

Wild escapes.
A desperate journey.
And the ghastly Fangs of Dang.

NORTH! OF BE EATEN



ANDREW
PETERSON

THE
WINGFEATHER SAGA
BOOK TWO

Praise for
North! Or Be Eaten

“Peterson deserves every literary prize for this fine book. It is obvious that his musical talents have been put to good use as his use of words, plot, and narrative read like a well-scored film script. A very fine book, by a very fine writer and future talent. Amazing—thrilling and well worth reading again and again.”

—G. P. TAYLOR, *New York Times* best-selling author of *Shadowmancer* and
The Dopples Ganger Chronicles

“Toothy cows are very dangerous. Andrew Peterson convinced me and shivers run down my spine at the very thought of meeting a toothy cow face to face. The author spills characters like Podo and Nurgabog onto the page, then weaves a tale of danger that holds the reader captive. Believe me, you will relish being held captive by this master storyteller. But be sure you don’t get caught by the Stranders. Those people just ain’t civilized.”

—DONITA K. PAUL, author of *The Vanishing Sculptor*

“In a genre overrun by the gory and the grim, Peterson’s bite-sized chapters taste more like a stew of Gorey (Edward) and Grimm (the Brothers). *North! Or Be Eaten* is a welcome feast of levity—and clearly a labor of love. Andrew Peterson has awakened my inner eight-year-old, and that is a very good thing.”

—JEFFREY OVERSTREET, author of *Auralia’s Colors* and *Cyndera’s Midnight*

“An immensely clever tale from a wonderful storyteller—filled with great values and even greater adventure!”

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“Thrills, chills, spine-tingling mystery, and lots of smiles. It’s not easy to combine heart-pounding danger with gut-busting laughs and make it work, but Peterson pulls it off. For readers who want nonstop action infused with powerful, life-changing themes, *North! Or Be Eaten* is a must-read.”

—WAYNE THOMAS BATSON, best-selling author of *The Door Within*
Trilogy, *Isle of Swords*, and *Isle of Fire*

“Andrew Peterson is a gifted storyteller, scene painter, and wordsmith who takes you on a rollicking white-water ride of adventure. Readers of all ages are sure to find *North! Or Be Eaten* worthy of a big mug filled with a favorite beverage and a cozy nook near a crackling fire for hours on end. Here there be tales within yarns within stories. Listen, reader, bend your ear, but keep an eye peeled lest the dreaded Fangs of Dang be near!”

—R. K. MORTENSON, author of *Landon Snow and the Auctor's Riddle*

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The Wingfeather Saga Book Two



WATERBROOK
P R E S S

NORTH! OR BE EATEN

PUBLISHED BY WATERBROOK PRESS

12265 Oracle Boulevard, Suite 200

Colorado Springs, Colorado 80921

The characters and events in this book are fictional, and any resemblance to actual persons or events is coincidental.

ISBN 978-1-4000-7387-0

ISBN 978-0-307-44666-4 (electronic)

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Illustrations © 2009 by Andrew Peterson

Published in association with the literary agency of Alive Communications Inc., 7680 Goddard Street, Suite 200, Colorado Springs, CO, www.alivecommunications.com.

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Published in the United States by WaterBrook Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House Inc., New York.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Peterson, Andrew.

North! or be eaten : wild escapes, a desperate journey, and the ghastly Fangs of Dang / Andrew Peterson.—1st ed.

p. cm.—(The Wingfeather saga ; bk. 2)

Summary: Jealousies and bitterness threaten to tear apart the three Igiby siblings, heirs to a legendary kingdom across the sea, just when they must work together to battle the monsters of Glipwood Forest, the thieving Stranders of the East Bend, and the dreaded Fork Factory.

ISBN 978-1-4000-7387-0—ISBN 978-0-307-44666-4 (electronic) [1. Brothers and sisters—Fiction. 2. Adventure and adventurers—Fiction. 3. Fantasy.] I. Title.

PZ7.P4431No 2009

[Fic]—dc22

2009015368

Printed in the United States of America

2009—First Edition

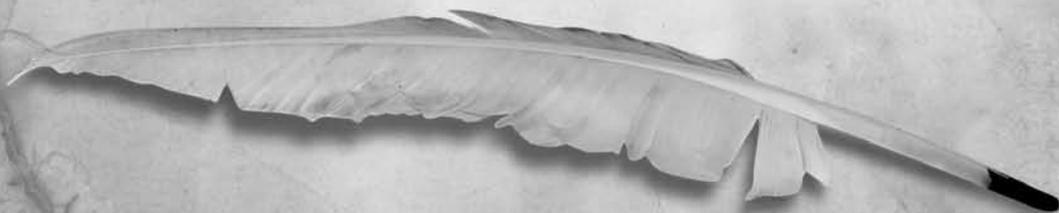
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*For Aedan, Asher, and Skye.
Remember who you are.*

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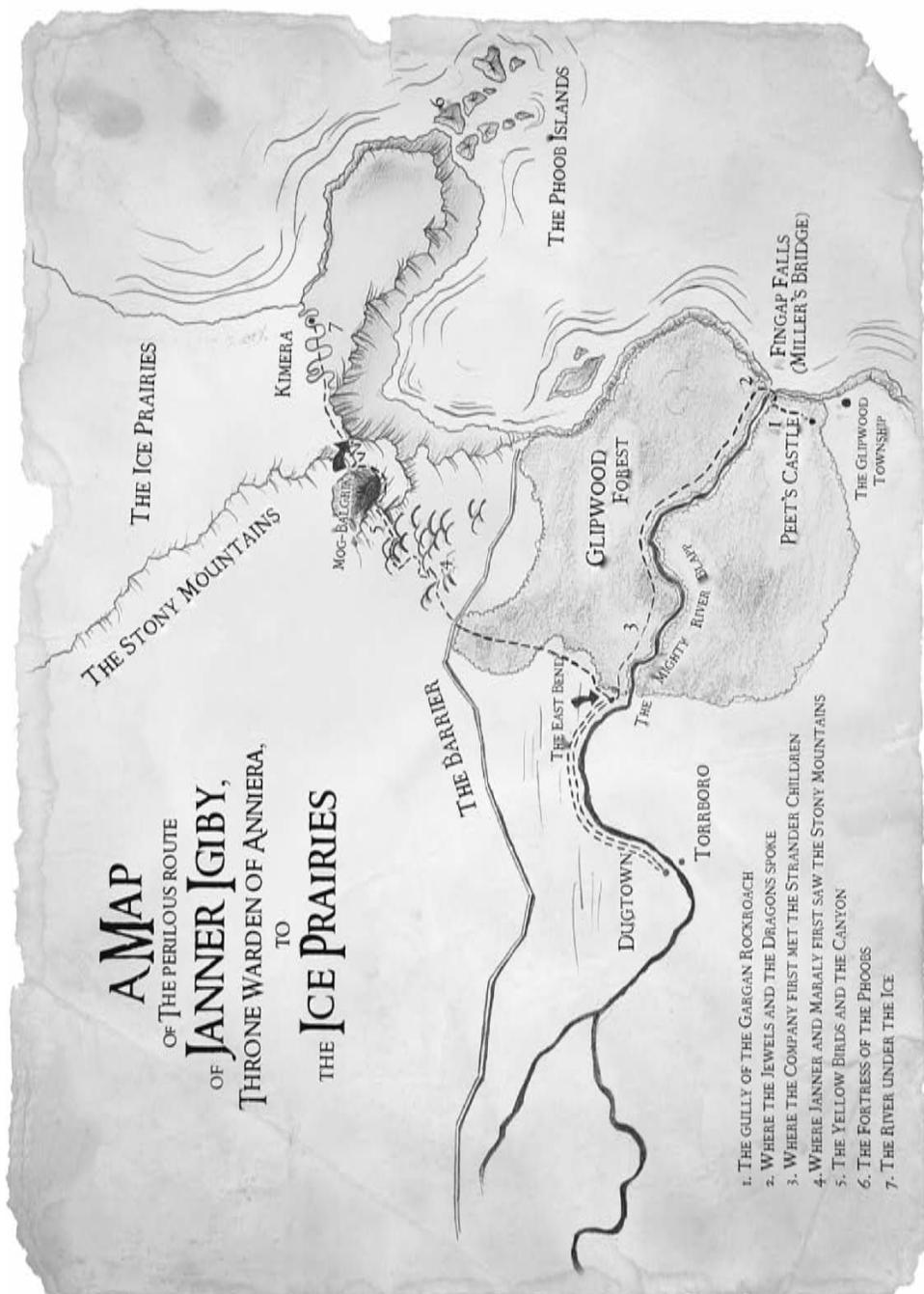
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NORTH!
or
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Eaten

A MAP
OF THE PERILOUS ROUTE
OF JANNER IGIBY,
THRONE WARDEN OF ANNIERA,
TO
THE ICE PRAIRIES



1. THE GULLY OF THE GARGAN ROCKROACH
2. WHERE THE JEWELS AND THE DRAGONS SPOKE
3. WHERE THE COMPANY FIRST MET THE STRANDER CHILDREN
4. WHERE JANNER AND MARALY FIRST SAW THE STONY MOUNTAINS
5. THE YELLOW BIRDS AND THE CANYON
6. THE FORTRESS OF THE PHOBOS
7. THE RIVER UNDER THE ICE

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 be. 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 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

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.

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 Igbys.

"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 po—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 lie low like a family of bumpy digtoads, waitin' fer things to happen to us. If Oskar was right about there bein' a whole colony of folks up north what don't like livin' under the boot of the Fangs, and if he's right about them wantin' to fight, then they don't need us to gird up and send these Fangs back to Dang with their tails on fire. I say the jewels need to find a ship and go home." He turned to his daughter. "Think of it, lass! You could sail back across the Dark Sea to Anniera—"

"What do you mean 'you'?" Tink asked.

“Nothin’,” Podo said with a wave of his hand. “Nia, you could go home. Think of it!”

“There’s nothing left for us there,” Nia said.

“Fine! Forget Anniera. What about the Hollows? You ain’t seen the Green Hollows in ten years, and for all you know, the Fangs haven’t even set foot there! Yer ma’s family might still be there, thinkin’ you died with the rest of us.”

Nia closed her eyes and drew a deep breath. Peet and the children stared at the floor. Janner hadn’t thought about the fact that he might have distant family living in the hills of the Green Hollows across the sea.

He agreed with his mother that it seemed foolish to try to make such a journey. First they had to get past the Fangs in Torrboro, then north, over the Stony Mountains to the Ice Prairies. Now Podo was talking about crossing the *ocean*? Janner wasn’t used to thinking of the world in such terms.

Nia opened her eyes and spoke. “Papa, there’s nothing for us to do now but find our way north. We don’t need to go across the sea. We don’t need to go back to Anniera. We don’t need to go to the Green Hollows. We need to go north, away from the Fangs. That’s all. Let’s get these children safely to the prairies, and we’ll finish this discussion then.”

Podo sighed. “Aye, lass. Gettin’ there will cause enough trouble of its own.” He fixed an eye on Peet, who stood on his head in the corner. “I suppose you’ll be comin’ with us, then?”

Peet gasped and tumbled to the floor, then leapt to his feet and saluted Podo. Leeli giggled.

“Aye sir,” he said, mimicking Podo’s raspy growl. “I’m ready to go when the Featherwigs are ready. Even know how to get to the Icy Prairies. Been there before, long time ago—not much to see but ice and prairies and ice all white and blinding and cold. It’s very cold there. Icy.” Peet took a deep, happy breath and clapped his socked hands together. “All right! We’re off!”

He flipped open the trapdoor and leapt through the opening before Podo or the Igbys could stop him. The children hurried to the trapdoor and watched him slide down the rope ladder and march away in a northward direction. From the crook in the giant root system of the tree where he usually slept, Nugget perked up his big, floppy ears without lifting his head from his paws and watched Peet disappear into the forest.

“He’ll come back when he realizes we aren’t with him,” Leeli said with a smile. She and Peet spent hours together either reading stories or with him dancing about

with great swoops of his socked hands while she played her whistleharp. Leeli's presence seemed to have a medicinal effect on Peet. When they were together, his jitters ceased, his eyes stopped shifting, and his voice took on a deeper, less strained quality. The strong and pleasant sound of it helped Janner believe his mother's stories about Artham P. Wingfeather's exploits in Anniera before the Great War.

The only negative aspect of Leeli and Peet's friendship was that it made Podo jealous. Before Peet the Sock Man entered their lives, Podo and Leeli shared a special bond, partly because each of them had only one working leg and partly because of the ancient affection that exists between grandfathers and granddaughters. Nia once told Janner that it was also partly because Leeli looked a lot like her grandmother Wendolyn.

While the children watched Peet march away, a quick shadow passed over the tree house, followed by a high, pleasant sound, like the *ting* of a massive bell struck by a tiny hammer.

"The lone fendril,"² said Leeli. "Tomorrow is the first day of autumn."

"Papa," said Nia.

"Eh?" Podo glared out the window in the direction Peet had gone.

"I think it's time we left," Nia said.

Tink and Janner looked at each other and grinned. All homesickness vanished. After weeks of waiting, adventure was upon them.

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2. In Aerwiar, the official last day of summer is heralded by the passing of the lone fendril, a giant golden bird whose wingspan casts entire towns into a thrilling flicker of shade as it circles the planet in a long, ascending spiral. When it reaches the northern pole of Aerwiar, it hibernates until spring, then reverses its journey.