

THE QUEST OF THE RAINBOW DRAGONS: A UU Hero's Story

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Part IV Installment fifteen - Rainbow Principle 4: **Green**

"Grow by exploring what is right and true in life"

We affirm and promote a free and responsible search for truth and meaning.

Our story thus far ...

Two children, Jared and Delia, are attempting to complete seven tasks laid out for them by an ancient prophecy called The Quest of the Rainbow Dragons. Guided by a furry little creature named 'Les', they hope to successfully complete the quest and bring peace and justice to the land. When last we met, they were in the midst of the fourth quest, on their way to meet with the Green Dragon, Zelyonov, who lives on an island in the middle of a lava lake, high in the rugged mountain range known as "The Ring of Fire." They are being guided to the dragon by a young girl named Sanah, daughter of the woman previously chosen by Zelyonov to be a teacher for her people.

Our story continues ...

Apparently, the restrictions against talking to men and boys didn't apply to small furry creatures, because while Sanah still refused to speak to Jared, or even look him in the eye, she babbled non-stop to Les, who then translated her words to Delia and Jared.

"She says that the entrance to Zelyonov's lair is in the middle of the most unstable part of this mountain range. Figures! We will have to move slowly and carefully, alert for signs of sinkholes, geysers, and other hot spots. She wants to teach us some of the warning signs when we get a little closer. This part of the mountain is quite stable, and quite beautiful. Why don't we stop a moment and turn around? Oh, good idea." They paused in the shade of a tough and scraggly pine tree and turned to look behind them. Sure enough, they saw the foothills and the desert, all extending seamlessly to meet the vivid blue sky. It was simply breathtaking. Sanah began to speak again.

"She also says that we will need to stop frequently as we climb to avoid the height sickness. Oh, she must mean altitude sickness!" "Les, what's altitude sickness?" asked Delia.

"Well, as we get up higher and higher, the air gets thinner. If we move too fast, we might get headaches, dizziness, even nausea and vomiting." "What do you mean, the air gets thinner? Air is air, and it's everywhere, isn't it?" asked Jared.

"Oh, boy. I forget sometimes what you know and what you don't know. How do I explain it simply? The earth is surrounded by a blanket of air that stays put because of the planet's gravity. Do you know what gravity is?" Delia and Jared shook their heads, 'no'.

"Okay. Gravity is the force that keeps us from flying off into space. Gravity basically pulls us - and everything else on earth - toward the planet. It even works on air. But as you get further away from the center of the planet, gravity gets weaker and weaker. Out in space, where the stars are, there's no air at all. Anyway, mountain air is different than the air you're used to, and so our bodies have to adjust. Does that make sense?" "I, I don't think so," said Delia. Jared just looked confused.

"Well, you'll just have to trust us, then. We need to take our time getting up and over this pass." So they did. Sanah talked most of the time they were walking, sharing the ways her mother's teachings had changed life for the tribes people. Apparently, there had been a great deal of resistance to having a female teacher at first, but the dragon's clear signs of favor had quieted all but the most die-hard skeptics. Sanah's mother, Tania, had brought new ideas on how to strengthen the herds of goats and sheep, as well as a different way of starting fires that made it unnecessary to carry coals in a tinderbox from campsite to campsite.

More controversial had been her teachings on how girls and women were treated. Sure enough, Sanah confirmed, it used to be that young women could be stolen, like a thing, and forced to marry against their will. Girls weren't allowed to learn how to read and weren't taught the more important stories. Zelyonov, through Tania, had started to change that, just a little bit. Now, women had a say in who they married, which meant that men had to win over the girl they wanted to marry by sending gifts and poems.

Tania would supervise meetings between couples so that they could speak to each other before the wedding, something that had been unheard of before Tania's visit to the dragon.

Tania had brought back new techniques in math and science, too, including something she called an abacus, with beads that slid and helped people add and subtract big numbers. It made it much easier to trade, and had helped the tribes bargain with the traders from across the desert, using the emeralds as barter.

Over the years, things had gotten better and better for the tribes people as the result of Tania's teachings, and so Sanah was very excited to be meeting the dragon in person.

She had hopes of helping her people as much as her mother had. What new ideas or ways of thinking might she be bringing back with her? She hoped they had to do with plants, and maybe medicines, for she felt very sad for people who got hurt or sick, and thought perhaps the dragon might know ways of easing pain and curing sickness.

When they came up and over the pass, they entered the area that was unstable. Sanah, true to her word, taught them how to recognize the more dangerous places, so that they could avoid them. When they had no choice but to cross a place that had signs of potential sink holes or geysers, she taught them to test the ground with each step, to listen carefully for the hissing sound that sometimes preceded an eruption, and to sniff the air for any hint of sulfur or other smelly gases. Going was slow, but luckily, no one was hurt.

On the third night of their trip, Sanah told Les they would reach the black gates to Zelyonov's lair the next day. She said she had to prepare her spirit, and went away from the fire to sit by herself.

Les, Delia, and Jared sat around the fire, tired from their journey, and excited to meet this next dragon.

"Jared," asked Les, "what do you remember about this next part of the prophecy?" "Well," answered Jared, "there's something about learning the dragon's weakness, and taking it as my own, and then learning the dragon's strength, and claiming that as my own, too." "Ah," said Les. "You're aware that you two will be on your own tomorrow, right? You know I can't go with you to meet Zelyonov?" "What?" said Jared. "I was just kidding when I said you had a habit of disappearing when things got dangerous. I didn't mean I wanted you to *keep* doing it!" Les laughed. "No, Jared. These quests are for you and Delia to complete. My presence isn't needed, and in fact, if I come with you, it's likely the outcome would be disastrous.

I take you to where you need to be, but it's your strength, your wisdom, and most importantly your choices that determine the outcome of the quests. Surely, you've figured out that much by now!" Jared sighed. "Yes, but I keep hoping. You're so much kinder and calmer than I am. I feel better when you're around." "That's sweet of you to say," said Les. "You need to understand, though, that whether you see me or not, I'm always around. You carry part of me with you, in here," and he pointed to Jared's chest. "Because I care about you, and you care about me, I'm in your heart, always. That's how love works."

The next morning, Jared, Delia, Sanah rose early to discover that Les had vanished again.

Sanah did not seem surprised, but all three of them were at a bit of a loss without their translator, not to mention nervous about what the day might bring.

The last climb was steep and strewn with rocks and boulders, but at least the ground seemed cool and stable. A fierce wind buffeted the three children as they picked their way up the slope. Near the top, they found them: the shiny black obsidian gates to the lair of Zelyonov the Green Dragon.

Sanah took off her sandals and pack and motioned for Delia and Jared to do the same.

Then, with her shoulders back, she approached the gates, placed her hands on them, closed her eyes, and called out: "Zelyonov!" Then she began to sing. At first, there was no change. Then she turned, looked desperately at Delia and Jared, gesturing with her hands and then pointing at them until they understood: they needed to sing, too. They sang harmony around her simple melody, weaving sound into a wordless plea for the doors to open.

The great doors began to swing inward, slowly, inch by inch. By the time the song was over, the gates to Zelyonov's cave were wide open. The three walked in and heard the gates beginning to swing shut behind them. In less than a minute, they were trapped in the mountain, the darkness around them complete and impenetrable. Heart pounding, Delia reached out and found Jared's hand on one side and Sanah's on the other. Hand in hand, step by careful step, they inched their way through the darkness toward the only thing they could see - a faint red glow, far in the distance.

The trip across the pitch black cave took a very long time. Their bare feet inched along the rough, uneven floor of the cave, their hands tightly clasped together so as not to get separated. Finally,

they arrived at the lava lake, and it looked just the way Tania, Sanah's mother had described. Sanah gestured for them to stop, and then turned and began to continue alone. "Wait!" said Jared, starting after her, but she motioned firmly for him to stay put. Though sweat poured down her skin, though her feet must have been burning, she continued bravely until she stood merely a few feet from the edge of the lava lake.

Then she began to sing again, a slightly different song. Behind her, Jared and Delia once again joined their voices with hers, weaving harmonies around her pure, clear melody.

As they sang, a vast, shining emerald creature, who could only be the Green Dragon, Zelyonov, appeared, and first rearing up, he lay himself down like a bridge over the lava.

Sanah beckoned, now, to Delia and Jared, who stepped carefully around the dragon's huge head (he snorted a bit as they passed and made them both jump). All three climbed his scaly neck and crossed the lava lake, finding on the far side the entrance to a cool, dark chamber lit only by the dragon's own faint glow.

"Greetings, children, and welcome to my home," said Zelyonov.

Dragon Task: *What do you think your greatest strength is? Your greatest weakness? As individuals? As a family? Share your answers with each other.*