

# S E C R E T S

THE BLACK DRAGON OF DEARTH



JASON D. MCINTOSH

Text and Illustrations Copyright © 2020 by Jason D. McIntosh.  
All rights reserved.

Cover, illustrations, and book design by Jason D. McIntosh.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher, except as provided by U.S.A. copyright law.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locations, or persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Scripture taken from The Holy Bible,®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Information about the author, sales, illustrations and more may be obtained by visiting [www.jasondmcintosh.com](http://www.jasondmcintosh.com).

First printing: February 2020

ISBN (hc): 978-1-7346626-0-3

ISBN (pb): 978-1-7346626-1-0

ISBN (ebook): 978-1-7346626-2-7

*For my wife and children.  
You are the story of my life.*

*– JDM*

*And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.*

*He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended.*

*After that, he must be set free for a short time.*

The Bible, Revelation 20:1-3



## PART I: THE GIFT

“GRAYVYKS!” THOMAS GROANED. A cold dread turned his stomach. And from the sound of it, there were *hundreds* of them. Each guttural shriek and heavy footfall of their talon-laden claws all bent in one ominous direction—*His*. Stopping to catch his breath atop the ravine, Thomas tracked the converging paths of crashing underbrush and tree rattling below.

They were closing in fast.

Without armor-piercing rounds, the weapon holstered at his side was all but useless against their tightly woven scales. Firing off a half dozen short-range shells at one of these ancient serpents was almost surely a death sentence, and he was not eager to shake hands with death tonight. He chided himself for not preparing for this mission better, then quickly excused the oversight. *How could I possibly have known?* He thought they had all been destroyed years ago in the Logarthiym war, yet here, panting in the pale blue and green moonlight of Haizorr’s dual moons, he had more than his share of them to deal with. On any other night, the moons with their halos of blue and green would have been breathtakingly beautiful. The kind of spectacle that caused starstruck lovers to reach out, as if magnetically, to clasp hands with each other in a heart-hammering silence. Like he and Jillian had shared

all those years ago...

A splintering crack sounded as one of his rhino-sized pursuers, consumed with blind rage, ran headlong into a small nearby tree. Thomas' breath caught ragged in his chest at the ground-shaking impact. They were closer than he thought! His hopes that the creature had smashed its own brains in, or at least knocked itself senseless, were dashed as the dark silhouette of the offending tree rocked and then fell to the earth with a sickening thud. Shaking its serpentine head side to side as if merely swatting an annoying insect, the beast ran onward unfazed—if not a little angrier than before. A bone-chilling call shot out from its throat.

The entire wood flooded with the curling echoes of dozens of answering snarls and shrill replies. The call of a grayvyk, the Book had said, is so potent that it can be heard for *years*. Surpassing the physical laws of sound, it is told that the echo can reverberate within the very soul of any who are so unlucky as to be within earshot.

That *Book*. The one possession Thomas both loved and lamented. It had set him free, unlocking his spirit from the gravelly gray of his ordinary life. It had also bound him to this mission, luring the very hounds of Hades to his own doorstep. Indeed, for that is exactly where he was heading. Home. He had tried all night to evade the beasts, and once he even thought he had succeeded. But the scent of the artifact he had stolen had proven stronger than his stealth. Evil is simply drawn to itself.

Perhaps *stolen* is not the best way to describe Thomas' actions of this particular evening. He preferred to think of these tasks simply as academic adventures aimed at collecting remarkable relics. The one he now carried was perhaps one of the most powerful artifacts ever recorded, and judging by the creatures pursuing him, had nearly fallen into the hands of a purely evil force with foul intentions. By those standards, Thomas judged his deed as right and just. But a grayvyk knows neither righteousness nor justice, and right now, in their eyes Thomas was a down-and-dirty thief. And a tired thief at that. Lack of sleep and an endless night of ducking and weaving beneath the shadows were beginning to take a toll on him. Not nearly as much as it would have on Earth where his strength was lessened, but nonetheless, if he did not cross over soon, it could be the end of his journeys altogether.

For a brief moment he entertained the idea of hiding high in the boughs of one of the *trabalisk* trees that lined the rim of the northern forest. They were easy enough to climb and had a staggering height—nearly double that of the tallest redwoods of Earth. Their fruit could sustain him for days if need be. Grayvyks could not climb, having only two legs, however the thought of being treed and driven mad by the mind-splintering shrieks of the serpents quickly drove the notion from him. He fought the urge to panic.

The Gate was at least three or four more miles from here. He was not worried about his strength failing, since this realm added a robustness to his body that did not exist anywhere else. It was the tenacious speed of his pursuers that troubled him. At this pace, and in this terrain, his hopes of ever crossing over were beginning to fade. He began considering his options. There was a stream down the valley just ahead beside a trabalisk grove; perhaps the huge trees would provide some cover while he tried switching his trail from bank to bank over the running river. Like a crafty raccoon attempting to outwit coonhounds. He dismissed the foolish strategy; these beasts could *feel* his cargo. Thomas would simply be making their hunt easier. Perhaps he could devise a trap? *There is no time!* he thought. *Even a bear trap wouldn't stop one of them, much less dozens!* Thomas knew he had to simply continue this mad sprint through the night. In the end, he decided that he was sick of crashing through the bushes. He could run along the bank of the stream and have less underbrush to tangle up his legs. It would also be less noisy. Alternating between prayers and gasping for great lungfuls of air, he plodded on toward the river.

Being pack animals, grayvyks seldom hunt alone. Bred by the hundreds for their simple minds and odd sort of loyalty that drives them to blindly obey their master's every command, they make a formidable and expendable army. Yet, once in a great while, one of the dark brood hatches with a blend of keen and cunning setting it apart from its mindless companions. This strain of grayvyk is slightly larger than the others with talons a shade of light blue, as opposed to the usual steel gray. The mutation, referred to as a *keen grayvyk*, is also deadly silent. Where the rest of the pack seems content to fill the wind with vicious howls, a keen grayvyk will utter no sound at all when hunting. Other than those factors, there is virtually no way to distinguish a

keen grayvyk from the rest of the group.

Normally, a keen grayvyk would be weeded out and destroyed by its master, as most of the fiendish folk who prefer grayvyks as pets are vicious themselves and cannot bear the thought of an intelligent minion. But as fate, or luck, or some evil plan would have it, this particular grayvyk-master had not noticed one of the blue-clawed menaces living among the pack. With a will of its own, a dark, and silent shadow broke off from the main group and began a snaking descent toward the river valley. The keen grayvyk had picked up a fresh trail and began hunting Thomas. Alone.

Thomas' plan to run along the river was not going as well as he had hoped. For one, the mud kept sucking at his boots, nearly pulling them off twice now. Then, there were the insects. Swarming in dense clouds, the fat-bodied flies lazily hovered just even with his head. They were not a biting species nor did they seem to be curious about him, but their position in the air was more than troubling for someone gasping for breath while running through their mid-air meetings. Thomas was sure he had dozens of them stuck in his nose by now.

When he stopped to spit out another mouthful of the horrible tasting brownish bugs, something pricked his senses. He pulled up sharply to listen. He was almost sure that the echoing calls of his pursuers sounded just slightly off course. He willed his breath to still in his chest so he could listen. Yes! There it was! The sound of the crashing and howling seemed to be falling away and to the left behind him. But why? Thomas was not an overly prideful man and so was not quick to think that he had the ability to outrun such swift creatures. Reasoning that the dense forest nearby must be obscuring his trail he abandoned the riverbank, altering his course into the trees.

After a moment he paused to rest and listen. Content that the grayvyk pack must be having difficulty tracking him, he took stock of his surroundings. The tree trunks about him were huge and he marveled at their thickness. *They must be over a thousand years old!* he thought. He was about to restart his journey forward when he noticed a subtle movement out of the corner of his eye. It was about twenty feet or more off the ground and swayed like a tree in the breeze. But there was no breeze. The moment he turned to stare at it directly, however, it vanished behind one of the huge trunks. Then,

just as suddenly, he noticed another swaying motion appear in the periphery of his other side. It too, vanished when confronted by Thomas' searching eyes. A chill trickled down his spine. He was being watched. But more than that—his watchers *knew that he knew* they were watching!

Thomas was unsure if this new discovery was friend or foe, but one thing was certain: many foes were already nipping at his heels and home was still a long way off. His knowledge of the grayvyks was not much, but it was enough to propel him forward and take his chances with these new creatures in the wood. The fact that they had not attacked him outright gave him a small measure of hope, and he continued onward, threading his way in between the watcher-filled trees.

After nearly a half-hour of jogging through the thick woods, Thomas began to find his hope strengthening. In fact, he could barely hear the grayvyks any longer and the dual full moons cast a perfect light into the majestic forest so that finding his way through it was quite easy. Only the eerie presence of the watchers kept his hope from returning fully. They were so good at remaining in his peripheral vision that Thomas had given up trying to catch a full view of one. Every step of the way, they had been there. From time to time he would also feel a subtle *thump* that shook the ground nearby. It felt as if something very heavy yet soft, had fallen onto the forest floor from high above. He had stopped whenever he felt the vibrations to figure out where it was coming from, but it stopped as soon as he did. As usual, his curious followers would avoid his probing stares into the trees.

It began to feel like a frightening sort of game. For what felt like the hundredth time Thomas stopped to scan the trees, always about twenty or thirty feet above ground. And for the hundredth time the onlookers dodged away from him just before he could catch a glimpse of one. It was maddening! In a fit of frustration, he bent down, snatched up a fist-sized stone and hurled it where he was sure one of the watchers had been just seconds before. A hollow knock, and he knew he had simply hit the trunk of an ancient tree. But, now just to the right of the same tree, Thomas was able to make out a distant clearing ahead. The Gate was now only a few hundred yards away! Recognizing the terrain, he picked up the pace.

*Whump!* The ground beneath his feet trembled.

*Thump! Thump! Thummmmp!* The tree trunk nearest Thomas groaned heavily as if something very tall, and very large had just leaned against it. Without bothering to look, Thomas took off on a wild dash toward the moonlit clearing.

*Thump! Whump! Thump!* The watchers in the woods were no longer just watching. Now at least one of them was matching pace with Thomas' mad scramble through the trees. To his left, and of course remaining out of his clear view, he could just decipher a very tall, thin figure taking enormous steps as it passed through the pale beams of moonlight falling between the trees. It was huge. Standing at least two stories high it appeared to have long pale arms and legs that took massive strides hurtling it through the forest at incredible speed. The only sound it made came from the heavy *thump, thump* of its footfalls.

*I'm going to be eaten by a giant! I never should have thrown that rock at it,* thought Thomas. He tried zigzagging through the trabalisk grove to shake its pursuit. *Thump! Thump!* It was closing the distance, angling through the dense growth directly toward him. His only hope now was getting to the clearing and reaching the Gate. With a rush of terror that surprised him, Thomas pushed his body to its limit and ran for his life. His shirt tore on a broken branch. He felt his right boot loosen as the laces began to unravel after catching on a gnarled root. Every twig, vine, rock and log seemed determined to prevent his escape! Finally, like a wild animal freed from its cage, Thomas burst through a cluster of low bushes and suddenly found himself knee-high within the grasses of the clearing.

Bathed in bright moonlight, he was now exposed in full view. Realizing this new danger, he did not slow his step. If he had taken but a half a breath to survey the new terrain, he would have noticed the odd pile of fallen branches that lay tangled in the weeds before him. With a grunt, his leg sunk deep between the space of two twisted trunks and down he went. A sickening *snap* followed, but Thomas was so stricken with fear that he was not sure if it were his ankle bones or the offending branch that had given way. *Thump! Whump!* It did not seem to matter either way. The giant had followed him out of the woods and was rushing toward him.

In seconds it would all be over.

**FIRST CAME THE BOOK.  
THEN CAME THE MARK.  
THEN, THE KIDS WENT MISSING.**

Thomas and Jillian can find anything. Possessed of a rare gift, the couple makes a living by uncovering relics of forgotten—even undiscovered—worlds.

Some might call them archaeologists, others call them treasure hunters. But guided by cryptic phrases from a mystifying Book and blessed with abilities that neither can explain, they know differently.

**SOMEONE, OR SOMETHING, HAS CHOSEN THEM.**

As the search for lost and powerful artifacts deepens, a dark danger is uncovered. When their children disappear, the family is thrown into a deadly race against time.

Is someone using them to unleash an age-old evil?

Is the Caller rallying an army for war?

Has their secret been discovered?

It all begins with a stolen scroll and the appearance of a mysterious mark...



ISBN 978-1-7346626-0-3

90000



9 781734 662603