

ANDREW PETERSON

THE
WINGFEATHER
SAGA

BOOK 1

ON THE EDGE OF THE
DARK SEA OF DARKNESS



WATERBROOK

ON THE EDGE OF THE DARK SEA OF DARKNESS

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For my brother

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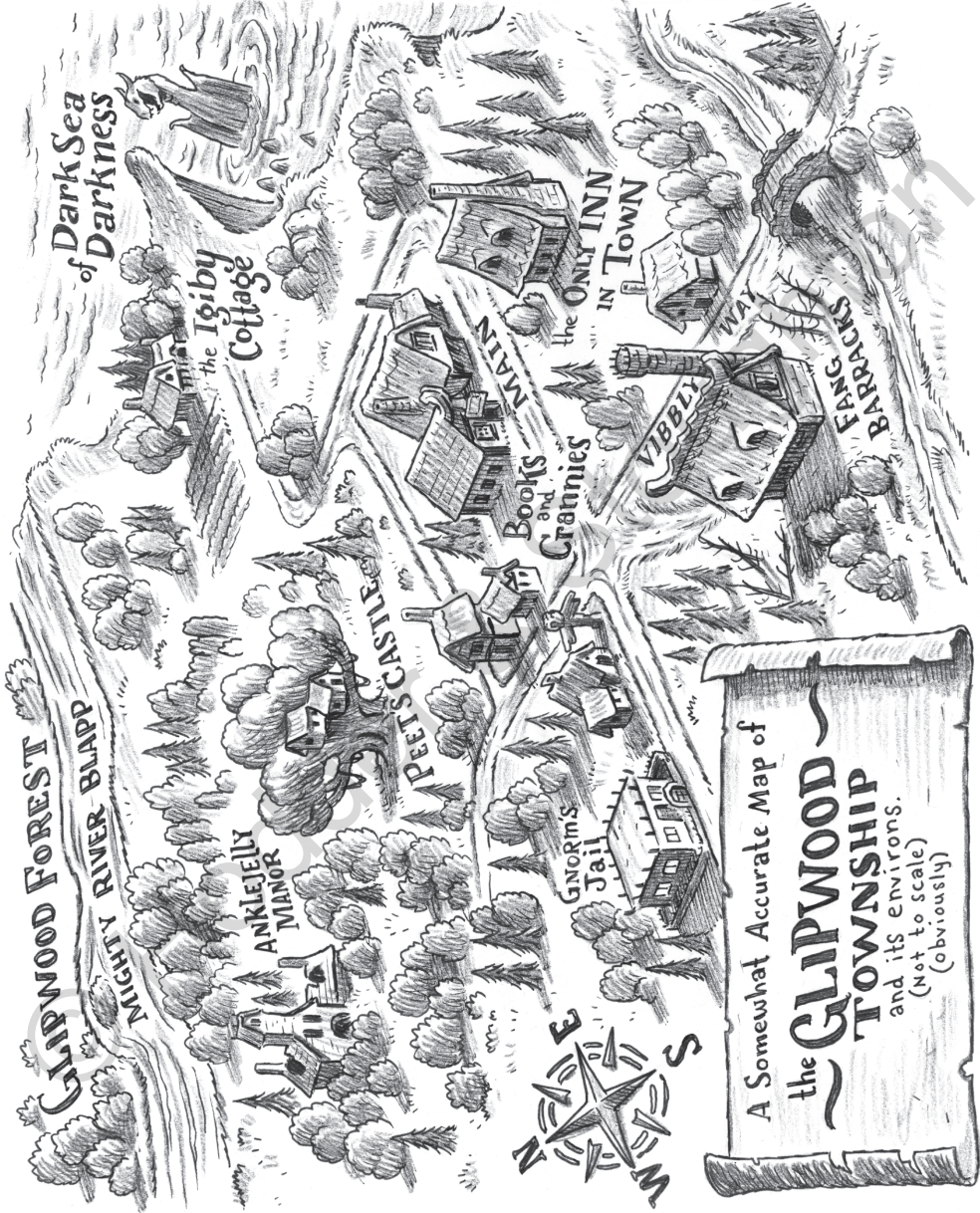
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A Somewhat Accurate Map of
the **GLIPWOOD TOWNSHIP**
and its environs.
(Not to scale)
(obviously)

A Brief Introduction to the World of Aerwiar

The old stories tell that when the first person woke up on the first morning in the world where this tale takes place, he yawned, stretched, and said to the first thing he saw, “Well, here we are.” The man’s name was Dwayne, and the first thing he saw was a rock. Next to the rock, though, was a woman named Gladys, whom he would learn to get along with very well. In the many ages that followed, that first sentence was taught to children and their children’s children and their children’s parents’ cousins and so on until, quite by accident, all speaking creatures referred to the world around them as Aerwiar.

On Aerwiar there were two main continents divided by one main ocean called the Dark Sea of Darkness. By the Fourth Epoch, the harsh land east of the sea had come to be known as Dang and has little to do with this tale (except for the Great Evil that came to exist there and waged a Great War on pretty much everybody).

That evil was a nameless evil, an evil whose name was Gnag the Nameless. He ruled from high atop the Killridge Mountains in the Castle Throg, and of all the things Gnag despised in Aerwiar, he most hated the High King Wingfeather of the Isle of Anniera. For some reason no one could guess, Gnag and his wretched hordes had marched westward and gobbled up the Shining Isle of Anniera, where fell the good king, his house, and his noble people.

Unsatisfied, the Nameless Evil (named Gnag) built a fleet that bore his monstrous army westward across the Dark Sea of Darkness to the continent of Skree. And he ravaged that wide land, nine long years before our adventure begins.

A Slightly Less Brief Introduction to the Land of Skree

The whole land of Skree was green and flat. Except for the Stony Mountains in the north, which weren't flat at all. Nor were they green. They were rather white from all the snow, though if the snow melted, something green might eventually grow there.

Ah, but farther south, the Plains of Palen Jabh-J covered the rest of Skree with their rolling (and decidedly green) grasslands. Except, of course, for Glipwood Forest. Just south of the plains, the Linnard Woodlands rolled off the edges of all maps, except, one would suppose, those maps made by whatever people lived in those far lands.

But the people who made their homes on the plains, at the edges of the forest, high in the mountains, and along the great River Blapp, lived in a state of lasting, glorious peace. That is, except for the aforementioned Great War, which they lost quite pitifully and which destroyed life as they knew it.

In the nine years after Skree's king and all his lords—in fact, everyone with a claim to the throne—had been executed, the people of Skree had learned to survive under the occupation of the Fangs of Dang. The Fangs walked about like humans, and in fact they looked exactly like humans, except for the greenish scales that covered their bodies and the lizard-like snout and the two long, venomous fangs that jutted downward from their snarling mouths. Also, they had tails. Since Gnag the Nameless had conquered the free lands of Skree, the Fangs had occupied all the towns, exacting taxes and being nasty to the free Skreeans. Oh, yes, the people of Skree were quite free, as long as they were in their homes by midnight. And as long as they bore no weapons, and they didn't complain when their fellow Skreeans were occasionally taken away across the sea, never to be seen again. But other than the cruel Fangs and the constant threat of death and torture, there wasn't much to fear in Skree. Except in the Stony Mountains where hairy bomnubbles

crept across the land with their long teeth and hungry bellies, and across the frozen wastes of the Ice Prairies where those few who made their home there battled snickbuzzards daily. Farther south, the Plains of Palen Jabh-J were as safe as they were beautiful, except for the ratbadgers that slithered through the tall grass (a farmer from South Torrboro claimed to have seen one as big as a young meep, which is about the size of a full-grown chorkney, an animal that stands about as high as a flabbit).

Before roaring over Fingap Falls, the River Blapp was wide and peaceful, clear as a spring, and the fish to be caught there were both delicious and docile, except for the many fish that were poisonous to the touch, and the daggerfish that were known to leap into boats and impale the stoutest fisherman.

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An Introduction to the Igiby Cottage (Very Brief)

Just outside the town of Glipwood, perched near the edge of the cliffs above the Dark Sea, sat a little cottage where lived the Igiby family. The cottage was rather plain, except for how comfortable it was, and how nicely it had been built, and how neatly it was kept in spite of the three children who lived there, and except for the love that glowed from it like firelight from its windows at night.

As for the Igiby family?

Well, except for the way they always sat late into the night beside the hearth telling stories, and when they sang in the garden while they gathered the harvest, and when the grandfather, Podo Helmer, sat on the porch blowing smoke rings, and except for all the good, warm things that filled their days there like cider in a mug on a winter night, they were quite miserable. Quite miserable indeed, in that land where walked the Fangs of Dang.

The Carriage Comes, the Carriage Black

Janner Igiby lay trembling in his bed with his eyes shut tight, listening to the dreadful sound of the Black Carriage rattling along in the moonlight. His younger brother Tink was snoring in the bunk above him, and he could tell from his little sister Leeli's breathing that she was asleep too. Janner dared to open his eyes and saw the moon, as white as a skull, grinning down on him through the window. As hard as he tried not to think about it, the nursery rhyme that had terrified children in the land of Skree for years sang in his head, and he lay there in the pale moonlight, his lips barely moving.

Lo, beyond the River Blapp
The Carriage comes, the Carriage Black
By shadowed steed with shadowed tack
And shadowed driver driving

Child, pray the Maker let you sleep
When comes the Carriage down your street
Lest all your dreams be dreams of teeth
And Carriages arriving

To wrest you from your berth and bower
In deepest night and darkest hour
Across the sea to frozen tower
Where Gnag the Nameless pounds you

At Castle Throg across the span,
A world away from kith and clan
You'll weep at how your woes began
The night the shadows bound you

Away, beyond the River Blapp,
The Carriage came, the Carriage Black
By shadowed steed with shadowed tack
The night the Carriage found you



It's no wonder that Janner had a hard time sleeping once he heard the faint thud of hooves and the jangle of chains. He could see in his mind the forms of the crows circling the Carriage and perched atop it, hear the croaking beaks and the flapping of black wings. He told himself that the sounds were only his imagination. But he knew that somewhere in the countryside that very night, the Black Carriage would stop at some poor soul's house, and the children there would be taken away, never to be seen again.

Only last week he had overheard his mother crying about the taking of a girl from Torrboro. Sara Cobbler was the same age as Janner, and he



remembered meeting her once when her family had passed through Glipwood. But now she was gone forever. One night she lay in bed just as he was now. She had probably kissed her parents good night and said a prayer. And the Black Carriage had come for her.

Had she been awake?

Did she hear the snort of the black horses outside her window or see the steam rising from their nostrils?

Did the Fangs of Dang tie her up?

Had she struggled when they put her into the Carriage, as if she were being fed into the mouth of a monster?

Whatever she had done, it was useless. She had been ripped away from her family, and that was the end of it. Sara's parents had held a funeral wake for her. Being carried off by the Black Carriage was like dying. It could happen to anyone, at any time, and there was nothing to be done about it but to hope the Carriage kept moving when it rattled down your lane.

The rattles and clinks and hoofbeats echoed through the night. Was the Black Carriage getting closer? Would it make the turn up the lane to the Igiby cottage? Janner prayed to the Maker that it would not.

Nugget, Leeli's dog, perked his head up at the foot of her bed and growled at the night beyond the window. Janner saw a crow alight on a bony branch outlined by the moon. Janner trembled, gripping his quilt and pulling it up to his chin. The crow turned its head and seemed to peer into Janner's window, sneering at the boy whose wide eyes reflected the moonlight. Janner lay there in terror, wishing he could sink deeper into his bed where the crow's black eyes couldn't see him. But the bird flapped away. The moon clouded over, and the *thump-thump* of hoofbeats and the *creak-rattle* of the Carriage faded, faded, finally into silence.

Janner realized that he'd been holding his breath, and he let it out slowly. He heard Nugget's tail thump against the wall and felt much less alone knowing that the little dog was awake with him. Soon he was fast asleep, dreaming troubled dreams.