

Evil Unleashed

RYANN RACED BACK the way they had come with Liddy and Terell close behind him. Springing past the last trappings of the forest's protection, they landed in the midst of a raging battle. Ryann's head swiveled trying to assess the calamity.

Hugons were pouring into the clearing from the eastern woods, clubs swinging. Snarling growls lashed out from behind their jagged teeth. Three were encapsulated in ice from the freezing breath of Sorcha. As Ryann watched, the white dragon's tail swept behind her, sending several others flying through the air. Taran and Mellt stood back to back, surrounded by a dozen Hugons. Their adversaries stood out of harm's way, carefully eyeing the bulls' pointed horns.

Adain's back hooves kicked out with blinding speed, catching one of the gray-skinned Hugons in the chest. Hurling backward, two other dragon-men were taken down.

Off to his right, Ireth plucked arrows from her quiver in the same rhythmic motion she had shown in the bow competition. Fifty feet in front of her, arrows stuck out of the arms, legs, and torsos of a horde of twenty to thirty dragon-men. Ryann could see she was going to run out of arrows soon. Rowan stood just behind Ireth, nervously gripping her wooden staff.

"Come on." Ryann motioned to Liddy and Terell. "Follow me." Racing toward the greatest need, Ryann raised his metal staff and aimed toward the closing gap between Ireth and the advancing



Hugons. He pushed button 2, unleashing a stream of fire. The fiery trail barely missed Rowan, sizzling into the grassy earth just in front of the gray-skinned monsters. As the turf erupted into a wall of flames, anguished cries rang out from the surprised Hugons. They fell backward, clamoring away to a safe distance.

“That should hold them!” Ryann shouted, advancing until he was alongside Ireth.

“Thanks, Ryann. I was almost out of arrows.”

“What?” Terell boasted. “You’ve got three left. You had those uglies right where you wanted ’em.”

“I’m really glad you three showed up,” Rowan confessed. “I didn’t relish having to take them on with my regular, wood staff.”

Over the shouting of the battlefield, a commanding voice bellowed from behind them.

“Enough!”

Heads turned to the sound of Carwyn, his head held high as he continued his slow stroll up to the Tree of Life. “It is time to stop fighting.”

Sorcha hesitated just before releasing another breath of frost. Ryann released the pressure on the button, and his wall of flames dissipated into a smoky mist. The Hugons cautiously advanced, waiting for the unicorn’s next words.

“All who rely on violence will die violently. Don’t you know that I can call upon the Word, and He will at once send legions of angels to my defense? This isn’t the way the Prince of Peace will redeem his people.”

“Yes! You should listen to him!” a mocking voice shouted from behind the Hugons.

“Ekron!” Ryann seethed.

A sly, curling smile spread across the dark angel’s face. With a

swoosh, his black, feathered wings fanned out behind him as he continued in his leering tone, “They don’t intimidate me. I recall leading those legions before I chose to leave.”

“Your mind has become clouded since your fall from grace,” Carwyn stated. “You did not choose to leave. You were banished from heaven.”

Ekron glared at the white unicorn. “Better to reign in the fires of hell than to serve in heaven.”

“That’s the same deceitful lie you tried to perpetuate on Earth, Ekron. And having failed there, I see you’ve moved on to new territories. The result will be the same.”

“I think not,” the dark angel raged. “Have you met my little friend here?”

Garnock stepped out from behind Ekron’s expansive wings. “I think he wants to have a word with you.”

The weary-looking dwarf stepped forward, avoiding Carwyn’s eyes as he walked toward him.

Sorcha took a deep breath, glaring at their betrayer.

“Don’t freeze him, Sorcha,” Carwyn cautioned. “I’ll talk with Garnock.”

The Chosen, Ekron, and the Hugon guards looked on as the river dwarf approached the white unicorn and conversed for several minutes. Garnock bowed, stepping backward as Carwyn held his head high and announced, “I am innocent of any charges of conspiracy against the throne of Aeliana that may be levied against me. And as such, I will go quietly with them to Myraddin.”

Ekron smiled. “Seize him!”

The Hugons hesitated, looking from the white dragon to Ryann and his staff.

“Now!”