“We have to clean you up,” said Elenna.

Tom and his friend stood beside the river that wound through the dusty Gorgonian plains. It was nothing like the clear streams of Avantia. Here the water was brown and sludgy. Every so often, bubbles escaped to the surface, bursting and filling the air.
with rotten-smelling yellow gas.

Elenna dabbed the gashes on Tom’s arm where Torgor the minotaur’s mighty axe had wounded him. The enchanted talon in Tom’s shield, given to him by Epos the flame bird, ran out of power before it could heal all of his injuries. It had been Tom’s toughest fight yet, but he had managed to free Tagus the horse-man from the clutches of Torgor. Now the good Beast was safely back in Avantia, away from Malvel’s evil.

“Do you think the herbs will work?” asked Tom.

Elenna smiled as she ground up the herbs Tom’s aunt had given them. Mixed with some water from her flask, they became a thick paste. Silver the wolf watched as she worked the paste into Tom’s wounds.
“Thank you,” he said. He didn’t know how he would have survived without Elenna on his Quests.

The pain in his arm began to ebb away.

“It’s working!” he cried.

The memory of the battle would take longer to fade, though. Torgor was more deadly than any Beast they had faced before. If there were other such creatures in Gorgonia, Tom knew he would need all his strength and courage to defeat them.

Elenna was bandaging the last of the linen dressings over Tom’s gashes when Silver leaped to his feet and began pacing along the riverbank, barking wildly at the water.

Tom’s horse Storm stamped his hooves and shook his mane, then backed away from the river’s edge.
“What’s got into Storm and Silver?” asked Elenna.

“Something’s spooking them,” said Tom. He peered into the water. The current seemed to have stopped. Silver let out a high-pitched whine as a ripple appeared in the middle of the water.

The two friends gazed into the river as the patterns there shifted. Gradually they could make out the lines of a mouth, then a nose, then two eyes. Ripples like long white hairs framed the image. The mouth moved in little waves.

Elenna gasped.

“Aduro!” said Tom.

It was their friend, the good wizard of Avantia.

“Greetings, Tom and Elenna,” the vision in the water called.
“Greetings,” they replied.

“Once again, congratulations on overcoming Torgor,” said Aduro.

“Tagus sends his thanks from Avantia.”

Elenna squeezed Tom’s arm, and Aduro continued.

“But, as you know, my magic is weak here in Gorgonia – the gateway between worlds saps my energy.
I don’t have the power to stay with you long.”

“Tell us, A duro,” said Tom, “what is our next mission?”

“You must track down a new Beast,” said Aduro. “Its name is Skor.”

Tom shot Elenna a look. She shrugged, looking mystified.

Aduro’s face began to blur at the edges, and his words became distant. His magic was fading. “Beware,” he whispered. “I give you a final warning: danger will come from both earth and air. Remember, earth and air…”

The face melted back into the water.

“He’s gone!” cried Tom.

“What is Skor?” said Elenna. “How can it be a danger by earth and air?”

“I don’t know,” said Tom, “but we
have to find out. We already know that Epos is in danger.” After the defeat of Torgor, the flame bird’s talon in Tom’s shield had begun to glow, calling for their help.

Tom picked up his shield, swung it onto his back, and tightened the magic belt around his waist. One of the belt’s slots already contained the red jewel he had captured from Torgor. It gave him the ability to understand what the Beasts were thinking. But there were five slots left to fill. Tom wondered what new powers he would gain on this Quest.

“Let’s see where we have to head next,” Tom suggested.

Elenna opened the bag on Storm’s saddle and pulled out the map given to them by Malvel. Unlike the enchanted parchment that had
guided them in Avantia, this map was scrawled on animal hide. Tom shuddered as he helped Elenna unroll the greasy yellow surface. “Look!” said Elenna. “A path.”

The stench of the map was overpowering, and Tom held his breath as he leaned in closer. A green line became clear against the discoloured surface. It marked a route from their present location on the plains. The line snaked around steep rocky gullies and ravines, and ended in a place marked with tall trees many miles away. They could see the figure of a tiny flame bird hidden within the trees.

“It’s a rainforest! And there’s Epos,” said Tom.

“It looks dangerous.” Elenna sounded worried.
Tom put his hand on her shoulder. “We’ve overcome thirteen Beasts already,” he said. “We can do it if we work together.”

“We don’t even know if we can trust the map,” said Elenna. “Malvel may be leading us to our deaths.”

Tom nodded. “Whatever Malvel throws at us, we’ll be prepared,” he said, rolling up the map. He gazed beyond the river. “Epos needs our help. We won’t fail!”