

The Phargol-Horn

Volume 64

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The Literacy Project (Part Eight) (An Unexpected Ending)

The night sky was as black as coal. Sal jumped back as a lightning bolt danced above his head and shot off into the darkness. He was relieved that it was just a lightning bolt and not a dragon's fireball. Taking a deep breath, he exhaled it out slowly. His mind wandered as he briefly went over what had taken place since the Literacy Project's inception. He wondered if he might have not volunteered his time if he had any idea of what a strange turn of events would take place. But he also knew that he was not one to turn down a friend's request for help, especially for a good cause.

It started simply enough with Reammon's wonderful initiative to promote literacy. He recruited his brother Reymon to assist him. The two sought out help from the dragons to gather and distribute reading materials. They even got Grunch's blessing. To reach the outer lying areas they found a willing hand in Sal and his flying carpet. Everything was going very nicely.

Young dragon Pree would join Sal on this journey. But shortly after their takeoff a hitchhiker flew onto their carpet, a strange black bird. His story about hostages held by N'Borg in the Krak castle made Sal feel he must return to the Obelisk to inform the wizards. The story the bird told about the once mighty Gorgon also left them longing to learn more. The bird had left as quickly as he appeared and his fate was unknown.

When they returned to Carin Tor the Literacy Project was in full swing, but their job was now to tell the Wizards Council what they had learned from the hitchhiker. After an emergency meeting Sal agreed to lead a small group to the Krak to find out more about the hostages and possibly try a surprise rescue. He would be joined in this trip by Graffyn, Groosh, Ploot and to everyone's surprise Poffles. Now the party found themselves heading for Krak N'Borg. (You only need to review your last seven Phargol Horns for much greater detail about all that is mentioned above.)

The night air had turned much colder for two reasons. One was the lateness of the hour but more prevalent was the fact that they were getting closer to the Krak. It is a bleak and barren place and N'Borg had cast his winter with no end about it. Sal pulled a robe up around his shoulders. It was times like this when it became more evident to Sal that he was not as young as he used to be.

Ploot's music fell silent as he slept on Poffles' belly. You could hardly see him except when Poffles would exhale and his belly would jet upward. Graffyn also was fast asleep which was obvious by his loud snoring. If anything was going to alert others to their hopeful surprise arrival

it could be this. But no sleeping on the job for Groosh, he stood erect with his eyes scanning the sky. Just his presence made Sal feel more secure. Sal slowed the carpet speed as he felt his eyes start to close.

Sal's rest was brief as it always is. When he opened his eyes again darkness still greeted them. Possibly it was his many years of experience but he immediately sensed something was different. He turned to speak to Groosh but he was not where he had just been standing. Sal's eyes darted across the carpet but Groosh was nowhere in sight. Could he have fallen asleep and fell from the carpet or maybe even deserted the mission? Neither of these thoughts seemed possible, especially the latter one. Sal did not know what the answer was but he was sure of one thing. He felt a whole lot less safe with Groosh not there.

The darkness was slowly beginning to lift and what was coming into view made Sal bring the carpet to an abrupt halt. In the distance one of the peaks of the Krak could be seen. They must have been spotted by now. N'Grall's dragons could sweep down at any moment and send a fireball onto their carpet. One ball would be enough to turn it into nothing more than a flaming cloth.

It was a good thing that Ploot could fly, with the quick stop he flew off Poffles stomach, into the air and off the side of the carpet. His small wings fluttered rapidly as he gained control. Graffyn was not so lucky. He went head over heels landing in the center of the blanket. He was quite angry until he opened his eyes and saw what Sal was looking at. His anger quickly disappeared and another emotion took charge, fear. It is not that the members of the group were cowards but they were smart enough to know when they were in harms way. It made matters worse when the others also realized that Groosh was nowhere to be found.

Sal directed the carpet to set motionless in mid air. The four occupants stood together staring at the Krak afraid to retreat and even more afraid to stay. It made a great picture. Probably titled "Oh crap".

There was one thing they all could see. Above the Krak was what appeared to be a fast moving ball of fire. It was moving in a circle. There was no way that they could not have been noticed by now. Sal pulled two pieces of white material from his sack. He tied them to the front two corners of the carpet. This was known throughout Krystonia as a sign of truce. He knew there was little chance that N'Borg would honor any truce but he saw no possibility of getting away if they had been spotted. He slowly moved the carpet toward of the Krak.

As they moved closer they were amazed not be approached or more likely attacked. The only area that showed any movement was the blazing circle. Soon they were within a proverbial stones throw from the Krak. Still there was no confrontation of any type. Then the carpet jarred to a stop. The front fringe bent backwards. Sal standing very close to the front felt his head jet forward and bounce back. A large bump began to form on his forehead. This time it was not Sal who had stopped the carpet.

The carpet set motionless straining to move forward. Sal reached over the end of the carpet with his hand and pushed. The carpet moved slightly backward. There appeared to be a wall in front of him. He knocked on it, only noise nothing else. He blew on it and a moist area appeared. While naked to the eye it was definitely there.

The circle of fire had now ended its path and was now heading straight for them at a very rapid pace. Could this be one of N'Gralls's dragons? If so they were in big trouble. There would not be enough time to cast a spell against it. Fear crept through their bodies. As the fireball got

closer its speed slowed greatly. It came into focus. Groosh landed gently on the carpet. The sigh of relief from the foursome echoed throughout the surrounding mountains.

What Groosh had to say was interesting but a bit hard to comprehend. After being on the carpet for so long he could not wait any longer. His long feud with N'Grall had to be settled. He had flown off to challenge N'Grall to a duel. If need be to the death. To Groosh's surprise as he approached the Krak no one came out to confront him. He too had ran into the invisible wall. He fell to the ground from his high flying position. What most likely saved him from severe injury was him being in such great physical shape. Peering through the wall he saw no one. He took to the air again and flew around the wall but still found no signs of life. Ho looked everywhere for a way to enter there was none to be found. It was not in Groosh's nature to give up easily. He decided to use his natural skill of fire breathing and try to burn his way through the wall.

Blowing his strongest fire he flew in a circular path over and over at the walls top. After many passes he cut a small whole. As the glass hit the ground inside the Krak it sounded like a million mirrors had broken. If anyone was inside they would surely have heard this but still no one appeared.

Groosh was what the party had seen in the distance that looked like a ring of fire. Once he succeeded in his mission he returned. Now it was up to the party to decide if they had the courage to enter the Krak. This was even more frightening in some aspects than being attacked as they had no idea what to expect. They made the decision, they would enter.

Sal moved the carpet in a backward motion. He would need some room to make the gradual climb to the height of the hole Groosh had made in the walls top. They were more than a little aware that this could be a trap set by N'Borg. It was possible that once inside hidden warriors would appear and attack them.

As they approached the hole in the top Sal spoke charm words that would make the carpet fly in a downward motion. Everyone but Groosh gathered in the middle to balance the weight. Groosh flew about in a fevered pace going from area to area scouting for hidden troops. None were found. The carpet softly landed softly on the ground. The party took their first steps on what had always been forbidden territory.

With Sal leading the way they started to move about the Krak. They stayed together for strength in numbers plus they were in truth scared. They walked for a long distance expecting at any moment to be confronted. What they found was amazing and most interesting.

There were areas of great riches, golden thrones and beautiful clothing. It did not take long to realize these all belonged to N'Borg. A torture chamber was found. Uninhabited but for a few black bird feathers that lay upon the ground. Sal feared he now knew where the black bird who had given Pree and him so much information had been.

Outside this chamber was a massive graveyard with only names scratched on the ground. One such name was Gorgon. It appeared that Gorgon's final resting place had been found. This lent some credence to the stories the bird had told Sal and Pree.

Another section was filled with numerous poorly built and dirty huts. The stench was almost more than they could bear. Several times Ploot left the group to clear his senses as he was afraid that it would ruin his delicate musical abilities. A sign hung above one hut with a name above it, N'Tormet. The Honji headquarters this most certainly must be. Weapons in huge abundance covered the grounds and the stains on them showed tragic use.

A much less extravagant but still large building stood on the other side of the compound. A large door swung open and a room full of vials with bottles lining its shelves stood before them. Odd bags of what seemed to be herbs hung from the ceiling. Scrolls lay open and were scattered about. A painting of over ten feet graced one wall. It was of N'Chaak. This could only be his laboratory. No one else liked him enough to want a picture of him.

Meanwhile on the other side of the compound Groosh looked everywhere for N'Grall. He was not there but his dwelling was. It wasn't what Groosh expected. In one corner stood a large jar of gumballs. A large featherbed with plush pillows covered by a bright pink blanket took up a whole wall. Padded slippers set at the beds base. On the wall above it was a picture of, Groosh had to look twice, Flayla. Mother was embroidered along its bottom. How could this be? The gentle, caring Flayla had given birth to N'Grall's egg. This was a long held secret that was now answered. Groosh would never tell anyone as it was Flayla's secret to divulge. N'Grall's cave answered many questions. Like so many bullies the actions shown by their outside does not always match the inside.

As he left the cave Groosh could see in the distance Sal and the rest of the party. He flew over to them. They summed up what they had found. The Krak had areas that varied greatly. Some fit for a ruler others for bare existence. It was obvious that there was very little regard for those on the lower level while those of privilege enjoyed great benefits. This was so different than Carin Tor where most believed in the betterment of all.

The larger question was still unanswered. Not one inhabitant had been found. Everyone voiced their opinions. Sal consumed with fatigue moved some rocks to make a circle for all to sit upon and rest. No hostages, no one at all he thought.

As he rolled the last rock for the circle the ground began to rumble and shake. Small rocks started to fall from their places. A huge boulder rolled towards them as they scurried out of its way. It stopped only a few yards from where they were. They walked around to its back side. Where the rock had rested a large tunnel was now visible. They peered inside. Crystal illuminated a long chiseled rock staircase. It wound around and around for as far as the eye could see and then darkened as it grew. The length was wide enough for ten good size Honji to walk side by side or at least six fat dragons. They had no idea what this meant but they did offer up some opinions?

Was this a secret hiding place? Could this be where the pale skinned hostages came from? How far did it go? Maybe under the Obelisk?

A secret underground Kingdom? Crystal mine or even a new world?

Time will only tell, will it not, Til then I remain yours,

KEPHREN