

# FROM IRSPON

By: DAN CHIEFFALLO

“O see ye not yon narrow road  
So thick beset wi’ thorns and briers?  
That is the path of Righteousness,  
Though after it but few inquires.

And see ye not yon braid, braid road  
That lies across the lily leven?  
That is the path of Wickedness,  
Though some call it the Road to Heaven.

And see ye not yon bonny road  
That winds about yon fernie brae?  
That is the road to fair Elfland,  
Where thou and I this night maun gae.”

Thomas the Rhymer

The time was precisely ten-thirty in the morning, and a young, ginger-haired student sat in his desk in the front row of the gloomy, windowless classroom. He was thin, yet tall, with short, neat hair, light-colored skin and was bursting with excitement; the student, named Doug Macklamore, could hardly contain himself. Once again, Doug flipped open his notebook – and there, in a pocket on the back of the cover, was his schedule for his first semester of college. He was glad that he had stuck with History as his major; Doug considered himself something of a history buff, and anything historical always caught Doug’s eye, especially when it dealt with the occult.

“The professor is late,” Doug muttered to himself as he promptly glanced down at the time on his digital watch. “I hope this doesn’t happen often.”

Suddenly, a short, pudgy man carrying a small, leather briefcase walked into the classroom, and the students – who had been whispering amongst themselves – immediately fell quiet. He turned his round, pruned face towards the students before giving them a wide grin, which seemed to wrinkle his cheeks further. His bright, blue eyes were the most distinguished feature on his dark-skinned face.

“This is a better turn out than last year,” the small man said rather cheerfully as he approached the giant desk in the front of the room. He set his briefcase on top of it and quickly turned to scribble his name on the board, which he enunciated as he wrote the name.

“Professor Ben Goddart, that’s me,” he said in that high-pitched voice with a chuckle, “and I’ll be teaching this class, Ancient History.” There was a rustle as students

rummaged through their book bags, so that they could take down notes. Doug was surprised that even here, with so little a number of students, they made so loud a noise; the room must have had excellent acoustics. A few moments later, everyone but Doug began scribbling something down.

"Oh, don't write down my name if that's what you all are doing," Professor Goddard said quickly, "I have syllabi for you right here!" The room grew quiet again as the professor walked from student to student, handing each of them a stapled packet of papers. As soon as Doug acquired his syllabus, he quickly flipped to the list of topics that would be covered in class. He smiled to himself as he saw nearly every ancient civilization he had read about listed.

"Now, before we go over the syllabus, I want to tell you that we won't," Professor Goddard said as he returned to his briefcase to remove a tablet upon which he had scribbled his notes for today's class. "As a student myself – many years ago, of course – I always hated going over the syllabus, so we aren't going to do that now."

A few students in the room chuckled, and all of them smiled; they seemed to like the old man already.

Time flowed rapidly, like a swift, powerful river, and before Doug could even realize it, he was already a couple of months into all of his classes. Professor Goddard had given them all his students a history paper to write.

"Remember," Professor Goddard's voice echoed in Doug's head as he sat down in front of his computer, "it can be on *any* ancient civilization we have covered thus far, and it can be about *any* old myths from that civilization's culture." Doug smiled as he placed his fingers on the keys in the home row of his keyboard: this paper was going to be extremely easy.

A couple of weeks later, in Doug's Ancient History class, Professor Goddard finally returned everyone's respective reports back to them.

"They were all – for the most part – good papers, and I'd consider that a compliment, as I've heard that I'm not the easiest grader out there," the professor said as he finally handed Doug back his paper. As he did, Doug noticed that the professor's face had wrinkled up; it wrinkled up so much that his left eye had been forced shut. Doug smiled smugly at the wink from his professor; if there was anything he could easily write well, it had to be about history. That smug smile soon faded as Doug lowered his gaze to look at his paper. He let out a surprised yelp, stood up and quickly flipped to the last page, where the grade was written. There, in red ink, a capital 'A' was clearly written, but the majority of his paper had been crossed out in red ink – this was impossible. It didn't help that the only comment Professor Goddard had left for Doug was "nice work, but incorrect." Doug looked up from his paper, confused, only to find that the other students were sending confused looks his way. Doug could only give them the same look before he heard his name being called by Professor Goddard.

"Doug, I'll need to see you after class," is all the old man said. Doug hastily seated himself and dreaded for the end of the class period, but it finally came, and the

students, save for Doug, cleared out of the room. Professor Goddard carefully made his way to Doug's desk.

"You look confused," the professor said softly.

"How can I not be? My paper..." Doug began.

"...was excellent," Professor Goddard finished, "but it was full of incorrect information." Doug didn't understand how his professor could sit there and smile at him like this. He had gotten all of that information from his small collection of top-notch history books, and Doug knew that books didn't often lie, especially when they had been written by some of the most famous and prestigious historians of their time. As Doug recalled the famous alchemy book that he had read and cited for his report, he was sure that it was written by the same man who had written the textbook for this class.

"That can't be, professor," Doug said, a little annoyed with his teacher right now, "all of my information about the Philosopher's Stone came from *The Alchemic World*, and not only is that book believed to be the only historically accurate look at ancient alchemy, but you said books are a valid—"

"Yes, but the book is *believed* to be historically accurate, and that is all."

"...you say this like you know better than the author of *The Alchemic World* or anyone that has ever written a book on alchemy."

"I do."

"...what? Professor, are you serious or—"

"I do," Professor Goddard repeated with a wide grin on his face, "let me show you." And with that, Professor Goddard exited the room, and left Doug with a dumbfounded look on his face. Doug remained seated for a few moments longer before the old man peered back in the classroom and laughed – he was really excited about something. Doug tilted his head in confusion, noticing for the first time the bald spot amidst the forest of gray hair on top of Professor Goddard's head.

"C'mon – we don't have enough time to waste it," the professor exclaimed as Doug reluctantly rose to his feet. He grabbed his book bag and began to follow the old man down the length of the hallway. For a short, chubby old man, Professor Goddard was moving much quicker than he ever did in class. What was he so enthusiastic about? And where was he leading Doug? After the pair descended a few floors on the staircase, Doug knew that he was being led somewhere far away from the other classrooms – to a place forgotten by all except for Professor Goddard. The further they went down, the less the building looked like an educational facility. The walls were painted an ugly maroon, and Doug could tell that the paint was old; it was cracked and crumbling off of the walls. Small, yellowish lights lined the walls of the incredibly deep stair-well, and Doug began to wonder how far underground his professor and himself were. Finally, they reached the bottom, where they met an ugly stone floor. A rusted door office door prevented the pair from going any further.

"Um, professor..." Doug began to ask, but Professor Goddard just ignored him. For now, the old man had shoved his hand into his pocket, and he was fumbling

around for something. Doug heard a slight jingling of metal and Professor Goddart's hand returned from the pants' pocket, holding a ring of small keys. Professor Goddart began examining each one, flipping the key away only if it was the incorrect one. A few seconds passed by before Professor Goddart had found the correct key, and he quickly unlocked the door. The old man turned and smile to Doug.

"Enter, and please shut the door behind you," the old man said – and with that, Professor Goddart disappeared into the dark room. Slowly, Doug crept forward until he reached the doorway. He took one last step, which brought him into the room, and his jaw dropped with awe. It was suddenly like he had stepped into a picture of an old, alchemic lab shown in the book *The Alchemic World*. There were all sorts of flasks and beakers everywhere, and on the multitude of tables were sensitive, alchemic instruments that had been used in many experiments before.

"Do you know what that symbol on the middle table is," came Professor Goddart's voice from some unknown corner of the room. Doug approached a wooden table where an ancient, rounded medal lay face up. He quickly examined the degraded silver medal, which depicted a long, silver snake eating its own tail.

"That's an Ouroboros," Doug exclaimed excitedly, "the serpent eating its tail is supposed to represent the infinite cycle of the universe."

"Very good," Professor Goddart said as he suddenly appeared at Doug's side, "now quickly follow me, and tell me if you can identify what *this* is." Professor Goddart led Doug to the back of the room, which was currently lit by a dull, crimson glow. The dim light was coming from a small, clay bowl on the table. As Doug approached it, he could tell that the bowl was filled with some kind of red liquid. On either side of the bowl was a complex set of glass tubes that only let drip a single drop of the thick, red liquid at timed intervals.

"I don't know... Wait, it can't be—" as soon as he had spoke, Doug spotted something else in the bowl. Directly in the center of the bowl was a rounded object, smooth in texture and crimson in color. Right away Doug could tell that it was solid, and he would have reached out to touch it if he had been told that he could.

"It can't be the Philosopher's Stone," Doug said, slightly baffled at the crimson-colored stone sitting in the bowl. "There's just no way – *The Alchemic World* couldn't be wrong..." Professor Goddart smiled in response.

"Ah, but it is, in all of its glory," Professor Goddart said as his smile transformed into a smirk.

"I can't believe that *The Alchemic World* was wrong! The Philosopher's Stone isn't a powder at all," Doug exclaimed, barely able to control the volume of his own voice. "But that liquid – does it grant you eternal youth...or was *The Alchemic World* wrong about that, too?"

"Trust me when I say that the stone isn't comprised of a youth elixir, either. In fact, the water does nothing and it tastes quite nasty. A bit like iron, actually," Professor Goddart said as his face wrinkled in disgust.

"This is really the Philosopher's Stone? If that's true, then why? Why isn't all of this stuff in myths and legends about it," Doug asked, forgetting that the man to whom he was talking was his professor.

"It was decided by the first alchemic philosophers of our time to keep the true Philosopher's Stone origins and applications a secret. Can the Philosopher's Stone be ground into a powder? Not once it has been constructed. Can you produce an eternal youth elixir from it? Not at all – the stone is comprised of a hardened liquid itself. More importantly, can it transmute ordinary metals like lead to precious and valuable ones like gold? Certainly not – only a fool would believe such a thing," Professor Goddart said with a grave look on his face. "In the hands of fools, Doug, the Philosopher's Stone would only be constructed to be broken apart, to be studied. This is not what the Philosopher's Stone is for – it is meant to be studied as a whole, by alchemists, not in pieces, by imbeciles."

"Then what does it do?" Doug asked irritably. "These origins, these applications...why must they be kept secret?"

"If I told you, you would have to become an alchemist, and you would have to stop breaking everything down," Professor Goddart said in a serious tone as he turned around to open a wooden drawer in the desk behind him. Doug huffed and crossed his arms as he scowled at his professor. "You agree to those terms, don't you, Doug?" Doug's scowl was gone in an instant as his lower jaw dropped once more.

"O-of course," Doug stammered, his voice quivering with excitement.

"Good," Professor Goddart said nonchalantly as he turned and placed a large, leather-bound tome before Doug. "Now, I have a faculty meeting, and you probably have other classes today, but today is Friday, so I won't see you again until Monday. Your assignment for the weekend is to finish this entire book – if you do, I'm sure I can exempt you from a couple of assignments or so." The old man smiled cheerily as Doug, still awestruck, nodded and stuffed the musty book into his backpack, and then they parted.

As soon as Doug returned to his dorm room, he forsook going to the rest of his classes (he only had one more) for the day, and instead he opted to begin reading the tome that his professor had thrust upon him. Immediately, Doug sat down on his bed and carefully removed the precious book from his backpack. The tome was extremely old, that much was certain; the words on the cover had long since decayed away, and were no longer readable. A buckle with an Ouroboros guarded the leather strap that kept the book shut tight. Excitement and joy continued to build up in Doug as he his hand took hold of the strap and slipped it out from under the buckle: the leather cover was now free to open and close as Doug saw fit. As the eager, neophyte alchemist opened the cover, it creaked loudly in protest, but it still opened and remained intact. The pages had a strong, musty smell to them, and they were dull yellow with many waterstains on them. The text on the pages was in good condition, so Doug took a deep breath and began reading.

The book, titled *The Secrets of Faerie*, described two worlds: the one in which Doug resided was dubbed Irspon, and the other, unreachable parallel world was called Faerie. Once, a long time ago, before the discovery of alchemy, the denizens of Irspon interacted with Faerie, a mystic realm where Elves, Dwarves and many other fantastic creatures, such as dragons, resided. Humans from Irspon could stay in the magical realm of Faerie for as long as they wanted, and everything was peaceful. Soon however, humans stopped visiting Faerie, and the connection between the two worlds continued to weaken. In an attempt to revive human interest in Faerie, the Elves created the Philosopher's Stone, which represented a bond between Faerie and Irspon. Humans, in their quest for knowledge, only sought to break the stone down, and thus, because of their actions, the connection to Faerie was severed. However, even though the rest of humanity forgot about Faerie, a select group of humans, dubbed alchemists, became dedicated to re-establishing a link to Faerie. The alchemists stole what knowledge the rest of humanity had gained from breaking down the first Philosopher's Stone, replaced it with lies about the stone and began attempting to reconstruct the Philosopher's Stone. When Doug finally flipped to the back of the book, he saw that, over the years, many alchemists had acquired this ancient tome, and they had left records of their experiments and instructions on how to construct the Philosopher's Stone.

Doug placed *The Secrets of Faerie* carefully on the ground before rubbing his reddened and tired eyes. He glanced over at the clock with a sigh when he realized how late it was, and he turned in for the night.

On Monday morning, Doug couldn't wait for his Ancient History class to come to end. After the other students exited the room, Professor Goddart and Doug once more descended spiraling staircase and had an alchemic discussion in Professor Goddart's private lab.

"I was so enthralled when the university finally gave me permission to use this abandoned chemistry lab for my experiment with the stone," Professor Goddart said as he took a seat on an old, wooden stool, which creaked under his weight. "But enough about that – let's talk about what you read."

"That book – *Secrets of Faerie* – it can't be true, can it," Doug asked, still doubting most of what he had read in the leather-bound tome.

"I know it's a little hard to take in, Doug—"

"A little? What that book implies is that there's a parallel world that co-exists with ours!"

"I know, but I can prove to you that Faerie is a real place, that once, Irspon – our world – interacted with Faerie on a day-to-day basis."

"How," Doug demanded, "how exactly can you do this?" Professor Goddart simply pointed at the clay bowl on the back table, the one in which the Philosopher's Stone resided.

"You read it, too, didn't you?" Professor Goddart asked softly, feeling sympathetic towards Doug's confusion. "The Philosopher's Stone represented a bond between the natives of Faerie and the natives of Irspon."

"Just because you can make it with the construction equation listed doesn't mean that's what the Philosopher's Stone was for," Doug said as he sighed, "how do you know that some crazy guy didn't dream this all up all those years ago?"

"That's exactly why we can't get to Faerie anymore, Doug," Professor Goddart said scornfully, "humans, more importantly – their culture – grew up, matured, and moved on; we forgot about Faerie, and Faerie itself devolved into a place only fit for children's stories."

"Look, professor," Doug countered after taking note of his mentor's tone, "it's not that I don't want to believe, it's just that it's hard to. That doesn't mean that I'm not going to stop being an alchemist – once the Philosopher's Stone is done, we can examine the mystery of the stone that no one has figured out yet."

"The Philosopher's Stone reacts to liquids strangely," recited Professor Goddart, who suddenly looked a lot happier, "you mean that riddle?"

"Yes," replied Doug, "the fact that Philosopher's Stone can never get wet is something that's been bothering me."

"Me too," said Professor Goddart, "it's taken me a lifetime to put the Philosopher's Stone together from the ingredients that were left behind with that book, and I won't waste it." Professor Goddart smiled as Doug nodded to him. "You know, Doug, you remind me of when I was my grandpa's apprentice alchemist." Doug smiled at the comment. From that time on, Doug met Professor Goddart in the alchemy lab at eight o'clock in the evening on every week-day to discuss alchemic theories with each other; they only took a break from each other on the weekend.

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Professor Goddart picked up the round, crimson stone in his hand. For a stone, it was rather large, and was about as big as Professor Goddart's fist. Doug brought over a pitcher filled to the brim with clear, cool water and set it down on the table next to Professor Goddart's arm.

"Okay," mumbled Professor Goddart as he placed his hand just above the water pitcher, "let's experiment." The chubby professor dropped the stone into the water pitcher. Some of the water spilled over the top of the pitcher as the stone sank to the bottom. Through the plastic, Professor Goddart and Doug carefully examined the stone, and could find nothing unnatural about it.

"It looks..." Doug began, a bit confused with their results.

"It looks like a red stone sitting in a pitcher of water," Professor Goddart said gloomily as he reached in to grab the stone, causing more water to flow over the brim and spill on the table and ground. Right when Professor Goddart grabbed the stone, he became perplexed by something and hurried as he pulled the stone out of the water. As the professor examined the Philosopher's Stone carefully, he grinned sheepishly.

"Well look at that," Professor Goddart said, "not a drop of water on her." Doug was handed the stone, and he confirmed that the stone wasn't wet, but Professor Goddart's hand and arm were.

"What could this mean?" Doug muttered aloud as he held the stone up to one of the overhead lights in the room.

"Here, hand me the stone," Professor Goddart demanded as he used an old sink to put more water in the pitcher. Doug did as he was commanded, and he watched Professor Goddart curiously, wondering just what his mentor had in mind. With the stone still in his hand, Professor Goddart dipped his entire arm into the container. Both alchemists let out a surprised gasp, for where Professor Goddart's arm should have been, there was nothing – only water. With tremendous effort, Professor Goddart ripped his arm from the container and stumbled back a few feet, hitting the pitcher and spilling all of the water onto the ground. When he looked at his arm that had vanished in the water, it was still there, and his hand was still gripping the Philosopher's Stone. Doug immediately rushed over to Professor Goddart to inspect the aftermath of Professor Goddart's tantrum.

"Are you okay, professor?" Doug hastily inquired, wide-eyed, as he gripped the chubby man on both of his shoulders. Professor Goddart could only stare into space until Doug shook him violently, which snapped the elder alchemist out of his trance.

"I couldn't feel any water, Doug..." muttered Professor Goddart finally "...I should have felt water on my skin, but instead, I felt nothing – only air." Doug nodded and looked back at the puddle on the ground.

"The next step of our experiment...must wait until Saturday," Professor Goddart said slowly as he rose to his feet.

"The next step, professor?"

"Yes, Doug – meet me by the swimming pool on Saturday, around noon."

Professor Goddart said before he darted off for elsewhere, leaving his apprentice alone in the basement, confused as ever.

The next couple of days were awkward for Doug. He didn't speak to anyone unless spoken to, and his Ancient History class had been cancelled for Friday, so he didn't have the opportunity to talk to Professor Goddart. He had thought about going down to the lab to see if his mentor would be there, but he decided against it, and focused on other schoolwork. After what seemed like forever, Saturday finally arrived, and Doug headed for the recreational center, the building in which the swimming pool resided. Upon reaching the pool itself, Doug was a bit relieved to see his professor waiting there for him, dressed in casual attire.

"Okay," Professor Goddart said, "can you close the door behind you, Doug?"

"Sure thing," Doug said, and he heard a distinct click of the door locking when he closed it. Immediately after closing the door, Doug hurried to his mentor's side, and he noticed the long coil of rope sitting next to professor. One end was tied tightly around the metal bars that supported the diving board, and the other end was left free.

"Now then, Doug, we are about to make alchemic history. Over the past few days, I've been performing experiments with the Philosopher's Stone to test my hypotheses," Professor Goddart said as he stooped down to pick up the other end of the

rope, “and I have determined that the Philosopher’s Stone is the key to getting to Faerie, and water is the doorway.”

“Wha-what,” Doug stuttered as he gawked at his professor. He had read and heard some crazy things these past few months, but this was just insane. . .wasn’t it? The more Doug thought about it, the more this made sense; this was, after all, a good reason to explain why Professor Goddart’s entire arm had disappeared when it was submerged in water.

“Yes,” stated Professor Goddart, “and now, the two of us are going to go there, for the first time in a long time. We must be on our best behavior while we are there.”

“Of course, but do you think the Elves, or any other species for that matter, will recognize us as humans once we get there,” Doug asked, “I mean, Dwarves weren’t particularly fond of humans, right?”

“Don’t be silly, Doug,” Professor Goddart said as he chuckled, “I’m sure the Elves, Dwarves, and Halflings will all remember us. We won’t have to worry about a thing while we’re there.”

“What about pixies and fairies,” Doug asked apprehensively, “and what about dragons? Aren’t those natives of Faerie too?”

“Doug,” Professor Goddart said, laughing at the same time, “those creatures are not part of Faerie – they only existed in Faerie’s stories, much like they only exist in stories in Irspoon. I thought you read that book carefully. It seems like you’re still trying to break Faerie down and study it piece by piece.”

“I did,” retorted Doug, “and I am not. I swear that the book said that dragons were natives of Faerie.”

“Doug, trust me – I’ve read *The Secret of Faerie* multiple times,” Professor Goddart snapped, his rosy cheeks turning a pink color “and I’m not about to abandon something I’ve believed for years. My grandpa told me that pixies, fairies and dragons were only in Faerie’s stories, and he read the book more than I did.”

After seeing the tremendous faith that Professor Goddart had in his grandpa, Doug said nothing else. Besides, both Professor Goddart and his grandpa knew much more about Faerie than he did, right? The professor, who had grown quite angry with his apprentice, soon cooled down.

“Press your back up against mine,” the old man said to Doug.

“Like this?”

“Perfect.” Professor Goddart and Doug had pushed their backs up against each other’s. Professor Goddart passed Doug the rope end, and together, student and teacher tied their waists together. After Professor Goddart made the knot, he reached into his pocket and pulled the Philosopher’s Stone out. He clutched it tightly and looked at the water’s surface. It undulated idly, and Professor Goddart could see his reflection in it.

“Ready,” Doug simply stated, breaking the short period of silence.

“Then here we go,” Professor Goddart shouted as he and Doug jumped off of the concrete edge and into the water. The pair had expected to hear a splash when their bodies collided with the water, but they never did, and they kept falling through

air, as if they had jumped into an empty pool. Doug closed his eyes and screamed as he felt gravity tug him downwards at a sickeningly quick speed. *The bottom – we'll hit the bottom any minute now!* Doug screamed out in his mind, and he scrunched his body together as much as he could. Doug felt a great tug at his middle as the rope snapped tight, suspending both Professor Goddart and himself in mid-air. When Doug finally opened his eyes, he saw an ocean of green in all directions, save for the little dirt paths that cut through the grass. Doug looked down and found that he was only a couple of feet away from the ground.

"Hmm, my calculations were a little off, but otherwise, we're fine," came Professor Goddart's voice, echoing off into the distance.

"Tell me, professor," Doug said quietly as his stomach finally slid back into its natural spot in his body, "how many times have you done that?"

"Just three," Professor Goddart cheerily stated, "well, four now." The pudgy man started untying the knot around the pair's waists, and in mere moments, both of them were down on the ground, standing on solid earth. Doug looked around and saw that there were paths leading in every direction, and he turned to look at Professor Goddart, who seemed to have just noticed the same thing. The paths themselves were extremely confusing to anyone who didn't know where they were going. They twisted and turned, and they even crossed over each other and made complete, one-hundred and eighty degree turns; it was like some giant maze to the befuddled duo.

"So what now, professor," Doug asked, a bit overwhelmed by the huge, expansive field.

"Doug, look up," is all Professor Goddart managed to say. Doug looked first at Professor Goddart, who was awestruck and staring directly up. Doug finally built up enough courage to look up as well, and he too was awestruck by what he saw. The sky, if one were so inclined to call it that, looked exactly like the water's surface when viewed from under the water. It was rippled, and it distorted the stars that hung in the space above the azure, watered sky. The rope – which swayed softly in the wind – seemed to hang in mid-air, and ripples constantly surrounded the part of the rope that touched the watery sky.

"Amazing," muttered Doug as he continued to gaze at the sky until he spotted a bright orb of light – a sun, to be more exact, which sat just below the sky-water's surface. *So this place has a sun, too,* thought Doug as he finally looked away from the marvelous sky. Professor Goddart was already searching every direction for some kind of indication as to where in Faerie they were, and at last, the professor pointed a chubby finger northwest.

"Over there – it looks like a signpost," exclaimed Professor Goddart, and the two hurried in that direction. When the duo reached the sign post, they made another amazing discovery: the sign was written in English, *and* in another language neither of them had seen before.

## THE FIELD OF THE BETWEEN



"The Field of the Between," Doug read like a question, confused.

"Apparently we aren't in Faerie yet, then," Professor Goddart theorized. He placed his hand on his chin.

"What do you mean, professor?" Doug asked apprehensively, "if we're not in Faerie, then where are we?"

"We're in this grassy field, the Field of the Between. Do you remember all those dirt paths back there," Professor Goddart asked as he squinted down at the ground.

"Yes, it was just a few moments ago."

"Well, I suspect that those roads lead to other places, and not just Faerie, hence the name of this place."

"Then which road leads to Faerie?"

That," Professor Goddart said, disappointed in himself, "I don't know."

"Then how are we going to get to Faerie," Doug said in a panicked voice, "or back to Irspon again?"

"Calm down, Doug," Professor Goddart said, "we'll think of something." But even Professor Goddart doubted himself. This never appeared in *Secrets of Faerie*; there was only supposed to be one road connecting Irspon to Faerie. The wind blew gently, and the grass blades swayed back and forth as Professor Goddart clenched his hand around the Philosopher's Stone. *Faerie... I need to get to Faerie*, Professor Goddart thought. As if reacting to his pleas, the Philosopher's Stone began to shake with a new found vigor in Professor Goddart's grip. The old professor yelped as he hand was pulled by some invisible force, and Doug turned to gawk at Professor Goddart. Professor Goddart's arm was stretched to its maximum length, pointing directly south-west. The stone in Professor Goddart's grip was glowing a bright blue and vibrating uncontrollably. Professor Goddart's face lit up and he laughed heartily while Doug, still somewhat panicked, shrieked loudly.

"What's it doing?" Doug exclaimed, pointing at the stone.

"I believe it's leading us to Faerie," Professor Goddart replied with a smug look on his face. He started walking in the same direction as the direction in which the Philosopher's stone dragged his arm. Doug reluctantly followed, and after what seemed like hours, the pair finally reached a lake in the middle of a patch of grass. Professor Goddart and Doug nodded to each other before they both gripped the Philosopher's

Stone tightly and made a leap of faith. As before, they sank beneath the water's surface and appeared on dry land, with a lake similar to the one they had just jumped in directly behind them. A large, wooden sign was driven into the ground before Professor Goddart and Doug, and the two of them began laughing as they read what it said.

## F&AERIE



In every direction, the pair was surrounded by a thick, lush forest. The ground, much like in the Field of the Between, had thin dirt paths going which way and that, while green grass populated everywhere else. Unlike the Field of the Between, however, the sky was a normal blue color, with a sun just like that in Irspoon. The grass and the leaves of the forest rustled, giving Professor Goddart and Doug the impression that this forest was rich with life. After a few moments of standing around, the two picked a path to follow, and they traveled down it for a long while. They had expected to see signs of Faerie folk, but so far, they had seen nothing but grass and trees. The duo's path came to an unexpected end in a large clearing that, again, yielding only grass and trees. Doug immediately slouched down against a tree and let out a sigh.

"I thought we would have seen something by now," Doug said as he laid his head against the tree's trunk. Professor Goddart said nothing as he gazed down at the Philosopher's Stone, which had returned to its original crimson color.

"Bring me to a city, or to an Elf," Professor Goddart commanded, shaking the stone. Nothing happened, and after a few minutes, Professor Goddart too reclined against a tree.

"Do you think we should just go back?" Doug asked nonchalantly.

"This is a disaster," was Professor Goddart's response, "aren't there any sentient beings out there?" Doug looked at Professor Goddart, surprised that he had just suddenly yelled at the top of his lungs. Even Doug knew that probably wasn't the wisest thing either of them could have done. At first, silence was the only thing to respond to Professor Goddart's challenge, and Doug began to relax; but soon, the ground underneath him began to rumble lightly. Boom...boom...boom...boom. It had a rhythm to it, like something large was walking towards Professor Goddart and Doug's location. Professor Goddart and Doug quickly searched the surrounding area, but they couldn't see anything moving. Doug squinted and peered off into the distance, and he could have sworn that he saw moving trees. He quickly backed away until he bumped into Professor Goddart, and the two of them froze, stuck staring off in the direction where Doug had spotted the moving trees. The quaking ground became fiercer, and the booming sound grew louder, until Doug and Professor Goddart were sure that

whatever was moving had to be right in front of them – and then, all was peaceful and still.

“Wh-what was that?” Doug finally whispered to Professor Goddart.

“I dunno,” replied the professor, “but let’s get out of here.” And suddenly, a gust of warm wind blew over the two humans. They both froze once more, and they turned to see towering trees trunks. No – they weren’t tree trunks at all; they were scaly in nature, and Doug swiftly traced the large, scaly trunk down to the ground, where he spotted three, large clawed digits. Those digits were attached to a paw...a dragon’s paw. Doug gulped as he looked back up, and now he could see the dragon’s massive snout, far above the tree tops, peering down at him and Professor Goddart. The head was connected to a massive body, also littered with brown scales. Two great wings remained folded, shielding the dragon’s back. A long, brown tail dragged behind the dragon, and the tip was currently coiling and uncoiling around a tree not too far from the humans. The dragon’s nostrils dilated, and thick smoke rose out of them, and the dragon’s jaws opened as it began to speak to them. The dragon’s voice boomed loudly, and unfortunately for Professor Goddart and Doug, it spoke a language neither of them had heard or understood. Seemingly frustrated by their silence, the dragon repeated what it had said earlier, and had decided to add a threatening roar to the end of its sentence. Doug, feeling some sense of obligation to protect his teacher, stepped in front of Professor Goddart.

“Stay back,” he shouted fiercely at the dragon, hiding his fear of the scaly behemoth well. The dragon raised an eye ridge at Doug, and it tilted its head as it the massive snout lowered to below the tree tops. The dragon’s breath roiled over Doug and Professor Goddart, and it smelled of rotting meat.

“Oh, your foolish race *still* uses that language, I see,” the dragon rumbled as it snorted at the humans, its voice flowing over the humans like a stream. Doug gawked up at the dragon, but he soon found the courage to reply.

“S’sorry,” he said, “but I don’t quite get what you mean.” The dragon rolled its great, yellow eyes and shook his head, which permitted Doug to spot the three horns that topped the dragon’s head.

“I would think you humans would be proud of your ingenuity,” the dragon said sarcastically, “making up new languages to trick us.” Doug still didn’t understand what the dragon meant, and after Doug had glanced back at Professor Goddart, it seemed that he didn’t, either. The dragon opened his toothy maw once more, but no words came out. The dragon had paused and had become perplexed, for it had realized that the confused expression these two humans wore was genuine.

“I’m sorry,” Professor Goddart whispered to Doug hastily, “you must’ve been right – dragons are a part of Faerie, after all!”

“Of course we are,” stated the dragon, who obviously overheard what the humans had been talking about, “we have been here since the beginning, just as your race was.” When Doug and Professor Goddart became befuddled, the dragon rumbled once more, only this time, they could tell that the dragon was chuckling.

"That spell worked far better than we had hoped," the dragon said aloud to no one in particular.

"Spell?" said Doug as he took a step towards the dragon, which proved to be a bad move. The dragon defensively slammed its paw down in front of Doug, and the young student would have been crushed had he not jumped backwards. The ground continued to quake for a few moments, even after the dragon had relaxed its paw, the talon-tipped digits now flexing. "What spell?"

"The spell that prevents your race from remembering anything about its own origin," the dragon replied calmly as it shifted its paw back to a comfortable position. Its voice continued to gush past the humans.

"Our origin," repeated Professor Goddart as he moved next to Doug, "please, great dragon, explain." A strange smile crossed those scaly lips, revealing long, yellowish-white fangs. The dragon remained silent for a few moments.

"Dragons, humans, elves, dwarves, and halflings co-existed peacefully in Faerie's beginning: they co-existed with each other, and with the other, lesser creatures of Faerie, like the pixies," the dragon stated, "but you humans are a greedy lot, and humans started causing many problems for others in Faerie. While you humans continued to wreak havoc throughout Faerie, the other races convened in secrecy until we found a way to rid ourselves of you.

"Meanwhile, you had learned of our plans and had developed a new language to confuse us while you yourselves secretly plotted to escape your punishment."

"You mean the language we're speaking right now?" Professor Goddart asked as he blinked his eyes.

"Yes, a variation of it," the dragon replied as its voice continued to pour out of its mouth, "you humans developed a number of new languages, but we soon broke the codes behind your newfangled languages and began using them ourselves. We soon began capturing your kind while we constructed with magic your race's cage: Irspoon."

"That's impossible," Doug shouted, his face red with anger, "Irspoon and Faerie existed side-by-side since the beginning of time!" The dragon laughed scornfully, even though it seemed to ignore what Doug had said, and flames licked its own lips as it did. Doug couldn't take it anymore – he shouted at the top of his lungs, and Professor Goddart only patted the young alchemist on the back consolingly.

"What right do you think you had to banish us from Faerie and deafen us to the truth?" shouted Doug, his whole body shaking with anger, "who gave you the authority to—"

"Your race had chosen its fate the moment it began wreaking havoc upon all of Faerie," roared the dragon, and flames were visible far in the back of its great maw, illuminating the crimson cave of flesh, "the moment you began mercilessly slaughtering others – that was when your race deserved to be isolated! We thought your destructive natures would lead to your race's undoing, but apparently, we were wrong."

There was a long moment of silence before Professor Goddart finally spoke up, his voice soft and high-pitched.

"So, Irspon was constructed from Faerie magic? For us to live in isolation," the old man said, obviously trying to continue the conversation with the dragon. The great draconic head turned to the old professor and it nodded.

"Yes – as you probably noticed, it was constructed to mirror Faerie, save for a few details," the dragon replied as it blinked those massive eyes. "But now, I have answered all of your questions, and it is time you answer some of mine. To begin, how did you get here?"

"With the Philosopher's Stone," replied Professor Goddart calmly as he held out the smooth gem to the dragon. The dragon carefully examined it with one, huge eye before it pulled its head back and rumbled once more.

"I see – so that was Yaedra's gift to your race," the dragon mumbled, more smoke rising from his nostrils. "Genuine Faerie magic."

"Yaedra," Doug asked after coming out of his trance, "who is Yaedra?"

"Yaedra was an Elven sympathizer for your race after we had declared it to be banished," the dragon said in his booming voice, "before the seal between our worlds was complete, Yaedra managed to send something through to your side. No one in Faerie, except for Yaedra, had known what it was until now. We had interrogated her many times, but she would not talk. She rotted away in prison for her crimes, all for your pathetic race."

"Ah, it makes much more sense, now," Professor Goddart mumbled to himself as he looked down at the ground.

"What does?" demanded the dragon with another snort.

"Yaedra," Professor Goddart said, "she was the one responsible for writing *The Secrets of Faerie*; she was the one who implanted all of those ideas in us alchemists and gave us the ingredients with which we could construct the Philosopher's Stone, which she knew would help us get back to Faerie." The dragon narrowed its eyes, emitted smoke from its nostrils and turned its head, muttering something in the incomprehensible language once more.

"I am still confused by something, though," Professor Goddart said, "why is water the gateway that separates Irspon from Faerie?"

"Two thousand years ago, we believed that the world was made up of five simple elements: earth, fire, water, wind, and quintessence," the dragon rumbled, "Your race's innate element was thought to be fire, over which water could prevail – hence the reason why water separates Irspon from the Field of the Between and Faerie. If only we had known more about the world around us, we could have constructed a better barrier to prevent a possible breach."

"Yes," taunted Doug, "and it's a shame you didn't know that humans were seventy percent water themselves." The dragon chuckled with delight as it lowered his head down close to Doug. The much smaller human shivered as a wave of hot, rancid dragon-breath washed over his body.

"That's just it. Because we banished humans, we haven't had the opportunity to study them," there was a tone of sick pleasure in the dragon's voice as its head moved

closer to Doug, "but now that you two are here, we have accurate specimens to study." The dragon rose to its hind legs, and its two fore-paws shot out in an attempt to try and grab both Professor Goddard and Doug. The smaller humans easily dodged the dragon's clumsy attempt to grab hold of them, and together, Professor Goddard and Doug darted off through the forest. Not longer after they had begun to run, they heard and felt the dragon's footsteps chasing after them.

"Where are we running?" shouted Doug nervously to Professor Goddard as the two of them weaved between the massive trees.

"I don't know, just stay close to me," Professor Goddard shouted back as he thrust his hand into his pocket. *To the Field of the Between, I need to get there now*, Professor Goddard thought, and just as before, the Philosopher's Stone began to glow a bright blue color, and it led them back to the lake where they had previously entered Faerie. Neither Professor Goddard nor Doug could hear the dragon, so they assumed that they must have gotten away.

"Now, we just have to return to the Field of the Between and find our rope," the old professor said, "and then we can go back to Irspoon." Doug nodded, but before the two of them could calmly enter the lake, a large shadow eclipsed the two humans, and when they looked up, they saw the massive, brown dragon diving at them from the air with its wings fully extended, its maw open wide, and its fore-paws extended out in front of itself, ready to grab at the two humans. Without warning, both Doug and Professor Goddard jumped into the lake in front of them.

\* \* \*

Professor Ben Goddard sat in his favorite chair, as he did every Saturday afternoon. All around him were his old history books; books that discuss human origin. Their pages had been torn asunder, and the old professor rocked back and forth in his chair.

"I could have saved him," he repeated over and over to himself, "if only I had grabbed onto him... DOUG!" Ben flung himself into another fit of rage, and he tossed his side table on the ground, causing the glass of vodka on top of it to shatter and spill all over the floor. The old man continued beating upon his environment until he came to the glass display with the Philosopher's Stone in it. Upon seeing it, Ben instantly began sobbing as he sank to his knees, only wishing that he would have remembered to hold onto Doug as he exited from Faerie with the Philosopher's Stone; but now he was alone in Irspoon, this falsely constructed realm designed to isolate him and other members of his race, and he alone was the only one that knew the truth.