growing vines, underneath was carvings etched in the stone. Talon pushed aside the vines and brushed the rock of dust to uncover the map carved into the rock. Talon traced with his finger and looked up straining his eyes toward the path ahead and then looking once more upon the map.

"Hmmm, according to this... We will continue up this path and then it will split and we will take the right hand path, into a small cave that will come back out to a small open area where there is a giant sundial, then another path winding left to Gudrun Castle. We should be able to see the castle when we reach the sundial."

"How long do you think it will take?"

"Not sure. Like I said it's been a long time since I've been here. I know you are anxious to meet Nontramar, but all in good time....Patience..." Talon sniffed the air, "Patience."

"We're all uneasy; I feel that there is definitely something happening in this world and the sooner we all know the better things will be..." said Mora, "I hope."

Talon, although silent, was feeling a sense that they were being followed or watched somehow and was a little more skittish as the darkness of the cave closed in. Ryan must have sensed this because he patted Talon on the back and it seemed to make him feel a little easier. The cave was damp and smelled of moss but the darkness quickly faded and the exit was now visible from where they were. Ryan could hear water dripping and could see golden coloured stalactites and stalagmites all around them with a small stagnant pool of water on the right with strange bulbous shapes protruding from the water that resembled a mushroom fanning outwards but were a bluish-pink colour with dark purple bubbles running through it and were the size of small stools. There were strange kinds of stones reminiscent quartz or opal.

It was like riding through a dream; when it abruptly turned into a nightmare. They strolled to the exit of the cave when Ryan was swiftly jarred and knocked off of Talon. Suddenly there were growls and screams coming from everywhere! Ryan saw stars and was beginning to curl into a ball from being winded. There was a struggle going on around him and Ryan, trying to catch his breath, began to rise up off the ground to aid his friends from any harm. Stumbling he stood up in time to see Talon rise onto his hind legs and come down upon a dark creature that looked like a black hairy dog but was spindly with arms and legs and was filthy from head to foot. There were two more, one was holding its ears and screaming as it tried to swat at Mora while the other was coming towards Ryan now; snarling. Ryan had to think fast! What creature was this? What could he do? Looking around him quickly he grabbed some dirt and dust from off the ground and as the creature got close enough he threw it into its eyes. The creature batted at the air and howled as it reached toward its face to clear its eyes and see. Ryan dropped to the ground knocking the creature's legs from underneath it. When it fell, Ryan crawled back onto his feet to see the creature had fallen head first to the ground and was now unconscious, looking over at Talon and Mora he saw that the creatures were also now fleeing from them heading up into the nearby brush to disappear.

"Is everyone alright?" Talon asked.

"Yes.", answered Ryan.

"Yes, I'm fine." said Mora who quickly landed on Ryan's shoulder to rest.

"What were those creatures?" asked Ryan.

"Those things are called Troctolites, they like to hide in the mountainous caverns here and usually don't attack unless they feel like they're being threatened." Talon was now gathering up all the things that had spilled from the saddle as he spoke, and found a lantern to which he was now starting to light with his tinderbox.

"I've never heard of them before!" said Ryan. "I don't think I've ever seen such a thing even listed in my LEGENDS book."

"They are a relative to trolls except that they can move about by day in the shadows as well as night and it is the sun that they fear because it turns them into stone if they're in direct light. A very rare beast indeed." Replied Talon as he dusted off his haunches and smoothed out his mane as he held the lantern in his other hand. "Why they would feel suddenly threatened is beyond my understanding...Unfortunately they don't seem very friendly and are obviously too nervous to speak if they even speak at all. We should take off before this one wakes up because they will obviously come back to find him when they notice he's missing...Maybe bringing more."

"You're right" said Mora, "Let's be off then!"

"Wait!" Ryan said as he was almost finished dusting off the iridescent sand of the cave from him. "My timepiece...It was in my pocket, it must have fallen out when I got knocked off...I don't know where it is!" Ryan's voice was rising in alarm. "We can't leave until I find it...Wait, is that it there?" Ryan retraced the path and looked down to see the timepiece intact on the path outside of the cave. Ryan picked it up and looked at it. The glass at the front had a diagonal crack in it and when Ryan put it to his ear; he couldn't hear it ticking. The timepiece was broken.

"Oh no, now how am I supposed to get home!" moaned Ryan.

"Your timepiece is broken? This is not good! We must continue Ryan to Nontramar; he may be able to fix it." Mora interjected.

"You're right! Talon, we have to get to the castle pronto! I have to keep this timepiece running or else I'll never get home!" Ryan said excitedly.

"Right! Hop on my back and let's go!"

They headed left spotting the sundial that resembled more a fountain, as the sunlight began to fade, and onto the path towards Gudrun. As they headed up the path they could definitely see a great spiral tower emerge from the distant trees like a giant dark conch shell and the closer they rode the more magnificent it became until they were at another gated entrance. Lanterns shone all around as if they were expected... Talon at first seemed a little hesitant and began to slow down as they approached. Ryan urged Talon forward and knocked heavily upon the giant wooden doors. There was silence at first and then the lanterns, including Talon's, began to spark up and brighten and then Ryan could see inside the gates begin to brighten as well; as the bolt slid and the gate opened of its own accord to welcome them in.

Talon felt apprehensive but Ryan nodded at him and assured him without words that they must enter and Talon knew he had nothing to fear. Mora was fluttering above but quickly landed on Talon's shoulder as they entered inside the gates. It was now dark outside but with the lanterns guiding their way they were easily able to see the doorway to the castle in which they would enter. The doors themselves were gigantic at this distance. Ryan wondered suddenly how big dragons were. In his book they ranged in size. Would Nontramar be so colossal that Ryan would be like a speck of dirt in comparison? Would Nontramar decide to eat him rather than greet him? No dragon he'd seen had ever been bigger than the size of his book LEGENDS with illustrations inside. Ryan had been to the local natural museum and saw how massive Dinosaur bones were. What did that make Nontramar? Suddenly it was Ryan that was becoming apprehensive. Ryan reached over to touch his books in the pouch on Talon's saddle. He removed the LEGENDS book and looked inside at some dragons to ease his mind and breathed. No one spoke a word until they were looking up at the massive wooden doors. There was a low rumble as the doors moved once again on their own and opened into a giant room.

Across the room sat a massive figure. If Ryan could estimate, he'd guess that Nontramar was at least fifteen feet tall. The room, more like a great hall, had spiralling pillars that held up the ceiling and shone with a bright golden shimmer that came from lights that reflected off of Nontramar's scales. Nontramar was sitting upon a great chiselled throne made of what looked like ivory. In Nontramar's hand he held a great staff that had a glimmering purple orb and was sculpted so beautifully that as they got closer the more ornate it became. So did Nontramar! It was an anxious moment as they got closer; no one spoke. They could see Nontramar breathing and his scales rippled as he straightened up to rise off his throne. Nontramar was almost standing as they approached the throne.

"Ah, what a relief you have made it! My little ones, who I have the utmost respect for, welcome to my castle. I am honoured you have arrived." Nontramar's voice rumbled through the room. The silence that had surrounded them now vibrated around them like sweet music. This made them all feel relief when he spoke.

"Son of Creation, your journey has been appointed to you because there is something great that is about to occur that may bring back balance to ALL worlds. You have brought with you as well two of the most respected people of our planet I see. Talon, Mora and Ryan, I want to extend my welcome to you in this great time of need and let you know that what is about to take place will make you all legends!"

"Thank you." Ryan spoke first. "There has been a bit of an accident. The timepiece in the book DRIFT TIME got broken on the way here, I'm sorry about that but we were ambushed by Troctolites and I have to get it fixed so I can get back home."

"Troctolites, that's not a good sign, please give the timepiece to me quickly."

Ryan jumped off of Talon's back and slipping the watch out of his pocket gave it to Nontramar. As Ryan got closer he got to see Nontramar in more detail: the brilliant gold of his scales, the deep green of Nontramar's eyes that seemed to glow as if there were light inside his eyes. The gentle expression on Nontramar's face made Ryan realize that he was in no harm of being eaten. Nontramar smiled at Ryan as he extended his free hand to take hold of the timepiece which was the size of a small pill in his huge hands. Ryan saw the sharp nails and knew this wasn't an elaborate costumed special effect. This was real. Nontramar raised the timepiece to his eyes and took a look at it. Ryan meanwhile was still taking in the reality of the situation looking at the great staff that showed carvings of different facial expressions as well as icons of great battle scenes. This was better than any book he'd ever read or any movie he'd ever seen! This was really happening! Ryan glimpsed over at Talon and Mora and saw them also admiring Nontramar, for Talon had only visited the sights and never met Nontramar, and Mora had only caught glimpses of Nontramar when passing through the portals of one place to the next. They were in awe as much as Ryan was. Nontramar slowly

moved back and sat again upon his throne. Setting the staff aside into a groove specially made for it, he freed up his other hand and moved the timepiece around on his palm up hand. He contemplated it and then looked up to see them all staring at him.

Nontramar smiled, “You know it isn’t very polite to stare, but since you are all new to this place and have never had a chance please feel free to look upon me...I am the last of my kind. Please stay a while, allow yourselves to be comfortable and relax; it may take some time to repair this...” Suddenly they saw an elf appear out of the air. “Saran, please take this and have it repaired as soon as possible.”

“Yes my lord.” With that he disappeared with the timepiece.

“Saran is the best jeweller in this world – he has the design of this watch and will have it repaired in no time.” Nontramar smiled. “Now, we have to begin because time is always against us in more ways than one; Ryan don’t worry about the piece it will not change your world time at all it is more important that you don’t lose it while you’re here. If you do there will be no way back.”

“I understand.” Ryan replied; nervous that he’d never see it again.

“Saran is quick and precise, he will probably repair the cracked glass and have it here by the end of today...So let me prepare you a place to rest for the night and let me begin to explain what we are up against...”

The darkness stirred. Blackness gave way to reflective light bouncing off of what was once a still surrounding of grey. Hands emerged and pushed out and broke through the membrane of nothingness into life. The air swirled around a shivering figure now lying damp upon a blackened stone against a mountain side. The dark figure struggles to rise from the ground; weakened but gaining power slowly as it rises to its feet. It’s eyes open with a shock and its fiery pupils instantly recognizes its surroundings. This is where it all ended once. Now he was back – this was the moment he’d been waiting for. He’d tasted defeat here once, but not again. He slithered off into the night.

“Apophis, my enemy, he has broken through. We are no longer safe. We have some time yet to prepare and perhaps stop Apophis from causing anymore harm. Maybe hurl him to the stars.” Nontramar winked at Ryan. “I need you to help be the one who brings back peace to all the realms of the world.”

“But I’m only eleven years old...”Ryan whispered to himself.

“Ryan, your destiny is awaiting you and I see you becoming a legend written in the stars yourself. You are a child of the universe. You are a rare child, who already expanded your fascination with the world to move beyond it and embrace the things you cannot see but know to be still lurking in your own world. This is when you become a man and learn more than anyone in your world that there is more to what lies on the surface.”

“Yes, that’s for sure...” Ryan breathed.

“We have a lot to do so we’d best let you rest and we’ll start training in the morning. My servants have made rooms ready for sleep, please follow them and get some rest. The sun will be up soon enough.”



Ryan to the Rescue!

The sunlight blinded Ryan and he instinctively put his hand out to shield his eyes. He was rubbing his eyes and looking at his surroundings; it was a massive bedchamber and even the covers he was lying under were shimmering from the light. Ryan sat up and moved away from the sunshine to rise then turned to look around the room. It was as if the whole room was carved out of stone, but the bed was warm and comfortable – much more comfortable than a bale of hay! The window where the sun came in opened onto a balcony with a lot of beautiful exotic flowers. It again was something he'd never seen before except in paintings. The colours were magical and the air seemed to sparkle in the sun as he straightened out his clothes and hair and walked out to look out the balcony windows. The scents of all the different blooms were intoxicating. Ryan knew it was still early in the morning and there was no more time for sleep he had to go and find Talon and Mora his friends and find out what they were supposed to do next.

No quicker had he thought it when there was a knock upon the door. Ryan ran off of the balcony and toward a heavy wooden door with intricate carvings and pulled it open. There was Saran with the now repaired watch ticking in his hand.

“I’ve come to give you your timepiece back and escort you down to the main parlour to meet your friends. I have never seen anything quite like you young son of Creation – “

“Ryan...My name is Ryan Lowe.”

“Yes and my name is Saran Sprig. I have been a servant of Nontramar’s for a long time. I have awaited your arrival just as much as Nontramar. I will show you where your friends are – hurry and bring your belongings...oh...and...your watch...repaired.” He spoke softly with a smile as he handed it to Ryan. “I’d say it was no more than a simple spring. The glass was nothing to replace. This is a beautiful timepiece. Carved by a great master, Ryan.”

“Oh, thank you so much! I really need to get back home sometime.” Ryan sighed with relief. He put the piece to his ear to hear it’s ticking and quickly checking the time on his digital watch he still had on his arm then setting the time again from his digital watch slipped the timepiece back into his front pocket and grabbed his belongings.

“Follow me...” said Saran.

Ryan had forgotten how he had arrived in his room from being so tired that he never paid attention. As they made their way through scarlet hallways; down the winding stairs to the second level then onto a great room with an open landing made of granite and then another set of stairs going steeply down to the last level where it was dimly lit by natural sunlight and candles in the dark corners. Ryan walked into a great room: the room where they had first met Nontramar.

On entering the room Ryan saw Talon and Mora together. Mora perched on Talon’s fingers. Them both talking face to face quietly when Talon saw Ryan and trotted over.

“Did you sleep well?” asked Mora happily.

“Yes, and you?”

“Yeah, better than I have for a while now. I know this may only be my last good sleep I will have for a while. There is something going on Ryan, and Talon and I are worried about our ability to carry this out.”

“What... What is going to happen?”

“Something that may change your world, all our worlds, together. Apophis has returned and he has begun his counter attack against you. Starting with those Troctolites that attacked for no reason and the uneasiness that was building at the places we’d stopped to rest.” recalled Talon.

“That’s right – all the signs of his arrival has sparked something.” Mora said.

“Yeah, thanks for not putting any pressure on me!” smirked Ryan.

“We don’t mean to upset you –“ Mora was about to apologize but Ryan stopped her.

“It’s not upsetting, there has to be a better way to beat Apophis and bring peace and I’m sure there may even be an answer in the books I have. I got here on purpose so there must be something in here that will shed some light on how we defeat Apophis.”

“You are correct Son of Creation!” A voice boomed from the far end of the room. It was Nontramar, with the magical staff in hand and walking slowly towards them. Sunlight gleamed off his scales as he strode slowly with some effort. “Look in the book, ‘DRIFT TIME’; it was one of the last books that Contaog had given to me. I had a feeling he knew as well as I that there was something that must be done but I’m not sure yet just what, but I know that you will help us find the answer that will end Apophis’ curse and free us from the fate that may befall us now that Apophis has returned.”

“Many of my kin fought against Apophis and died. That was a long, long time ago and we prayed it would be the last time.” said Talon. “Many times as a child I would have nightmares from the stories the elders used to tell of the battle. Now we have to confront this evil creature!”

“Don’t worry Talon, we’ll find out what there may be to save us from ever having to deal with this again!” said Nontramar.

Ryan, as Nontramar spoke, with his books in hand quickly found a nearby table to lay them out on. The table was filled with different kinds of food upon it. Some food looked familiar, as he opened up the DRIFT TIME book upon the table, some of the food was something he’d never seen. Before he could begin to read Nontramar told all of them to eat and search through the book for as long as they needed. The other book LEGENDS sat unopened at the side of the long table. It was then that the smell of the sweet potato pie nearby sparked his hunger. Ryan had forgotten how hungry he was since they had taken the journey; he had maybe the chance of eating some dried fruit and water once. Here before him was a feast of which he hadn’t seen for a while. Further down he could see Talon already eating the roasted leg of a pheasant and saw Mora pecking away at some seeds. Ryan grabbed a nearby plate and dug in to whatever he could find.

Earth was so far away to Ryan and yet so close. The thought of different dimensions in the same real time may have never occurred to Ryan until later on in his life and yet he always thought that lurking around each corner was something. Was it magic? Sometimes, when he was smaller, he looked up into the night sky with his father and could see all the stars out in the dark sky and felt that if he didn’t hold his father’s hand he would lose his gravity and float away into the cosmos. Ryan’s father unfortunately died the year previously from cancer and Ryan hoped that maybe one day - in a different dimension he may meet up with his father again. That reality seemed a little more feasible now that he was in Ga’sa. Perhaps there is a place called Heaven in another dimension like here and he’d learn to come and go there one day too, like it was a spell away. The thought was too heavy at this time to think about further while he sat with Talon, Mora and Nontramar looking for clues in the book. It was like finding a grain of sand in a bag of marbles. It was just a matter of time, but what is time in this place, thought Ryan to himself. Ryan flipped another page and read with intent as he ate a big juicy apple which dripped on the table as he ate it. There were so many spells in

script-like lettering that words would blend into other words. Ryan rubbed his eyes and looked around him. Talon and Mora were reading over his shoulder and Nontramar had gone back to his throne to sit. Ryan hadn't heard him move at all and for a dragon of his stature it was amazing how light his footsteps were. Talon looked up at him and smiled. Ryan smiled back and made room for Talon to get a better look.

"You got here by using this book?" Talon asked.

"Yes." replied Ryan.

"Truly fascinating..."

Ryan looked at the book again. The clues to help them were here, Ryan could feel it. The book looked like something he'd seen on a TV special talking about Leonardo D'Vinci and his scientific drawings and his habit of using a mirror and writing things backwards. There were odd drawings and symbols and what looked like calculations by strange mathematicians. Ryan had looked in the index of the book to find Ga'sa, maybe there was something in the index that talked about Apophis. Ryan picked up the book and flipped it to the back.

"Sorry Talon, I just want to check something..."

"Not at all...Go ahead."

Under the letter A he scrolled down with his eyes and saw the name...Apophis. Page number which was 191 and flipping the book to the page saw a drawing that he'd not seen - or perhaps hadn't been there until now - of a dark dragon; almost like a silhouette of a dragon made of blackness. No distinct features except for the snake-like eyes which glowed from the dark skin and the wings that seemed spindly and not used for flying. The small caption underneath read 'Apophis' and as Ryan looked on the page he happened upon a small scrawling of words next to it:

'tempus edax rerum'

"What does that mean?" thought Ryan aloud putting his finger on the words.

"Let's keep reading this page maybe there is more information here! Good going Ryan - check the back of the book!"

"That's how I got here.", he smirked.

"What does these words mean?"

"It's Latin..." sighed Nontramar. "It's an ancient language - isn't that right Ryan?"

"You know what it means?" asked Ryan.

"'Time Devours All Things' that is what it means. Time devours all things. Tempus edax rerum. It is no spell, it's a fact of nature in all worlds. It is a philosophy because we only know so many things in this reality and look what happens when we try and see beyond it."

"Yes, you end up in a whole new world with new problems."

"You got that right Ryan. Contaog had a clue. So simple and yet complex. Hmmm..." Nontramar sat back and stretched his wings involuntarily. The air swirled around the large dragon.

"Time devours all things. It applies with all things." said Mora. "In my travels through the different dimensions there are places of importance that have a 'time' about them...Sundials, the rising and setting of the sun in many places, landmarks to map and worship its movement across the sky; it is a way of life for many. Time...Where would we be without it? How else would I be able to explore these worlds?"

"That's right, you have the ability to travel through space and time." said Talon.

“Yes, but things have been acting very strange of late; and then you came to our world,” said Mora looking at Ryan.

“I willed him here.” spoke Nontramar. “There is nothing strange about that but in doing it I must have released Apophis too.”

“Why am I here? Why me?” asked Ryan to Nontramar. “I still don’t understand why.”

“You are special - there’s no other way to say it. You have something about you and I’m not sure what it is yet but that is because you haven’t done what you were meant to do.”

“What’s that?”

“Lift the curse and save the world.”

Ryan sighed. In the pit of his stomach. He knew it.



The Chambers

Beautiful darkness! How he loved the encompassing heaviness of the silent dark. Apophis crouched in the dankness of a nearby cave and pondered his next move. Evil welled within him. So little time! What to do next! Now that he was back to a world he'd been banished from it seemed only fitting to try and continue what he had been stopped from doing originally...World domination. Oh yes, and this time he wasn't going to hesitate - not that he did the last time - and allow himself to be captured or destroyed again. No - this time will be different! It will be something that will resound in ALL dimensions! Apophis smiled in the dark.

There are things in this reality which were only meant to be the works of fiction, but with the book of spells in Ryan's possession there were now new portals to reach these unseen realities that exist all around us. Ryan had obviously not read as much fiction as he would have liked or perhaps he may have foreseen this future. It was something that was now staring him in the face - he had a purpose. That was the one thing he felt he lacked back where he came from. He was pretty much a loner at school. He had his other friends Dave and John. He had a great imagination and his teachers would often encourage him to write stories for them because he could understand what he was writing and reading at an early age. That's when he started going to the library with his mom. Even before he could write he was talking and putting words together that he would sing under his breath as if singing a song he had just heard on the radio. Sometimes he would sing sad songs to himself that would make him cry. Funny how memories work, you never forget some of the minor things of life sometimes! Now that he was understanding that he had to confront Apophis and find a way to destroy him. Something that had to do with this world at this time. Something that involved the timepiece he was carrying in his pocket.

He had unconsciously put his hand toward his front pocket to make sure the watch was still there. He could feel the weight of it and knew it was still safe. He would have to be more careful - he really didn't feel that it was right to not try and keep this Apophis from taking over all the worlds! It could change the Earth as well! It could be changing the Earth as we are realizing this! This is what bothered Ryan most. There were such people as psychics that have a 'feeling' toward that sort of thing - Ryan's Aunt on his Mom's side was like that and would know things by smelling them.

"There is more to life than what is in front of us. Don't just take it in one dimension but in all dimensions and see if this makes sense to you." *Time devours all things.*

Keep in mind time and dimension and Ryan realized it was something that was in this space in time that was from another time and it wasn't just about worlds it was about portals from and to different worlds. A common theme and a common ground that seemed perhaps out of place in all worlds. 'What could it be?' thought Ryan. He knew it was on the tip of his mind - he knew this one! Perhaps legends with time and space? Was there something in space perhaps on other planets that is also on the different worlds in the different dimensions and time?

Ryan's jaw dropped! It all made sense! He looked at Nontramar in which he made a quizzical look back. Ryan was realizing it had to do with perhaps platforms or pyramids or pyramid shapes - it all stood for something. Perhaps there were pyramids or platforms all over the different worlds. That was the way to start! He knew that on earth there were many.

“Are there any strange formations around here that are in the shape of a pyramid? Maybe even triangular shaped ancient ruins?”

Nontramar stopped and he inhaled deeply as if pinched by an unseen hand. “You must be meaning the Chambers!”

Talon and Mora both looked at Ryan and spoke of the Chambers.

Talon began:

“Ryan, I think you are onto something! As Nontramar will no doubt let you know because he has been around a lot longer than we have, there used to be formations but they had long been covered over by dirt during shifts of the world or they were reclaimed by the forests here, but there is one spot not too far from here called the Chambers. This is like a platform that is in the shape of a pyramid.”

Mora continued:

“That's right Talon, there are different pyramids all around this world. They have been here before any dragons hatched and there are many that have crumbled but there are still remaining platforms of where they used to be. As I recall, many ceremonies were carried out on those pyramids by ancient civilizations that were here long before there were even Children of Creation.”

“So, there may be a clue at the Chambers! How far away are they?” asked Ryan.

“We will have to go back the way we came to the cave that we went through earlier and head toward the sundial at the caverns again but down a different path...It could take at least a day's travel.”

“One question,” asked Ryan, “If it is a pyramid platform why is it called the Chambers?”

“Nothing is ever quite what it seems to be...”

“That's for sure...” Ryan muttered under his breath.

“This pyramid is in the midst of these caverns and has a legend itself - I'm not sure what we'll find.”

“We should at least see if there are any clues to help us defend ourselves against Apophis.”

“I totally agree. Hopefully the clues will aid us in stopping whatever he has in mind.”

Apophis shivered in the darkness, moving further out and finding temporary shelter inside an old hollowed out tree waited for the progressing day to pass. That way he could travel by nightfall to the one place that would have all he would need to continue. The Chambers were not even a day away from where he was and he was itching to leave and make his way further into the mountainside to the East. He knew he would be safe in the shadows and nothing by the light of day would be able to see him. He unfortunately had forgotten a lot of the spells to accelerate him through the woods without detection but once he was back up to full power there would be nothing that would keep him from travelling to the other side of the universe in one quick swoop. For now he would have to head out on foot as soon as the darkness fell - which wasn't too far away now. He would gather up the Trocitolites and they would serve as spies for him to let him know of any threat in the area. The biggest threat being of course Nontramar Somtara and his Magical Sceptre. Apophis was anxious for the night and to start out to the Chambers.

The band of Talon, Mora and Ryan was prepared to head out and had gotten all their supplies together along with any extra magical items they may need for the trip and were about to leave when they had one last request from Nontramar. He asked to have Saran Sprig come along for the journey. Saran was happy to attend and everyone agreed that he could be a big help when it came to the service of a quick and nimble being to keep an eye out on what's ahead. With Saran aiding them they would be well on the way to being a little more safer if should they encounter any more Troctolites on their journey back to the cavern and the Chambers. All four together, they headed out in the early afternoon sun and made their way back toward the sundial and to the Chambers.

By the time they made it to where the caverns were, the sun was beginning to set in the sky. All the colours of purple and pink streaked across the sky and the conversation had turned from informing Ryan about the Chambers to keeping their eyes sharp to anything that moved nearby and to watch for Troctolites of course. Around this same time Apophis was also making his way to the Chambers and had still a few more hours to travel before he reached the cavern with the sundial nearby as well. Ryan decided that they would pass through the cavern tonight and with torches lit they made their way once more through the small cave without any sign of Troctolites at all. Ryan, upon Talons back held the sputtering torch as they entered the cave, and although the cave was more like a passage, the dripping sounds resounded through the cave sounding like snaps and plopping. The cave glowed an iridescent blue and as quick as they were in, they were out of the cave and at the other side of the opposite entrance.

It seemed in no time at all they were at the eastern caverns and all looking once more at the stone with the map carved on it...Ryan shone the light down so Talon could read the directions and said that the Chambers were not too far away. The map in the firelight showed the path that was to the left of them that led higher up towards the eastern caverns; there would be a clearing and following it on a more westerly path; there would be the path to the Chambers. Ryan looked at his timepiece and wound it again so it wouldn't stop ticking. Time is a strange thing, thought Ryan, that applies to all worlds. It is like a mark; a measurement on which to remember what you are doing or where you're supposed to be. The time on Ryan's watch applied to his world and the time was also showing as being around the same time at this moment. It had been days since he'd seen home and the fact of going towards the Chambers meant that he too may be able to head back home after this adventure. He was wondering if his mom had even knew he was missing or had begun searching for him since he had slipped into the water at his secret place. For all he knew she could be worried by now or even sick with the notion that her son was missing or dead. Oh, if she only knew the truth!

"Ryan, are you alright?" asked Mora.

"Yeah, yes I'm good. We should get going and hopefully there will be some place to set up a camp for the night at the Chambers."

"I believe we have everything." said Talon. "There are also more caves so there is always shelter from any elements of weather."

"Good then, we should keep going."

"Let's head off then! Onward and upwards!" Saran added with a smile.



The Return Home

If Ryan had never said the magic spell and landed in Ga`sa there was already something strange going on in the world at this time. In Ryan's world there had been some strange patterns emerging with the weather as well as with the earth itself. There were more earthquakes and natural disasters this year than with any other. The government and church would deny the existence of other forces at work in the world. They would call it nature. In this moment, the present, now, nature does not apply. People of this time were seeing new great technologies but also witness to some brutal human conditions of social classes that forced people to be slaves to the very thing that allowed the technology and progression of the species: the economy. The very humans who were the Children of Creation...were like slaves to the almighty dollar! There was something intangibly sinister about the whole thing. Apophis would have thrilled at the prospect of coming to Ryan's world at that time. People would speculate that poor management was to blame and the reason for short-comings of many officials in charge of world trades. It was if an unseen evil had entered into the world. Imagine if he had said a different spell? Would life be any different?

Back in the land of Ga`sa, Apophis had rallied up the Troctolites and begun his move toward the Chambers. He was so evil it was if the night rippled when his leathery wings flapped in the darkness of the woods as he waited. He would have to trek upwards and knew where to look for the route that lead to the Chambers. There he would recite the spell that would call all sinister forces to himself once more and restore him to his full potent evilness. The sunset was already faded into dark purple night when he emerged and now he was in full sprint towards his destination. He could tell he wasn't alone, he could sense his nemesis was near. It wasn't going to take long to call his minion to the spot where the ravages of the world would begin once more. In the Chamber is where his domination of Ga`sa would begin again. He had vengeance on his mind and his thoughts were now of what he would do once he had Nontramar begging for mercy on his broken knees before him. This was reason to be excited. He and the Troctolites quickened their pace through the underbrush.

For Ryan the sight of the Chambers was like something he'd seen in a National Geographic magazine where it showed natural wonders. The Chambers were made of what seemed fossilized remains of giant snail shells. The outside had slightly crumbled but as you entered into the caverns the caves swirled with chambers inside with a phosphorescent glow and with torches still in hand they made their way inward. The walls were smooth and the path led further into the mountainside where the pyramid lurked inside.

"Everyone alright?" whispered Ryan, not wanting to be the first to speak.

"Yes," said Talon, "It's been years since I've been near this place and it still makes me a little nervous."

"Yes, that is because there is some serious magic going on here...Right now. I felt it as we entered," said Saran, "and I believe the pyramid will bring it all into focus. These paths lead to the Chambers and to the pyramid. We will be witness to great things - I can feel it already. Ryan - be ready because I don't know what to expect but you are part of it."

“Okay.” Ryan could feel something too.

Inward they went and deeper into the mountainside until they caught glimpse of the base of the pyramid before them. It was huge in structure and the cavern seemed to be like a shell around it grown over with dirt and vegetation above but sheltered and safe below. It wasn't buried like the ones found in the desert, it was surrounded; shielded by invisible magic. It was impressive to Ryan who would never had witnessed anything like it before. In the Chambers the pyramid glowed with a purple hue and when the torches waved near it the colour became more yellow or golden. Looking upwards there was a platform and a door entrance with a lot of stairs heading upward.

“I guess we climb upwards.” said Ryan.

“I'll stay and keep watch here - I'm really not that great on stairs.” said Talon.

“Thanks Talon for all your help. I hope if this is the portal I need to get back home to my planet that at least I can say I made a friend on another planet.”

“Don't get too serious yet - you still have to make it to the platform and have the spell ready.”

“Yes, right thanks, I have to take my books with me too!” Ryan jumped off Talon and got the books from the bridle and with that hugged Talon and began making his way upwards.

Mora perched herself on Ryan's shoulder and Saran walked with him up the ancient stones. As they made their way to the platform they could hear something faint like wind. As they got more than a few feet from the platform the sound got louder until they reached the platform at the same time that Apophis was just about to land on the platform as well.

A faint cackling escaped Apophis' lips as he landed; unfolding and refolding his wings:

“Well, it seems my timing could not be better! I've been waiting for you. I knew it would take some time but now - here we are! Nontramar couldn't have expected this to happen so soon! I bet he thought you'd get here first and eliminate me before I could do any harm. I have been doing plenty harm already! You should see how your world has changed since you got to this place!”

Apophis came towards Ryan and Saran got between them when Apophis grabbed him.

“Saran Sprig. Are you really going to put yourself between something you have no clue about? You see,” Apophis said as his claws ripped into Saran's chest and brought his body closer to his face, “I am pretty sure that it is Ryan and I that have to fight each other - not you.” Picking up Saran he threw him back down the stairs. Mora's claws dug into Ryan's shoulder.

“Mora,” Ryan whispered, “What do I do?”

“Go to the door! Run to the door, go through and close it!” She flew off toward Talon.

Ryan did just that. But there was no handle to open it and desperately Ryan felt around the door for any hint of what would open it.

“Just where do you think you're going?”

Ryan turned around to see Apophis' black scaly face looking back at him.

“You and I have unfinished business.”

“I'm just a boy.” he whispered. “You...You really don't want to hurt me!”

“Ryan, you are the reason that I am here! You opened a portal for me to escape now I want to start again somewhere else. Perhaps I'll come back with you to your planet!”

Apophis got closer and wrapped a hand around Ryan's throat. Ryan was stunned. He was being choked and had his books in his one hand and his free hand against the door when he felt a nodule on the door and with his finger poked it in. The door fell opened and both Apophis and Ryan looked inwards to see Nontramar standing before them. Nontramar with the sceptre poised and ready.

"Apophis! You and I also have some unfinished business."

"I should have guessed you'd be here! Why wouldn't you be!"

"There are so many ways this could turn Apophis, you know that, but this is how it should end!"

With that a bright green flash erupted at the top of Nontramar's staff and came towards both Ryan and Apophis.

Ryan rolled with his books tucked to his body and bolted to the inner chamber where Nontramar was standing. Dropping his books he pulled out his timepiece from his pocket and pointed it as well at Apophis. Sweating and full of adrenaline Ryan was amazed when the timepiece also began to glow green.

Ryan saw the glow take form and become like a shroud around Apophis. Apophis snarled and yowled: "You can't stop me! You can't stop me!" while lashing at the thick green that encompassed him. "My Troctolites will finish you!!"

As he pointed at Ryan his hand began to disintegrate.

"What is this magic? Curse you! Argh! The pain!!!!" Apophis' arm began to disintegrate followed by his other arm and then his feet. Apophis fell back to the ground screaming. Unable to guard himself with his hands as he fell, he landed on his side and began to writhe and slither like a snake. He looked like a giant black snake as his two legs became one and his wings disappeared.

"This isn't over! You aren't that powerful Nontramar! I shall return again and again!"

"Not this time!" said Ryan breathlessly. "Tempus Edax Rerum!!! Your time has come!"

"You are no magician. You know nothing about who your dealing with!" Apophis as a snake was still disappearing into the green shroud.

"I'm not trying to be a magician, I am trying to be a hero!"

The shroud made Apophis' form smaller and smaller until it disappeared.

It was over. Looking at Nontramar, Ryan could tell he was smiling.

"Ryan you did it!"

No sooner did he speak those words when a handful of Troctolites made it to the doorway growling. Nontramar instantly turned them to stone. Relieved, Ryan smiled back.

The room they were in was small and Nontramar was tall enough to stand in it but it was cell in comparison to the rooms at Nontramar's castle.

Ryan picked up the books and scratched his head. "The pyramid isn't a portal?"

"It is, but it isn't through just that door but this one..."

Nontramar stepped aside to reveal a large circular pattern under his feet. It looked like cobblestones in the shape of a circle. He saw those on the main streets of Carson Town. Usually they would be spots where he'd seen live theatre performed or jugglers or musicians play.

"This is the portal."

“Really, you’re kidding me! So where will I end up?”

“Where you started.”

“Where I started?”

“You have kept the watch wound and you have fulfilled your destiny. All you have to do now is repeat the spell that brought you to our world and you will be back in your world.”

“Wow! Wow...sigh*...I kind of don’t want to go now. I’ve seen so much! I’ve enjoyed being here.”

“There’s nothing to say you can’t come back.”

“What if I bring Apophis back again?”

“You won’t Ryan - you have lifted the curse. I needed your help on ridding Apophis from this world, and the timepiece was the key to it all! Quite a good start on an amazing adventure if you ask me.”

“Thank you so much Nontramar, I will come back again!”

“I know you will and I will be here when you return again, and again and again.”

“So I guess there is no goodbyes.”

“Not for you here. Thank you Ryan. Now say the spell...”

Ryan opened the Drift Time book and once again found the spell.

“Here goes nothing!” he smiled at Nontramar and repeated the spell out loud and walked into the center of the circle.

Immediately, with his books in hand and the timepiece in his hand as well he felt something happening. It felt like he was sinking and it happened as fast in the blink of an eye he felt his feet become cold and wet and when he opened his eyes he was up to his knees in water. Ryan blinked a couple of times and realized where he was. He was back at his favourite spot. Under the tree he removed the timepiece from his pocket and spun the hands back to the 12 position then carefully slipped his hand into the solid, now liquid, book and put the time piece in its place. It immediately went to solid when he removed his hand. He put the books on the ground removing his socks and shoes and quickly ringing them out before he made his way back home. He put them back on and checked the time. His digital watch read 3:30pm. That was it.

“Fifteen minutes! Wow! I felt like I had been gone forever! This is incredible!! Thank you so much Nontramar wherever you are! Say hello to everyone for me and I will be back again soon.”

Ryan grabbed his books and headed to his bike and then made his way back home. The LEGENDS book was a great book to have but would have to go back to the library eventually the DRIFT TIME would stay with Ryan for the rest of his life.