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# 1

## A Discontented Crew

Abbey Roberts knelt beside a small creek washing her hair. She was a most attractive girl, thirteen years old. At the moment her long blonde hair was filled with white suds, and for the most part she kept her eyes closed to keep the soap out. From time to time she would open them, though, and glance over at Sarah Collingwood, who sat on the bank, reading a book.

Sarah was only one year older. Her hair was as black as Abbey's was blonde, and her eyes, which were more than half closed with sleepiness just now, were large, brown, and wide-spaced.

The two girls had come away from the rest of the Sleepers to spend some time alone.

There were times when Sarah and Abbey did not get along. They were very different. Abbey spent a great deal of time making herself more attractive, a habit that irritated Sarah considerably.

"You're always primping, Abbey. Don't you ever get tired of trying to make yourself look better?" Sarah had said this more than once, and that irritated Abbey considerably. She always responded, "It's a girl's responsibility to look as good as she can, Sarah. It wouldn't hurt you to take a little bit more care of your hair and to spend a little more time with makeup."

As Abbey got on her hands and knees to let her hair fall forward into the water, she thought, *If we were*

*back in Oldworld, Sarah and I would never be friends at all. We're just too different.*

She splashed the cold water over her hair, keeping her eyes tightly shut, and for a moment her mind went back to the time before the world as all the Sleepers had known it was destroyed by atomic war.

That time was like a dream now. She knew she would probably never see again such things as Popsicles, which she loved, or all the other little things that had filled her world. As she rinsed out the last of the soap, she thought with discontent, *It doesn't do much good to pay attention to your looks here in Nuworld. Nobody's going to see you except maybe some sort of weird mutants like Mat and Tam.*

She squeezed her hair to get the water out, then picked up a towel. It was not really a towel. It was simply a large piece of cloth. As she tried to dry her hair, she wished for a thick, fluffy white towel such as she had used every day before Oldworld disappeared. The cloth seemed a sort of sad symbol of all that she had lost.

Abbey and the other Six Sleepers had been placed in protective capsules before the bombs went off. The seven young people had "slept" for many years. She was not quite sure how many.

When they emerged, the world was different. Geography had gone crazy. Even the continents had changed, for the oceans had washed away many old lands and new ones had been formed. Strange mutant forms had arisen—giants, dragons, dinosaurs . . . Abbey suddenly thought, *No one ever knows what sort of monster he'll meet in Nuworld.*

She longed for the old days. The lives of the Seven Sleepers had been filled with little but hard adventure

since they had been awakened. They had become the servants of a strange man called Goél, whom Abbey could never quite figure out. He would appear from time to time, give them orders, and in obedience they would throw themselves into an adventure. Often their lives were at risk, yet Goél seemed as much interested in making them into something different—*better*, he said—as in anything else.

“I guess Goél will be coming along soon to send us on another quest against the Dark Lord, Sarah.” She glanced in Sarah’s direction.

But Sarah apparently had not heard. The book she had been reading lay in her lap, and her arms had fallen to her side. Abbey knew their last adventure had taken every bit of Sarah’s strength. Perhaps the warm sun overhead had been too much for her. She began to slump down.

Abbey’s eyes flew wide. “Sarah! Wake up! You’re falling in!”

And Sarah Collingwood *was* tilting over. The bank was steep where she sat, and she simply flipped over headfirst in a rather boneless fashion and hit the cold water. The stream closed over her head, and her arms beat at the water as she attempted to come up.

Then Abbey remembered that Sarah was wearing heavy hiking boots. They would fill with water at once and drag her down. *Oh, no!* She thought. *We’ve been through all sorts of dangers, and now Sarah’s going to drown by falling into a creek!*

Upstream from the two girls, Josh Adams sat with a small sapling in his hand. At the end he had tied a stout cord, and a bit of light wood served as a cork. He and the other male members of the Seven Sleepers had

decided to come to the creek to fish. They were tired of their monotonous diet.

“I wish I was back home in Arkansas,” Bob Lee Jackson said. “I bet I could show you how to catch fish then.” Bob Lee was called just Reb by the other Sleepers. He was fourteen, tall and lanky. His light blue eyes were half shaded by the cowboy-style straw hat he wore, and strands of tow-colored hair straggled out from beneath it. “I’ve been fishing there when the fish bit so good that you had to hide behind a tree to bait your hook.”

Josh grinned. “Don’t you ever get tired of telling those lies?” He was almost as tall as Reb but was rather skinny, being on the brink of young manhood but still not fully coordinated. Although he had been chosen to be the leader of the Sleepers, Josh was shy and unsure of himself and could not believe he was the leader of anything.

Dave Cooper laughed aloud. At fifteen, he was the oldest of the Sleepers. He was a handsome boy with brown hair and gray eyes and was very athletic. “Back home where I lived, we’d catch fish that weighed twenty or thirty pounds.”

“Were they catfish, or is that another one of your educated lies?” Reb sounded suspicious.

“No, we lived right on the Gulf. We’d go out on charter boats. We caught many an amberjack that weighed twenty pounds. Wish I had one now.”

The other two members of the group sat side by side, quietly fishing. Jake Garfield, a Jewish boy, was the group’s mechanical genius. He could make anything work. Now he nudged the Sleeper beside him, saying, “Hey, Wash, let’s get away from here. They’re starting to swap those lying fish tales. I don’t want to hear it.”

Wash—Gregory Randolph Washington Jones—was twelve, the youngest Sleeper. He had ebony black skin and a beautiful white smile. He giggled and lifted his fish hook to examine it. “I wonder which one of them’s going to tell the biggest lie about fish.”

“I don’t think—” Josh Adams began.

And then someone screamed.

Josh threw down his pole and leaped to his feet. “That’s Abbey!” he cried and took off at a dead run.

“It sounds bad,” Dave said at the same moment, and all of the boys dropped their poles and raced off after Josh.

Josh ignored the brambles that clutched at him. A branch scratched him across one eye, half blinding him. But Abbey’s screams were serious, and he sped on. He had toughened up since coming to Nuworld and was not even breathing hard when he burst into the clearing where she stood, pointing down at the water.

“She fell in, Josh! She’s drowning!”

Taking in the situation at one swift glance, Josh kicked off his shoes and made a shallow dive into the creek. It was something he would not have done otherwise, for he knew that diving into unknown waters could get a fellow hurt quick. But he saw Sarah struggling and knew there was no time to lose.

The mountain creek closed over him, its coldness taking his breath. He was thankful that swimming had always been his best sport. He came to the surface, his arms pumping and his feet kicking frantically. Just ahead, Sarah’s hands broke the surface, and he drove himself toward her. When he reached where she struggled, sinking again, he grabbed a handful of her hair and pulled her head above water.

But Sarah began to clutch at him, threatening to drag them both under.

“Don’t grab at me, Sarah! Just let yourself go! Relax, I’ve got you!”

As is true with most drowning people, Sarah Collingwood was beyond reason. Frantically she kept clutching at Josh.

But he continued carrying her entire weight by her heavy hair. As she sputtered and struggled, he swam strongly, towing her toward shore.

And then he felt his feet touch bottom. “It’s OK,” he gasped. “You’re OK now, Sarah.”

But now her heavy hiking boots sank into the mud. Josh put both arms around her and pulled her free, then staggered toward the bank.

“Give me a hand, you guys! She keeps getting stuck in the mud.”

Dave jumped in and took hold of Josh’s waist, and Jake did the same for Dave. The others formed a human chain, and a tug-of-war with the creek bottom began.

Sarah’s feet came out of the squishy mud, but her boots remained there. She was dragged unceremoniously to shore, and as soon as she was there she did a very ungrateful and surprising thing.

Turning around, she slapped at Josh. “Get your hands off me!” she cried.

He stared at her, then looked wildly around at the group. “Get my hands off of you? You would have drowned if I hadn’t put my hands on you!”

“No, I wouldn’t have! I can swim as good as you can!”

“You didn’t look like it,” Wash protested. “You looked like a goner to me, Sarah. I think Josh saved your life.”

“He’s always showing off,” she said, next to tears. As a rule, Sarah was very sweet and reasonable, and Josh was sure she liked him. But she lashed out at him verbally now. “I didn’t need your help! I was just about ready to kick off my boots and start swimming.”

Reb shoved the straw Stetson back on his forehead and grinned broadly. “You sure gave a good imitation of a girl drowning,” he said. “You ought to go on the stage and be an actress if you can act that good.”

“You hush up, Reb!” Sarah said furiously.

Dave too could not help teasing her a little. “You look like a drowned rat,” he said. “What did you do, just jump in to make yourself look funny?”

But then Wash interrupted. “Hey, you guys! Let up a little. That was a pretty bad scene.” He went over to Sarah. “That wasn’t too funny, was it? That stream’s swift. I nearly drowned in it myself the other day. It’s worse than the Old Man.”

“What old man?” Abbey asked.

“Oh, that’s what we used to call the Mississippi River back in Oldworld. I used to just about drown in it every summer.”

Sarah, Josh thought, must have felt absolutely stupid. She was looking down at her dripping clothes and her ugly, now black socks, which were covered with mud. Her hair streamed down in her face. She repeated, “I didn’t need your help, Josh. I would have gotten out all by myself.”

She turned then and ran away as quickly as she could. The stones must have hurt her bare feet, but she paid no attention.

Josh watched as she disappeared. He had known Sarah Collingwood back in Oldworld when she had

lived with his family. He had thought then that she was the prettiest girl alive and was in awe of her.

Now as he stood there soaking wet, looking after her, he shook his head. "Girls are sure funny."

Reb took off his hat and ran his hand through his sandy hair. "They sure are. I had this kooky cousin called Mary Belle Smite. She was bigger and stronger than any boy, and she liked to wrestle with the mule we had on our place. She was almost tough enough to throw him down. Most of us figured any girl that could throw a mule down would be too hard on a feller, so she didn't have many boyfriends. She was a funny one."

"Sarah was just scared and embarrassed," Wash said. "Abbey, why don't you go see if she's all right?"

"All right. I will." She looked at Josh with admiration. "You sure can swim, Josh."

Josh basked for a moment in the warmth of her compliment, but as Abbey left them, he shook his head again. "Sarah sure was mad."

Wash was always the peacemaker. He struck Josh lightly on the arm. "Don't worry about Sarah," he said. "Like I said, she was embarrassed. She'll be all right."

"I hope so," Reb grunted. "I'd hate to think she was gonna be that mean and nasty all the time."

Supper that night was a somewhat tense affair. For one thing, Sarah had not gotten into a mood that was much better. She realized that she had done a very stupid thing. Abbey had told her it could happen to anyone, and most of the others had been sympathetic, but she could not see it that way.

She had done the best she could with her hair, but there were no hair dryers in Nuworld, and her hair was

long, coming halfway down her back. She'd dried it by simply sitting out in the sun. For supper, she tied it into a long braid. She ate little and said almost nothing.

Then, Reb and Dave got into an argument. Dave had acted as the cook that night, and when Reb tasted the meat, he said, "Dave, you're the worst cook I ever saw. Why, this meat's raw!"

Dave, who did not like to cook anyway and was, in fact, not very good at it, said, "If you don't like it, don't eat it!"

Reb was quick to take offense. "I've seen cows hurt worse than this and still get well," he said. "It ain't fit to eat."

"Will you two calm down?" Wash put in quickly. "Dave did the best he could, Reb."

Josh said little. His eyes kept going to Sarah, as though he was expecting her to apologize or to at least say some kind of thank you. But she sat with her head down, saying nothing.

Finally Josh sat down beside her. "Are you still mad at me?"

Sarah looked up and felt tears coming to her eyes. "I'm—I'm not mad at you, Josh. I just felt so stupid. Imagine, just falling in the river like that! I'm the dumbest girl that ever lived!"

"It could happen to anybody," he said.

She blinked her tears away then and managed a smile. "You're the sweetest boy, Josh."

He lowered his head and said, "Aw, shucks! It wasn't anything!"

"It was, too. I really would have drowned if I couldn't have gotten those old boots off. I guess you saved my life."

"Well, what would I do without you, Sarah?"

At that moment, a voice outside caught everybody's attention. Instantly, the Sleepers jumped to their feet. Nuworld was a dangerous place, and they all grabbed weapons—swords, knives, anything. Josh seized a staff with which he had become quite handy. "Who's out there?" he called.

"Why don't you open the door and find out?"

The voice was rough and sounded vaguely familiar. "I know that voice," Josh said. "I just can't place it." He opened the door and gaped in amazement. "Mat," he said, "it's you!"

"And me. Tam. Can we come in? We're starved to death."

Grinning, Josh stepped back. The two strange looking individuals who entered were identical twins. They were not more than three feet tall and were fat as sausages. Their bellies gave promise of exploding any minute were it not for their broad, black leather belts with shiny brass buckles. Both had round red cheeks with small black eyes peering out from under impossibly bushy eyebrows. Both also had bushy beards that covered their chests.

"Well, I don't see much improvement around here," Mat said, scowling. But Tam was going about greeting everyone with a happy smile.

Mat and Tam were Gemini twins, a strange mutant form that had occurred in Nuworld. The Gemini mothers gave birth to twins every time, and the strange thing was that these twins were usually as different inside as they were alike outside. Mat, for instance, was grumpy, always complaining, always seeing the dark side of things, while Tam was the cheerful optimist who saw good in everything.

Mat and Tam were scarcely inside when Tam said,

“Oh, we forgot someone!” He went back to the door and said, “Come on in.”

The room suddenly seemed to be filled, for an enormous man stooped and came through the door.

“Volka!” Sarah cried. She ran to him and reached up her arms for a hug. She could not reach the neck of the giant, who stood well over eight feet tall. “Ho,” he said, his eyes twinkling, “my Sleeper friends.” Volka’s voice was as big as his body.

“Here, sit before you knock the ceiling down,” Josh said. He waited until Volka was seated on the floor and Tam and Mat were sitting at the table. “Now let’s give these fellas something to eat.”

The three visitors ate like starving sharks.

After they were finished, Mat said, “Well, it’s happened again.” His eyes were gloomy, and he hunched his shoulders in despair. “I know it will turn out to be no good.”

“Sure it’ll be good,” Tam said. “I’m glad to be here.”

“Me too,” Volka boomed. He had cleaned up all the food and sat looking hopefully for more.

“What are you fellows doing here?” Abbey asked. “We didn’t expect you to come.”

“It’s that Goél again,” Mat said, a woeful look on his face. “He told us to come here.” Then he glared around angrily. “We’ve got to take care of you babies again!”

“Goél told you to come here?” Josh said, suddenly alert.

“Yes. Worse luck,” Mat complained. “To be baby-sitters.”

“What did he tell you to do?” Dave asked, puzzled. All of the Sleepers knew that any message from Goél must be obeyed instantly.

“Didn’t say,” Mat said. “Just gave us a map and said

to be here. Well, here we are. Now we'll just have to wait until he shows up."

"It'll be fun," Tam said happily. He hit his twin in the side with his elbow. "Cheer up! Things could be worse."

Mat glared at him. "They probably will be."

## 2

# The Word of Goél

None of the Sleepers slept particularly well the night after the Gemini twins and Volka arrived. Josh, as their leader, was more restless, perhaps, than the others. He lay awake for a long time listening to the breathing of his friends grow steady and slow as they finally dropped off into sleep.

*What's Goél going to send us into this time?* he wondered.

Locking his hands behind his head, Josh stared up at the thatch roof of the hut that had been their home for several weeks. He thought of the dangers that he had encountered simply finding the other six Sleepers. Thoughts of Emas, the chief interrogator for the Dark Lord, came to him, and he remembered how the man's eyes had fastened on him with hatred. At last he shoved Emas and the Dark Lord out of his mind and went to sleep. But he tossed and turned most of the night.

The next day at breakfast, Mat tasted the porridge that the girls had cooked, and a frown crossed his face. "What is this? It tastes like paste."

"It's porridge, Mat," Sarah said. She did not grow angry, for she knew that this was simply Mat's way. He seldom had anything good to say about anyone or anything. Tam, on the other hand, grinned and reached for Mat's bowl. "I'll eat it, brother, if you don't want it."

"Keep your hands to yourself, and don't be so confounded cheerful! I've got a feeling we're going to be in a terrible situation."

“Give no thought for the morrow,” Josh said. “Sufficient to the day are the troubles we’ve got right now.”

When they had finished eating and the others went outside, Josh offered to help Sarah clean up after the meal. The two of them heated water in the fireplace. Then Sarah washed the tin dishes and flatware while Josh dried them and put them in a box that was nailed to the wall.

“Remember what it was like to have a dishwasher?” he asked suddenly.

“Do I!” Sarah breathed fervently. “And I used to complain about having to wash dishes.”

“We complained about a lot of things in Oldworld. Like having to walk to school instead of going in a car.”

Sarah handed Josh a platter, then asked thoughtfully, “Do you think about those days a lot?”

“I do,” Josh said. He dried the plate slowly. “I miss my parents.”

“I miss mine, too,” Sarah said. “I think about them all the time. Every day.”

The two worked on until finally the dishes were done, and Sarah said, “How about a tea party?”

Josh grinned. “We used to have those when you first came to live with us. I thought they were silly.”

“And you laughed at my dolls too, but you finally got to where you would play with them.”

Josh glanced over his shoulder with a worried look. “Don’t let that get around. If Reb ever found out I played with dolls, he’d never let me hear the last of it.”

“There’s nothing wrong with boys playing with dolls. Just like there’s nothing wrong with girls playing baseball.”

“I know. I used to play with G.I. Joes for hours on end. Remember the wars we used to have?”

“Yes, and I always had to be the enemy,” Sarah said. “You would never let me be one of the good guys.”

Josh looked over at Sarah. She was wearing a simple dress that came down just to her knees. It was made of some soft, pale green material. “That’s a nice looking dress,” he said.

“Well, things are looking up! You never used to compliment my clothes. Do you really like it?”

“Sure. It looks nice on you.”

The two made tea and sat and sipped it and talked about the adventures they had had since coming to Nuworld.

“Sometimes I have bad dreams about the Dark Lord,” Sarah confessed. “He frightens me.”

“He frightens just about everyone. Not just us, either. Everywhere we go, people are scared stiff of him. He’s got lots of strange powers.”

“If it weren’t for Goél, I don’t think I could bear living here,” Sarah said.

“I wish he’d come soon. He may send us out on some awful mission, but it’d be better than just hanging around here.”

Josh did not get his wish that day, and the Sleepers spent their time hunting for squirrels. There were no guns in Nuworld, so all of them had learned to use the bow and arrow. To hit a squirrel with an arrow was quite a feat, and Sarah turned out to have the surest eye. She got three squirrels, and Reb brought down four with a slingshot that he had made of some elastic and a forked stick.

“I don’t see how you hit anything with that,” Jake complained. He was not a very good archer, nor was he

good with a slingshot. “If I just had my .22, I’d show you what squirrel hunting was really like. I could hit anything with that gun.”

Jake stood watching Reb skin the squirrels for supper. Reb was very good at it. He just made a simple cut or two, then ripped off the hide as easily as taking off a small overcoat.

“I don’t see how you do that, Reb.” Jake shook his head. “I’d make a mess out of it.”

“If you’d cleaned as many squirrels as I have, you could do it, too.”

“Do you think Goél will come pretty soon?” Jake asked suddenly.

“I reckon so.”

Reb’s attention was not altogether on the squirrels, and Jake had noticed. “What are you thinking about?”

“Guess I was thinking about back in Camelot. That was really my kind of place.”

Their adventure in Camelot had been a high hour for Reb Jackson. The people there had somehow arrived at a civilization much like King Arthur’s court. Being the best horseman of any of the Sleepers, Reb had become an expert jouster. “Someday I’m going back to Camelot,” he said.

Jake did not answer right away. “I’d just like to go back home,” he said finally.

“You mean back to Oldworld?”

“Yes.”

“That’s all gone, Jake. You might as well forget it.”

“How can I forget it?” Jake said. “I’d give anything just to walk down a street again with big buildings on both sides. Go out to Coney Island, catch a movie. All the things I liked to do, they’re all gone.”

Reb shook his head. "I miss a lot of things, too. I don't ever get to go trot lining like I did back in Arkansas."

"We could do that here, but we can't build a city like New York again!"

Josh and the other boys watched Sarah and Abbey set about making squirrel stew for supper.

"Can you make some dumplings?" Reb asked. "Squirrel and dumplings go mighty good."

"Maybe not like your mom used to make, Reb," Abbey said, "but we'll do the best we can."

"I saved the brains. You could have some of them, Abbey. Nothing like squirrel brains for taste."

Abbey shuddered. "No, thanks!"

"You don't like squirrel brains?"

"I don't know. I've never tasted any and don't intend to."

Supper went well, though the meat was rather scarce. The squirrels did not go far, divided among ten people. Volka probably could have eaten them all himself. Instead he filled up, more or less, on the pasta that Sarah had learned to make.

When the dishes were done, they sat around talking, and then things turned rather gloomy. It wasn't long before an argument broke out between Jake and Dave Cooper. The two were just starting to shout at each other, in spite of Wash's plea to cool it, when all of a sudden the door swung open. There stood a tall figure wearing a gray robe. A hood shadowed his face, but as the man entered he pushed it back.

"Goél!" everyone cried.

Goél was a lean man, not handsome but strong-looking, and there was strength in his face and warmth

in his dark eyes. He came to the center of the room, saying, "Greetings, my young friends." He glanced at Dave and Jake and smiled slightly. "I see you're still showing great love and affection for one another."

Both Dave and Jake looked terribly embarrassed. To ease the strain, Josh said quickly, "Goél, we've been waiting for you. Come and sit down. Have something to eat."

"I'm afraid there's not time for that," Goél said. He had a pleasant voice, one that the Sleepers could never mistake. It was quiet right now, but there was hidden power in it. Josh knew that at times Goél could raise his voice until it was like the roll of distant thunder.

Mat looked relieved but could not help complaining. "Well, we've been waiting for you, sire," he said. "We expected you earlier."

Goél seemed to find this amusing. He smiled. "Mat, you are always unhappy, but I do not come on command."

Somehow Mat could not meet the eyes of the tall man. He dropped his glance to the floor and muttered, "Well, we were just anxious to see why you commanded us all to meet."

"It is a fair question, Mat." He looked about the group and said, "I hope you are well rested, for I have a mission that will involve considerable effort."

Something very close to fear came over Josh. He was a shy boy, never completely certain of himself, always thinking he was a failure. And now the thought of leading this group anywhere into danger frightened him. "Are you sending us far, Goél?"

"Very far indeed. To a land that is different from anything that you have encountered in Nuworld so far."

“Where is it, sire?” Tam said. “I’ve traveled quite a bit.”

“Have you ever been to Whiteland?”

“Whiteland?” Tam looked puzzled. “No. I’ve never even heard of it.”

“I am not surprised. As I said, it is far from here, and I would not send you if going were not of the utmost importance.” Goél looked around then, as if weighing each person. Josh felt the weight of his eyes. Once Reb had told him, “When Goél looks at us like that it’s like he just comes through my eyes, crawls down into my heart, and rummages around to find out what’s down there. It’s downright uncomfortable.”

Each of them must have felt somewhat the same. Abbey kept looking down at her hands, unable to meet Goél’s eyes. Everyone knew that Goél seldom explained himself, but most of them had had times when he would come to them individually and quietly talk to them about things. “I reckon we’re a pretty motley group, Goél,” Jake said. “I never have understood why you chose us. We’re just a bunch of kids and not very talented ones at that.”

“You are as talented as you need to be, friend Jake. All of you have hidden talents.” He paused for a moment, and they all waited. Then he said, “It is not the easy things that make a young man or a young woman strong. It is the hard things.”

“Well, we ought to be getting strong,” Reb said. “We’ve gone through some mighty hard things.”

“Yes, you have, Reb, and you are not the same young people who came to Nuworld.” There was approval in Goél’s warm eyes. “But now, I have another hard thing for you, and if you are faithful and strong and brave, it will make you more into true servants of Goél.”

“I’d guess it involves the Dark Lord again, sire.” Dave Cooper spoke up suddenly, his eyes fixed on their visitor.

“It does. His arm is long, and he has reached into a group of my friends that are in great need of help.”

“This Whiteland. Where is it?” Josh asked.

“It is far to the north. It will be a hard journey for all of you. It will require all of your strength just to get there.”

“But how can we find the way? Are you going to draw us a map?” Sarah asked. She’d often said she had visions of getting lost in some pathless forest, and the thought frightened her.

“I have something better than a map, but first let me tell you a little about the situation. Sit down.”

They all sat except Goél. Standing before them, he spoke of the Dark Lord, who had his spies and his servants everywhere. He spoke of the House of Goél, which was small. He said, “You all know the prophecy that concerns you.” Then he quoted the verse that all of them knew well:

“The House of Goél will be filled,  
The earth itself will quake!  
The beast will be forever still,  
When Seven Sleepers wake!

“There was once a young queen,” he went on to say, “who was called upon to do a very daring thing. She risked her life to save her people. It was said that she came to her kingdom for just such a time as that. And now I must tell you that you Sleepers are come to Nuworld for such a time as this. The shadow of the Dark Lord grows long. More and more fall into slavery

in his deadly kingdom, but the Sleepers have been awakened, and one day the power of the Dark Lord will be broken.”

“Will it be soon, Goél?”

Goél smiled and said quietly, “All times are the same to me, but whether soon or far in the future, your task is to be faithful to me.” Then he said, “You ask how you would find your way. I have provided a guide for you.” He moved to the door and called out, “Come in, Fairmina.”

Josh did not know what to expect, but he and the other Sleepers got to their feet. Even as they turned to the door, a young woman stepped through. She wore clothes made of some soft blue material that clung to her athletic figure. Long blonde hair cascaded down her back.

“This is your guide,” Goél said. “Fairmina is the daughter of Denhelm, chief of the Lowami tribe in Whiteland. Her mother is Rimah, who comes from a princely race.”

The girl looked around at the Seven Sleepers, and Josh thought he saw disdain in her eyes.

Then she turned to face Goél. Her back was straight. She said, with scorn in her voice, “My lord Goél, my father sent me here because we are desperately in need of help to save our people.”

“I understand that, Fairmina, and I am answering your father’s request. These are the Seven Sleepers.” He named each Sleeper and then introduced Tam, Mat, and Volka. “This is my answer to your father’s plea for help.”

Fairmina, princess of Whiteland, looked over the group again. “My lord, this one may do”—she waved a hand toward Volka. “He is big enough to be of help. But

as for the others, my father sent me to get *warriors!*”  
A sneer twisted her lips. “We need warriors in  
Whiteland, not children!”