

ANDREW PETERSON

THE
WINGFEATHER
SAGA

BOOK 2

NORTH! OR BE EATEN



WATERBROOK

NORTH! OR BE EATEN

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*For Aedan, Asher, and Skye.
Remember who you are.*

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A MORE OR LESS ACCURATE MAP
of
SKREE
(not to be used for holiday planning)

THE ICE PRAIRIES

XIMERA

a BORNHUBBLE

the PHOOB ISLANDS

MOG-BALGRIK

Snickbuzzards

THE BARRIER

THE FORK FACTORY

DUGTOWN

TORRBORO

MIGHTY RIVER BLAPP

MILLER'S BRIDGE

PEI'S CASILE

FIN GAP FALLS



The Lone Fendril

TOOOOTHY COW!” bellowed Podo as he whacked a stick against the nearest glipwood tree. The old pirate’s eyes blazed, and he stood at the base of the tree like a ship’s captain at the mast. “Toothy cow! Quick! Into the tree house!”

Not far away, an arrow whizzed through some hanging moss and thudded into a plank of wood decorated with a charcoal drawing of a snarling Fang. The arrow protruded from the Fang’s mouth, the shaft still vibrating from the impact. Tink lowered his bow, squinted to see if he had hit the target, and completely ignored his grandfather.

“TOOOOOTHY—oy! That’s a fine shot, lad—Cow!”

Podo whacked the tree as Nia hurried up the rope ladder that led to the trapdoor in the floor of Peet the Sock Man’s tree house. A sock-covered hand reached down and pulled Nia up through the opening.

“Thank you, Artham,” she said, still holding his hand. She looked him in the eye and raised her chin, waiting for him to answer.

Peet the Sock Man, whose real name was Artham P. Wingfeather, looked back at her and gulped. One of his eyes twitched. He looked like he wanted to flee, as he always did when she called him by his first name, but Nia didn’t let go of his hand.

“Y-y-you’re welcome . . . *Nia*.” Every word was an effort, especially her name, but he sounded less crazy than he used to. Only a week earlier, the mention of the name “Artham” sent him into a frenzy—he would scream, shimmy down the rope ladder, and disappear into the forest for hours.

Nia released his hand and peered down through the opening in the floor at her father, who still banged on the tree and bellowed about the impending onslaught of toothy cows.

“Come on, Tink!” Janner said.

A quiver of arrows rattled under one arm as he ran toward Leeli, who sat astride her dog, Nugget. Nugget, whose horselike size made him as dangerous as any toothy cow



in the forest, panted and wagged his tail. Tink reluctantly dropped his bow and followed, eying the forest for signs of toothy cows. The brothers helped a wide-eyed Leeli down from her dog, and the three of them rushed to the ladder.

“Cows, cows, cows!” Podo howled.

Janner followed Tink and Leeli up the ladder. When they were all safely inside, Podo heaved himself through the opening and latched the trapdoor shut.

“Not bad,” Podo said, looking pleased with himself. “Janner, next time you’ll want to move yer brother and sister along a little faster. Had there been a real cow upon us, ye might not have had time to get ’em to the ladder before them slobbery teeth started tearin’ yer tender flesh—”

“Papa, *really*,” Nia said.

“—and rippin’ it from yer bones,” he continued. “If Tink’s too stubborn to drop what he’s doin’, Janner, it falls to you to find a way to persuade him, you hear?”

Janner’s cheeks burned, and he fought the urge to defend himself. The toothy cow



drills had been a daily occurrence since their arrival at Peet's tree house, and the children had gradually stopped shrieking with panic whenever Podo's hollers disturbed the otherwise quiet wood.

Since Janner had learned he was a Throne Warden, he had tried to take his responsibility to protect the king seriously. His mother's stories about Peet's dashing reputation as a Throne Warden in Anniera made Janner proud of the ancient tradition of which he was a part.¹ The trouble was that he was supposed to protect his younger brother, Tink, who happened to be the High King. It wasn't that Janner was jealous; he had no wish to

1. In Anniera the second born, not the first, is heir to the throne. The eldest child is a Throne Warden, charged with the honor and responsibility of protecting the king above all others. Though this creates much confusion among ordinary children who one day discover that they are in fact the royal family living in exile (see *On the Edge of the Dark Sea of Darkness*), for ages the Annierans found it to be a good system. The king was never without a protector, and the Throne Warden held a place of great honor in the kingdom.

rule anything. But sometimes it felt odd that his skinny, reckless brother was, of all things, a king, much less the king of the fabled Shining Isle of Anniera.

Janner stared out the window at the forest as Podo droned on, telling him about his responsibility to protect his brother, about the many dangers of Glipwood Forest, about what Janner should have done differently during this most recent cow drill.

Janner missed his home. In the days after they fled the town of Glipwood and arrived at Peet's castle, Janner's sense of adventure was wide awake. He thrilled at the thought of the long journey to the Ice Prairies, so excited he could scarcely sleep. When he did sleep, he dreamed of wide sweeps of snow under stars so sharp and bright they would draw blood at a touch.

But weeks had passed—he didn't know how many—and his sense of adventure was fast asleep. He missed the rhythm of life at the cottage. He missed the hot meals, the slow change of the land as the seasons turned, and the family of birds that nested in the crook above the door where he, Tink, and Leeli would inspect the tiny blue eggs each morning and each night, then the chicks, and then one day they would look in sad wonder at the empty nest and ask themselves where the birds had gone. But those days had passed away as sure as the summer, and whether he liked it or not, home was no longer the cottage. It wasn't Peet's tree house, either. He wasn't sure he had a home anymore.

Podo kept talking, and Janner felt again that hot frustration in his chest when told things he already knew. But he held his tongue. Grownups couldn't help it. Podo and his mother would hammer a lesson into his twelve-year-old head until he felt beaten silly, and there was no point fighting it.

He sensed Podo's rant coming to an end and forced himself to listen.

"... this is a dangerous place, this forest, and many a man has been gobbled up by some critter because he weren't paying close enough attention."

"Yes sir," Janner said as respectfully as possible. Podo grinned at him and winked, and Janner smiled back in spite of himself. It occurred to him that Podo knew exactly what he'd been thinking.

Podo turned to Tink. "A truly fine shot, boy, and the drawing of the Fang on that board is fine work."

"Thanks, Grandpa," Tink said. His stomach growled. "When can we eat breakfast?"

"Listen, lad," Podo said. He lowered his bushy eyebrows and leveled a formidable glare at Tink. "When yer brother tells ye to come, you drop what yer doin' like it's on fire." Tink gulped. "You follow that boy over the cliffs and into the Dark Sea if he tells you to. Yer the High King, which means ye've got to start thinkin' of more than yerself."

Janner's irritation drained away, as did the color in Tink's face. He liked not being the only one in trouble, though he felt a little ashamed at the pleasure he took in watching Tink squirm.

"Yes sir," Tink said. Podo stared at him so long that he repeated, "Yes sir."

"You okay, lass?" Podo turned with a smile to Leeli.

She nodded and pushed some of her wavy hair behind one ear. "Grandpa, when are we leaving?"

All eyes in the tree house looked at her with surprise. The family had spent weeks in relative peace in the forest, but that unspoken question had grown more and more difficult to avoid as the days passed. They knew they couldn't stay forever. Gnag the Nameless and the Fangs of Dang still terrorized the land of Skree, and the shadow they cast covered more of Aerwiar with every passing day. It was only a matter of time before that shadow fell again on the Igibys.

"We need to leave soon," Nia said, looking in the direction of Glipwood. "When the leaves fall, we'll be exposed, won't we, Artham?"

Peet jumped a little at his name and rubbed the back of his head with one hand for a moment before he spoke. "Cold winter comes, trees go bare, the bridges are easy to see, yes. We should probably go—probably go."

"To the Ice Prairies?" asked Janner.

"Yes," said Nia. "The Fangs don't like the cold weather. We've all seen how much slower they move in the winter, even here. Hopefully in a place as frozen as the Ice Prairies, the Fangs will be scarce."

Podo grunted.

"I know what you think, and it's not one of our options," Nia said flatly.

"What does Grandpa think?" Tink asked.

"That's between your grandfather and me."

"What does he think?" Janner pressed, realizing he sounded more like a grownup than usual.

Nia looked at Janner, trying to decide if she should give him an answer. She had kept so many secrets from the children for so long that it was plain to Janner she still found it difficult to be open with them. But things were different now. Janner knew who he was, who his father was, and had a vague idea what was at stake. He had even noticed his input mattered to his mother and grandfather. Being a Throne Warden—or at least *knowing* he was a Throne Warden—had changed the way they regarded him.

"Well," Nia said, still not sure how much to say.

Podo decided for her. "I think we need to do more than get to the Ice Prairies and