

Excerpts from Chapter 12 of Deadly Secrets

Standing on the wide spongy shore, Darian stared up at the awesome-size cave entrance. The dome-shaped ceiling rose at least fifty feet over Darian's head. The opening of the cave was the mouth of some earth-monster with rows of needlelike stalactites forming a mouthful of teeth. Though right next to the sea, a sour putrid stench hung faintly in the air of the large orifice. As if eating something bad, the remnants of it drifted out from the belly of this earth monster.

As young Darian stood surveying the hidden cave, the spooked birds slowly returned and settled into their cliff-side commune.

Darian thought, "It's amazing how life has the ability to adapt to nearly any provided habitat. These birds have literally built themselves little castles in the sky."

Armed with torches and drawn hand weapons, the men went to face the awesome power of the terrible lizard. Like a burning arrowhead, the elite army converged into the depths of darkness. Quickly, the light of day faded away.

The torches only burned away ten feet of blackness in every direction. Creeping along quietly, they all hoped and prayed to find this dragon of darkness slumbering on that cold miserable day. As they moved further and further into the huge cave, a rank putrid smell overpowered the men. The deeper they went, the more unbearable the stench became. Literally stinging their eyes and burning the insides of their noses, tears and mucus dripped from their faces.

Whispering to the others, the point man remarked, "We must be getting closer. It smells terrible here."

Bringing up the rear, Darian thought, "Oh, my God, how can they stand it? The way it smells back here, I would swear that damn thing is breathing down my neck."

Inching forward, the group remained silent for a while. The soldiers with their burning torches moved along at a slow methodical pace. After traveling about two hundred yards farther through the wide winding cavern, the tunnel opened into a large chamber that reeked with the putrid smell of death.

As they searched the enormous room, one of the soldiers stumbled and fell. On his hands and knees, a slim soaked through his breeches and covered his hands. Looking down to inspect the floor more closely, the unfortunate man came face to face with a half-eaten human head.

Frozen forever with the utter look of terror, a final dying scream went silently unheeded from the dead man's wide-open mouth. Turning to the side, the emotionally distraught soldier spewed out what remained from his sea-wrenched stomach.

As one of the men helped him to his feet, the other warriors closely inspected the rest of the floor. Numerous remains littered the ground like half-eaten rotten apples. Torsos with legs, torsos with no legs, torsos with only heads or arms and other body parts lay partially devoured throughout the sickening lair.

Never had Darian seen so many dead bodies in one place at one time. Horrified and shaking slightly, he struggled to stop from vomiting like some of the other soldiers. Feeling dizzy, he wondered how much more he could really stand.

Finally the young man heard Captain Garrick call out in a commanding voice, "Let's get the hell out of here. There is nothing for us here except death. We shall just camp out on the cliff above us for the night and wait for the cold-blooded beast to return."

Gathering by the leader of the small squad in the center of the chamber, the men quickly organized to leave the vacant lair. Designated as the point man of the small party this time, Darian went out the same way they had just came in. As they turned the first sharp corner, the stench dissipated somewhat. Though now, a thin foul film layered everyone's clothes and skin.

Then, after going only twenty yards further, the young squire suddenly stopped dead in his tracks. With the aid of his flickering torch, terrified, young Darian stared straight into the eyes of the dragon.

Walking right into the stopped squire, the next soldier in line barked, "Why the hell are U . . ."

Instantly seeing what Darian saw, the man fell dead silent, paralyzed by the same fear that froze Darian.