

Chapter 1: Mysterious Dying Words

David wiped his sword off and sheathed it. There had been many beasts out that night. The Dark Lord was up to something big. He turned to Pelonus, his mentor, and asked, “Are you all right? Is your shielding down?”

“I’m fine,” Pelonus replied, in typical fashion for an Adventurer. The Adventurers were a special group of people. They had to live by strict rules and make vows of faithfulness to the God of Light, but in return, they were gifted with incredible strength, extra speed, and magical shielding, giving them the ability to fight the beasts, beasts which were way too powerful for a normal man to fight.

“I hope we don’t have to fight more tonight,” Pelonus stated, sitting down on a log. That was his way of saying that his shielding was down and he was not as all right as he claimed.

“If there are more beasts, I will fight them,” David offered. “My shielding is still holding.” He looked up at the moon. There was still over an hour until sunrise.

Sunrise was a joyous time for an Adventurer. The beasts were creatures of the dark, who avoided the daylight, thus, attacking at night. Soon, the people would all be safe again.

David looked over at their horses and thought of taking Pelonus home, but he knew better. Adventurers were sworn to protect the people. They had to be out at night.

David looked around again. They were on the outskirts of the village of Pranel. It was a small village, but he'd spent the last year training under Pelonus there, learning to be an Adventurer. Generally, it took several years of training to become one, so he'd be in the town for a few more years.

He looked over at Pelonus, and seeing that he was lying on the log, offered, "Let me take you home, and I'll finish the watch tonight. It is not against our oath to not fight when wounded."

Pelonus forced himself up and weakly insisted, "I'm fine. Let's continue."

"You rest. I'll watch for trouble," David offered.

Unfortunately, Pelonus didn't get to rest long.

The sound of an explosion rang through the air, coming from the nearest village. That was odd. The nearest village, Daleton, usually called them if there was trouble. They had a large bell that rang loudly enough to be heard in Pranel, and they used it if David and Pelonus were needed. Why hadn't they rung it already?

It didn't matter. Both David and Pelonus jumped on their horses and hurried off toward Daleton. The ride would take twenty minutes if they urged their horses to keep up a fast pace. Twenty minutes was a long time to an Adventurer. They knew how much damage one beast could do in twenty minutes.

David listened to the howls and roars of the beasts they were charging to. If only he knew what the explosion was and what they were riding into. Yet, there was no way to tell. He

saw billows of smoke rising into the dark night sky, and the light from the city was fire.

“Fire fiends,” he muttered, suspecting the cause of the fires. He listened again to the sound of the fight and clearly heard their howls. Yet, there were obviously more beasts. That wasn’t good, as Daleton had few Adventurers. They were a larger village than Pranel, but still only housed about four Adventurers there.

David kicked his horse, Kingston, to urge him to run faster. As he did, he glanced over at Pelonus to see if he was matching pace.

Pelonus wasn’t. He was holding his side and obviously trying hard to focus on the path ahead of them.

“Turn back!” David warned. “You are in no shape to fight.”

“I’m fine,” Pelonus replied, but not very convincingly.

The time seemed to pass very slowly, but in only twenty minutes, they arrived in the village of Daleton and saw the problem. Indeed fire fiends were flying all around setting fires. People were busily putting them out, hoping they would be protected from the beasts as they did.

David jumped off his horse and started fighting a beast. Pelonus joined him.

They made fairly quick work of it, even though the beast was large, hairy, had sharp teeth and claws, and Pelonus was injured.

Once that beast was dead, David looked to see where he was needed next. What he saw was horrible. Fareman, his

friend and fellow Adventurer from Daleton, lay dead in the middle of the street. David began to shake, but there was no time for mourning. Lives were at stake.

He turned to help with a beast, when suddenly an unfamiliar Adventurer stood up, threw something at the largest beast, and it exploded, raining down hot ash all over everyone around. Fortunately, many of the people in the city were in hiding, and those putting out fires had buckets of water to cool where they were hit with ash.

The other beasts shrieked horrible howls at the sight and ran or flew away. Never had David seen beasts flee before, but whatever the Adventurer had done was terrifying.

As David was distracted watching imps fly away, he heard a horrible sound, a stifled scream from behind him.

David turned to see Pelonus laying in a puddle of blood and a man over him with a knife. David wanted to help Pelonus, but if he tried, the man would surely kill him as he did. He had to stop the man first.

David stepped up and demanded, “Who are you?”

The mysterious man, who was dressed as an Adventurer, said nothing in return, but attacked. Fortunately, David’s shielding was still holding, so he wasn’t killed by the attempted knife to the gut.

David’s curiosity would have to go unanswered. He struck back with his sword. The man was strong, as strong as an Adventurer, but surely he couldn’t be one. No Adventurer would strike another Adventurer down.

The fight was intense, but not long. David was the better fighter, so it didn't take long for him to kill the man.

David didn't like killing a man. He wasn't allowed to unless absolutely needed to protect the innocent. His job was to fight beasts. He looked down at the dead body, abhorred by what he'd just done. Yet, the man had killed Pelonus and was trying to kill him. It was clearly self-defense.

A moaning behind him took his thoughts immediately off the man. Pelonus was alive! David dropped down beside him, hoping to bind his wounds.

He immediately started looking to see what he could do, but Pelonus put his hand on David's to stop him. He gasped for breath and mumbled, "They exist. Go to King Raymond and warn him."

"Live!" David begged. "I can't go without you. I'm not a full Adventurer yet."

"You are," Pelonus muttered, again gasping for breath. "Look at your ring." He gasped again, and warned, "They exist. Warn King Raymond. Don't let his kingdom fall."

"Live!" David cried with his heart pounding, before asking, "What exist?"

"False..." Pelonus began. He didn't finish as he gasped for breath, his eyes closed, and his hand went limp and fell off of David's.

"No!" David screamed, his eyes swelling with tears. "No!" He leaned over and cried. As he did, he glanced at his ring. All Adventurers had rings that showed their progression. His ring had a black stone, but the band had turned from black to steel,

a sign that his training was complete and he was fully an Adventurer.

He turned back to Pelonus. Before going to King Raymond, he needed to give Pelonus a proper burial. After all, Pelonus had been like a father to him for the past year.

He picked up Pelonus and lay him over his horse. Then, he mounted Kingston and began the ride back to Pranel.

David knew the feeling of defeat, all too well. He hung his head as he rode, mourning the loss of his mentor. Pelonus was a good man. He'd been so kind to David. He was an older Adventurer, but still was too young to die.

David was so lost in his pain that he almost ran into another rider.

"Who are you?" David asked as he pulled Kingston to a stop.

"I'm Joel," the man answered. He looked young, probably in his early twenties, about David's age. He wore a forest green jerkin and brown pants. He was thin, but didn't look weak. Since he had a few fox skins tied over the back of his horse, it was apparent that he was a trapper. "You are an Adventurer," Joel added. He pointed to Pelonus and asked, "What happened to him?"

"My mentor just died," David explained. "I have to get to King Raymond in Lumberton as quickly as I can. I must warn him."

"Warn him of what?" Joel asked.

“I’m not sure,” David admitted. “False something. I hope the king will know what Pelonus was talking about.”

Joel scratched his head and asked, “What do you mean, false something?”

David shook his head and responded, “It’s a long story, and I’m in a hurry. I need to bury Pelonus and get to the king. My mentor was just killed by another Adventurer. I have to warn the king. Pelonus said I can’t let his kingdom fall.”

Joel stopped scratching his head, but he ran his fingers through his hair and shook his head as he admitted, “I’m really confused. False something? Kingdoms falling? Adventurers killing Adventurers. This sounds serious.”

“It is,” David assured him. “I’m not sure how serious, but something is seriously wrong. I’m going back to Pranel, burying Pelonus, getting my belongings, and then heading to Lumberton as soon as I can.”

“If this is so important, why go home first?” Joel asked. “Why not bury Pelonus in Daleton?”

“Because I must have my supplies,” David explained. “Adventurers must use their own equipment. Normal items are not strong enough for us. Did you not know that?”

“I’ve heard it before,” Joel confirmed.

David tensed as he insisted, “I need to go.”

“You can’t go alone,” Joel reminded him.

“I can if there are no other options,” David corrected, and he kicked Kingston to go. Soon he was galloping off toward

Prael, leading the horse with Pelonus draped across him with him.

When he reached his home, he quickly went in and grabbed the items he needed. Keeping focused was hard, as he lived in Pelonus's house. There were so many memories, and now, Pelonus was dead. David fought back the tears as he put his belongings in his bag. It could fit many items. All Adventurers had bags that somehow magically held far more than they should.

As he started to walk out, he noticed one of Pelonus's knives on the table. He was surprised that such a precious item would not be in Pelonus's bag. After all, most Adventurers kept their prize possessions and weapons with them at all times.

He picked up the knife and put it in his bag before he walked out the door. It wouldn't work for him as well as his own weapons would, but it had sentimental value. As he stepped outside, he noticed that someone was there. He took a defensive stance, but relaxed as he saw it was Joel.

"What are you doing here?" he asked Joel.

"I'm coming with you," Joel informed him.

"I'm in a hurry," David insisted. "I need to bury Pelonus and then leave.

"I can help you and leave as soon as you are ready," Joel informed him. "I am going with you. You aren't supposed to travel alone."

"I can if I don't have another option," David corrected.

Joel smiled victoriously as he pointed out, “You now have another option.”

“Fine,” David conceded with a sigh. “You can come with me.”

“I’m ready to go,” Joel assured him.

“I’m not,” David responded. “First, I have to dig a grave.”

Joel hopped off his horse and offered, “Hand me a shovel, and I’ll help.”

The sun had risen well before David and Joel finished the grave. David had fought all night and dug all morning. He was exhausted, but he had to get to Lumberton and warn the king.

Several townspeople, fearing the explosions they had seen the night before, came to ask what had happened. Soon, there were people gathered for a quick funeral for Pelonus. He had no family, except one son who lived on the other side of Lumberton, so David said some words over the grave.

As soon as he was done, he bid the people farewell and hopped on his horse.

Joel hopped on his. “You need to sleep,” he warned David before they left. You are exhausted.”

“I am,” David agreed, “but Pelonus seemed to think this is urgent, urgent enough that kingdoms could fall. I will sleep later. We need to go, now.”