

STEWART & RIDDELL



THE  
**EDGE**  
CHRONICLES

DOOMBRINGER

← BOOK 2 OF THE CADE SAGA →



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About the Authors

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Praise for *The Edge Chronicles*

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## ABOUT THE BOOK

*A New Life.*

*A Deadly Threat.*

*Welcome to The Edge.*

Cade Quarter is starting a new life in the wilds, along with Tug, the Nameless One, and Rumblix, his prowlgrin pup. But despite the calm waters of the lake they live beside, and the secrets in its depths, all is not well in the Farrow Ridges.

Cade has enemies who have not forgotten him. And the arrival of a sinister mire-pearlers' skyship, the *Doombringer*, marks the start of a terrible threat to their community.

Cade and his friends must travel far and fight hard to defend the land and life they love.

The second book of the Cade Saga, part of the *Edge Chronicles*



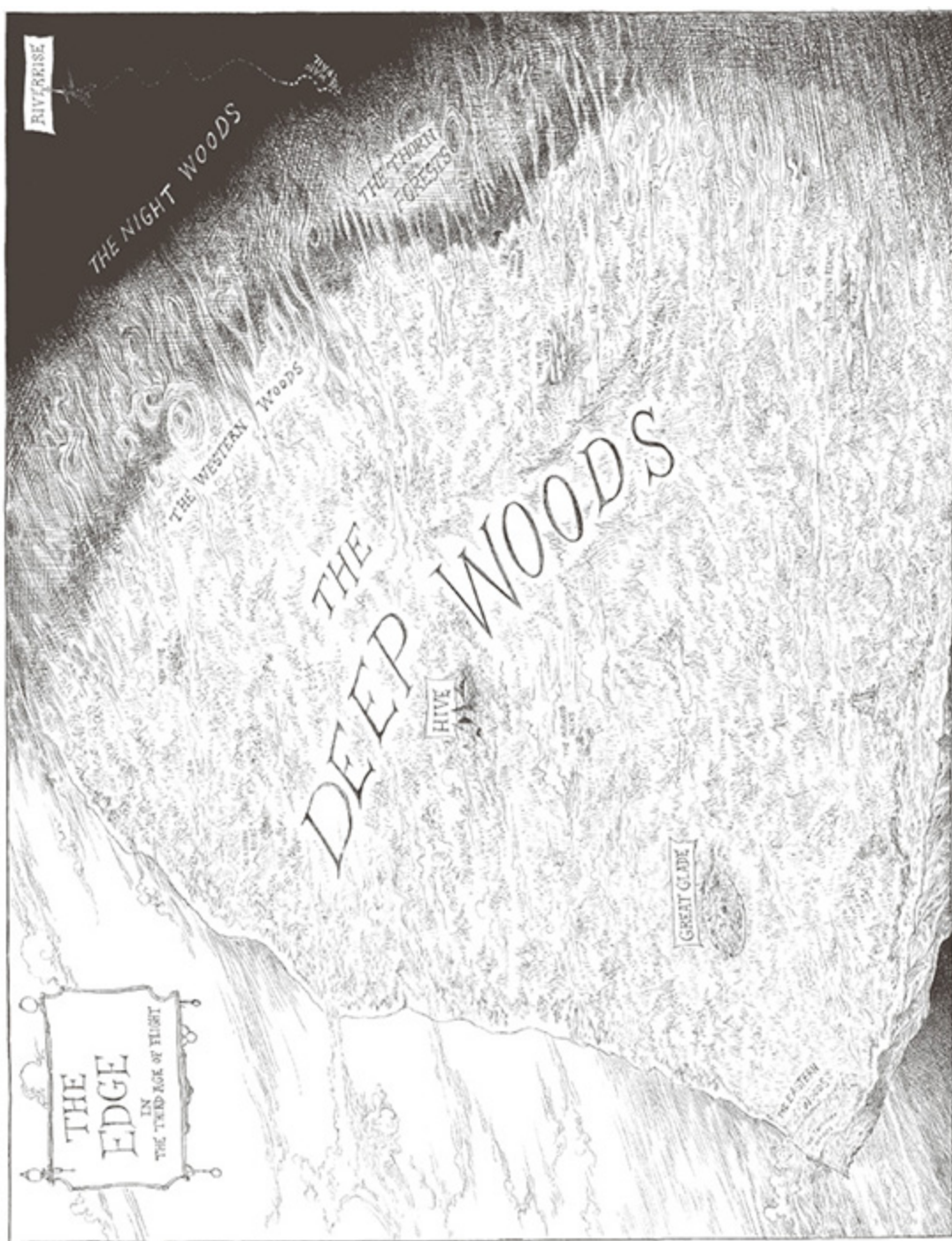
# THE EDGE CHRONICLES

DOOMBRINGER  
↔BOOK 2 OF THE CADE SAGA↔

STEWART & RIDDELL

**RHCP DIGITAL**

*Paul: For Julie*  
*Chris: For Jo*









## · INTRODUCTION ·

FAR FAR AWAY, jutting out into the emptiness beyond, like the figurehead of a mighty stone ship, is the Edge. A torrent of water pours endlessly over the lip of rock at its overhanging point. This is the Edgewater, a mighty river that crosses from one end of the Edge to the other.

At its source, far to the west, lies Riverrise, the city of night. While to the east, at the very tip of the Edge cliff, where the thunderous waters plunge down into the void, is the mysterious floating city of Sanctaphrax; now a pale shadow of its former glory.

Between Sanctaphrax and Riverrise lies a vast, sprawling landscape, from the muddy wetlands of the Mire to the mist-wreathed barrenness of the Edgeland Pavement; from the eternal golden glow of the Twilight Woods to the inky darkness of the Thorn Forests.

Along with Riverrise, there are two other great cities that have prospered in this, the Third Age of Flight – Great Glade and Hive. There are smaller towns too: Thorn Harbour and the Midwood Decks, Four Lakes and the Northern Reaches. And then there are the smallest outposts of all – trading stations and mining camps, and isolated supply posts that exist only because they are on the routes of the great skytaverns that crisscross the Edge.

One such a place is the sky-platform at the Farrow Ridges. Passing skytaverns dock there briefly, taking fresh water on board and trading supplies for local produce with its solitary platform-keeper. They don't stay long, for this is a wild, untamed area, with savage hammerhead goblin



tribes roaming the forests, and fearsome white trogs said to infest the caverns beneath the ridges.

Yet a few intrepid pioneers have made the Farrow Ridges their home. Individuals who want to put their past behind them and carve out a new life in this beautiful, unspoiled corner of the Edge, with its lake and waterfalls, its untouched forest and rich, fertile land.

In the First Age of Flight, when buoyant rocks kept mighty sky galleons airborne, sky pirates and leaguesmen established the first trade routes across the vastness of the Deepwoods. But then stone-sickness struck and put an end to this age, and tiny skycraft of buoyant sumpwood and spidersilk sails ushered in the Second Age of Flight. Brave librarian knights and other adventurous explorers mapped and gathered information on the many wonders of the Edge.

Then one such academic managed to harness the explosive energy of phrax crystals. It was a discovery that led to the invention of phraxchambers: the artificial flight rocks which power the mighty skytaverns in the Third Age of Flight. Now the skies over the Deepwoods are traversed by such vessels, carrying passengers between the great cities and linking isolated communities like never before.

But with such links come new dangers . . .

The Deepwoods, the Eastern Woods, the Mire and the Edgewater River. Sanctaphrax and Undertown. Great Glade, Riverrise and Hive. The Farrow Ridges. Names on a map.

Yet behind each name lie a thousand tales – tales that have been recorded in ancient scrolls, tales that have been passed down the generations by word of mouth – tales which even now are being told.

What follows is but one of those tales.

## · CHAPTER ONE ·

THE FISHING LINE looked fine. Untangled. Still weighted deep in the water. All Cade needed now was a bite. After a hot and cloudless day, the sun was low in the sky. Far off at the southern end of the Farrow Lake, the Five Falls looked like five ribbons of gold fluttering in the late afternoon glow. On either side of the falls, the forest pines were black and jagged against the pale sky.

Cade rested a hand on the side of the coracle, then traced his fingers idly backwards and forwards along its upper edge. The leather pleats beneath his fingertips were satisfyingly smooth and flat.

The little vessel was holding up well. The plaited framework, with its curved strips of water-soaked willow, had kept its shape. The black pitch he'd applied to the tilder hide had rendered the little craft both waterproof and buoyant. Now, as he sat out here in the middle of the lake, fishing pole in hand and the early evening sun warm on his face, the hard work he'd put into making the coracle all seemed worth it.



He peered over the side. The water beneath was still and dark and deep, and full of fish. If only one of them . . . Just one. He wasn't greedy. If only one fish would bite.

Cade sniffed the air. It smelled of lufwood smoke and grilling fish. Over on the east shore, he could just make out the pointed roof of his friend Thorne Lammergyre's hive-



hut poking up through the trees. He smiled as he pictured Thorne's wood-burning stove blazing purple, with the flat skillet perched on its top, lakefish sizzling inside it.

Cade owed the fisher goblin so much. Thorne had designed and helped Cade build a lakeside cabin; he had taught him how to pickle and salt and cure provisions to stock the storeroom beneath it, and he had taken the time to teach him the fine art of coracle construction so that Cade could venture out onto the Farrow Lake on his own to fish.

He glanced at the fishing line. It was motionless. Limp. Unfortunately, not even the fisher goblin could make the lakefish take Cade's hook . . .

Turning away, he looked over his shoulder at the north shore, where his own cabin, with its stone jetty leading down to the lakeside, nestled below a low bluff. A great hulking figure was shambling about at the water's edge, stooping and stamping and waving his arms. It was Tug, a nameless one from the far distant Nightwoods who Cade had adopted – or who had adopted him; he was never sure which. He was playing with a frisky young prowlgryn, Rumblix, the pedigree grey that Cade had raised from a hatchling and that was now almost fully grown. The two of them would be expecting a supper of lakefish.

Cade turned back to his line with a sigh.

A little way off, a pair of lakefowl dabbled. Glitterwings droned from the reed beds. A skein of grey and white plattergeese flew overhead in V-formation, their honking cries, half cough, half yodel, fading into the distance as they passed over the Five Falls – only to be replaced by the far-off boom of a steam klaxon.

Cade looked across the lake to the east, where Gart Ironside's sky-platform towered above the treeline. Gart must have heard the steam klaxon too, for as Cade peered up, he could just make out the tiny figure of the platform-keeper scurrying here and there, preparing for the

imminent arrival of the *Xanth Filatine*, a mighty skytavern on its way from Cade's home city of Great Glade. When it arrived, laden with cargo and teeming with passengers, its great funnel billowing ice-cold steam, the skyship would dock briefly at Gart's sky-platform to refill its water tanks and take on supplies before moving on to its destination in the great city of Hive.

The skytavern passed by once every four months, and each time Cade heard its booming klaxon call his stomach churned. For he had enemies aboard the *Xanth Filatine*, and one enemy in particular he hoped he would never run into again . . .

Cade shuddered. The fishing would have to wait. He needed to get off the lake and out of sight before the mighty vessel came into view. He was about to wind in his line when the pole in his hand shuddered, then bowed, and the fishing line went taut.

He'd hooked something. Something big. But before he could begin reeling it in, the pole was torn from his grasp and disappeared into the lake. The coracle pitched and lurched and started bobbing wildly about. Cade gripped the sides of the little boat tightly, breath held. All around him, the water swirled. Large bubbles wobbled up and burst at the surface as a dark shape rose from the depths.

It was huge. Cade caught a glimpse of dark scales, the flash of savage-looking teeth and the glint of a silver eye as the creature neared the surface. It glided underneath the coracle, then circled back round, Cade's fishing pole and line trailing behind it.

It was a snagtooth. It had to be. Cade had never seen one before, but Thorne had warned him about them. Usually they kept to the deepest, darkest places of the lake, lying in wait for plump, unsuspecting lakefish to swim by. But in the early evening, as the light began to fade, snagtooths were liable to stir . . .

In the distance, the boom of the steam klaxon sounded once more. Cade grabbed his oar and started paddling furiously for the shore.

All at once, the great creature broke the surface of the water and reared up. A long snout, fringed with fangs, gaped open as a row of undulating flippers that ran the length of a gnarled and leathery body flexed and thrashed at the air. It spat out the rod and line and lunged at the boat, its fangs glinting and eyes ablaze.

Cade fell back, the oar gripped in his hands.

The snagtooth plunged back down into the water, sending a wave crashing against the side of the tiny coracle, which bucked and rolled precariously.

*I've learned my lesson*, Cade told himself, gulping mouthfuls of air as he leaned forward and stabbed his oar down into the water. Never again would he go fishing so far out in the lake, not at this time of day. He strained at the oar, pushing the coracle on.

The stone jetty was coming closer. Tug and Rumblix had stopped their game and were looking back at him.





Not much further to go.

But the snagtooth had not given up. It had sensed Cade's fear. Now it wanted blood.

Cade glanced down to see a ridged back, nubbed and pitted, rising up beneath his boat. The next moment, the coracle gave a sickening lurch and tipped right over, throwing him into the roiling water.

Arms flailing, he sank down into the green depths.

*This is it, Cade thought. This is the end . . .*

Suddenly he was grabbed by the shoulder. Cade lashed out wildly, trying to hit the snagtooth that had him in its jaws, but succeeding only in taking in a lungful of lake water as he was pulled up towards the rippling light. At the surface, Cade coughed and spluttered, and found himself being propelled across the lake, away from the bobbing hull of his capsized coracle.

Fighting to catch his breath, he looked back to see the creature, far behind him now, leap up out of the lake. As it crashed back down again, it seized the coracle in its jaws and disappeared beneath the water.

Whatever had hold of him, it wasn't the snagtooth.

His speed began to slow and beneath him Cade saw the glimmer of pebbles. He was in the shallows, not far from the stone jetty of his cabin. His shoulder was released and he fell back, the lake water lapping at his chin.

'Please accept my apologies,' came a soft voice close by his ear. 'That was all my fault.'

## · CHAPTER TWO ·

CADE TURNED. THERE, sitting back on his haunches in the shallow water, was a webfoot goblin.

*'Your fault?'* said Cade.

The goblin nodded. *'I'm afraid so.'* Tall, rangy, with scaly, pale green skin, he had a long face, large triangular ears, droop-lid eyes and a scallop-shaped crest at the top of his head which, as Cade watched, changed colour from bluey-green to a deep pulsating crimson.

*'Phineal Glyfphith,'* he said, and thrust out a scaly hand.

Cade shook the webfoot goblin's hand and, expecting it to feel like the fish it resembled, was surprised by how warm and soft it was.

*'Cade,'* he said. *'Cade Quarter.'*

The goblin climbed to his feet and splashed over to the shore. Cade followed, noticing the goblin's large flat feet with the webbed skin between the splayed toes, and the long curved spikes that protruded from the backs of his ankles. He took note of the snailskin tunic and patched breeches the goblin wore, and the various tools and decorations that adorned his body. There was a string of shells around his neck. Hooks, jag-blade knives and a barbed spear hung at his belt, along with a heavy-looking stone with a hole at its centre that was attached to a length of coiled rope tied around his waist. On his back was a forage-sack that bulged with contents Cade couldn't even guess at . . .





‘That’s where you live?’ Phineal was saying.

Cade looked up. Phineal was staring at his cabin, a little way along the shore.

‘I built it myself,’ said Cade, a note of pride creeping into his voice. ‘With a little help,’ he added.

Phineal nodded. ‘We webfoots also construct our buildings on stilts,’ he said approvingly. ‘In case of flooding.’

The crest on his head shifted through colours from orange to yellow to green. His scaly brow furrowed into a frown.

‘I owe you an explanation, Cade Quarter,’ the webfoot said seriously. ‘You see, I was down on the lake bed doing some fishing myself, when I saw your line. So I did what I always do for fellow fisherfolk – I placed one of my catch on your hook . . .’

The goblin’s crest turned from green to blue.

‘Unfortunately, I only spotted the snagtooth when it was too late. It appeared out of nowhere and swallowed the fish whole, taking your hook with it. And that must have whetted its appetite, because when it spotted your coracle, it went wild. There was no stopping it.’

The webfoot goblin paused, his crest flashing from blue to purple. He was staring at something back along the shore, and Cade turned to see Rumblix and Tug coming towards them. The prowlgrin was bounding ahead with Tug lumbering behind him.



‘It’s all right,’ Cade reassured Phineal, whose crest was now shimmering erratically. ‘They’re harmless. Rumblix is my prowlgrin. And the other one is called Tug.’

Even as he spoke, though, Cade found himself seeing Tug the way the webfoot must be seeing him – the way *he* himself had first seen him when Tug had emerged from the forest on the night of the great storm. The powerfully built body, with those long arms, and fists like boulders that looked capable of crushing you with a single blow. The misshapen head. The jutting brows and skull ridge. The tiny deep-set eyes. The crooked fang-studded jaw . . .

And yet that wasn’t how Cade saw him now. Tug was kind and hard-working and loyal. Tug was his friend.

‘I’ve seen such creatures before,’ Phineal said, his voice a low sibilant whisper. ‘They live in the Nightwoods, where they’re enslaved by the red and black dwarves. They call them nameless ones.’

Rumblix reached them and, after giving Cade a slobbery lick on the hand, began sniffing tentatively around the goblin’s ankles. Phineal stroked the prowlgrin’s back, but

his eyes remained fixed on the nameless one plodding towards him.

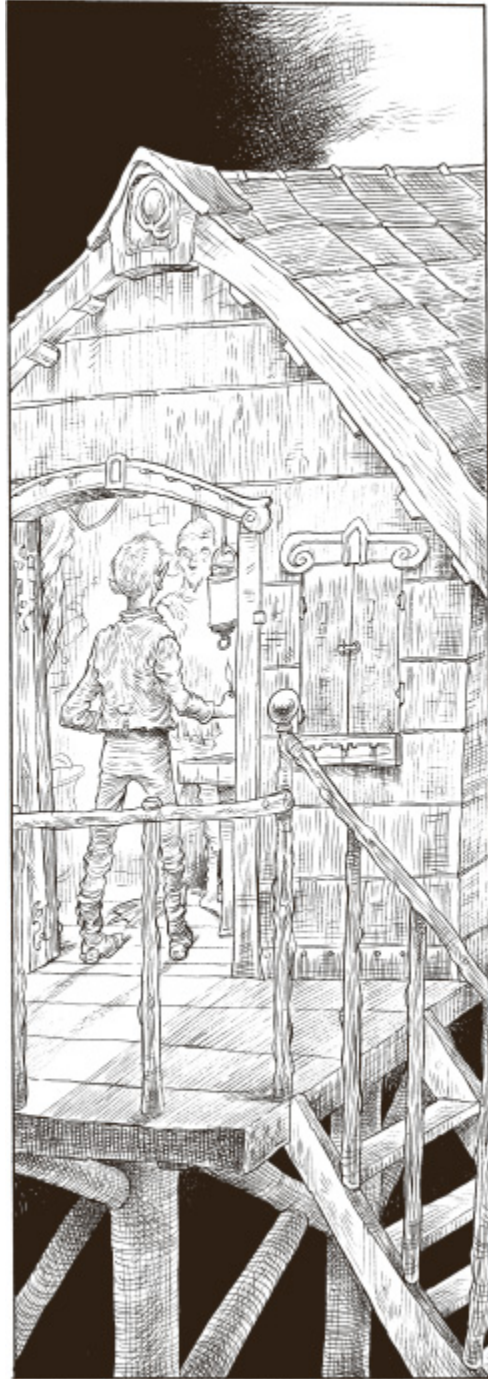
‘Well, I gave this nameless one a name,’ said Cade, stepping forward and resting a hand on Tug’s arm as he stopped beside him.

‘Tug, Phineal,’ said Cade. ‘Phineal, Tug.’

Phineal nodded. He didn’t offer a hand in greeting, but his crest flashed a pale crimson colour. Tug shuffled from foot to foot, his small dark eyes flashing from Cade to the webfoot goblin and back again. Phineal slipped the forage-sack from his shoulders and reached inside, and for a moment, Cade feared that he might be going for a weapon of some kind. But instead, when he withdrew his hands, Phineal was holding two large, plump lake-fish.

‘I can’t replace your coracle,’ he said, turning to Cade, his crest a soft shade of orange, ‘but I can provide us all with supper. If you provide a cooking fire.’

Cade happily agreed and the two of them headed along the shore towards the cabin.



Tug and Rumblix remained behind at the water's edge, the nameless one hunkered down eating feather-reeds while Rumblix scampered about, giving playful chase to the lakefowl. The sun had slipped down behind the horizon and luminescent flameflies flickered and danced against the orange sky.

'Welcome to my home, Phineal,' Cade said.

He lifted the latch, pushed open the door and ushered the webfoot inside. As he followed him in, Cade noticed how different the *slip-slap* of Phineal's bare feet was to the echoing *clomp-clomp* of his own boots. It was dark inside and he lit the table lamp, bathing the cabin with soft, golden light – the sleeping-quarters to their left, with his buoyant sumpwood bed swaying gently next to an open window; the living area, with its rough-hewn table, stools and bench, and the kitchen to the right, complete with fireplace, stove and washbowl.

'Make yourself at home,' said Cade. 'I shan't be a moment.'

Lighting a second lamp, he ducked through the door next to the fireplace, went down the stairs on the other side and into the storeroom. Cade had been working hard, and the place was satisfyingly well stocked with provisions that he'd gathered over the preceding months – and that he hoped would last him for several months to come.

Shelves bowed under the weight of boxes of oakapples, crates of woodpears, earthenware pots of jugged woodfowl and barrels of saltroot, pickled blue-cabbage and rock-whelks in brine – as well as a series of pitchers of winesap in various stages of fermentation. Burlap sacks stood in a line along the base of the far wall. Each one was bulging. There were dried herbs, barley-rice, and beck-lentils; tagberries and peppercorns, and flour that Cade had ground himself. Above them, suspended from a row of hooks, were tied-up bunches of nibblick and glimmer-



onions, dried pipefish and tanglecarp, and a gleaming fitch of smoked tilder.

Cade gathered up some herbs, glimmer-onions and beck-lentils, and a pitcher of the winesap that his nose told him was ready to drink. Arms full, he returned upstairs to find Phineal busy gutting and cleaning the lakefish on the table.

Just then, the echoing boom of the skytavern echoed across the lake. Cade had forgotten all about it. He hurried to the window to see the *Xanth Filatine* docking at Gart Ironside's platform-tower, and shivered.

Phineal followed his gaze. 'A skytavern,' he said, and Cade could hear the bitterness in his voice. 'My home in the Four Lakes changed for ever the day skytaverns started to arrive.'

## · CHAPTER THREE ·

AS THE JET of white flame shut off at the propulsion duct, the *Xanth Filatine* came to a standstill. With a slight tremor, the skytavern hovered some twenty or so strides above the trees, the vast hull and phraxchamber dwarfing the towering ironwood pines beneath, and making even the distant Five Falls look small and insignificant. The steam that poured from its funnel, stained purple by the remnants of sunset, billowed like storm clouds.

Dazzling hull-lamps came on, lighting up the vessel. Crew members were busy on the decks, while passengers were spectating, draped over deck-rails, clustered at viewing-platforms, or with their heads poking out of the rows of portholes. Then the lamps were realigned until they were shining down on the treetops and the wooden sky-platform that rose above them, illuminating a modest cabin, a tethered phraxlighter, a stack of crates and an over-sized water tank, beside which the tall, thick-set figure of the platform-keeper was standing.



In a rising swirl of glittering steam, the skytavern began to descend. It came lower, slowly, then ground to a halt when the hull-weights grazed the uppermost leaves. Tolley-ropes appeared at jutting lower-deck gantries at the prow, midships and stern, and uncurled as they dropped. Crew members slid down them, secured the ends to the upper branches of the trees then scrambled back on board.

The platform-keeper, Gart Ironside, was waiting. One hand was pressed against the side of the water tank, the other raised to his forehead, shielding his eyes from the glare of the hull-lamps as he peered up at the skytavern. Nets appeared over the side, bulging with sacks and boxes and, raking his fingers through his thick black hair, Gart strode across to the stack of crates beside the phraxlighter.

The net swung close. Gart grabbed hold, eased it down onto the wooden boards, then opened it up and removed the contents, stacking the sacks and boxes of provisions next to the wall of the cabin. In return, he took two of his own crates and loaded them into the net. Then he reached up and tugged the rope twice. The net lifted off the platform and was winched up to the skytavern.

With the words *Trade Goods - G. Ironside* scrawled on the wooden sides in red leadwood pencil, the crates contained the fruits of Gart's labour for the past four months. Lemkin pelts. Pinewood resin. Fire crystals . . . Small items of high value that Gart had managed to collect without ever having to leave his phraxlighter and set foot on the ground - items that ensured that the platform-keeper was provided with more than just the basics. After all, it was a harsh and solitary existence he led up on the sky-platform - one that was made more bearable by the occasional crate of winesap or sack of strong, aromatic oakwood tea.



When the last of the cargo had been exchanged and the nets withdrawn, Gart opened the top of the water tank, then stood back. He looked up expectantly, wincing into the bright light that turned his sallow skin to burnished silver.

Moments later, a long flexible pipe was lowered towards him from a hatch in the midships. Swaying like the trunk of a giant fromp sniffing out barkbugs, the pipe spiralled down through the air. Gart seized it in both hands and thrust the end down into the water tank. From above, a plume of vapour rose from a short funnel that jutted out from the hull as a steam-pump juddered into action, followed by a tremor that ran the length of the pipe as water was sucked up from the tank and into the reservoirs in the bowels of the skytaVERN.