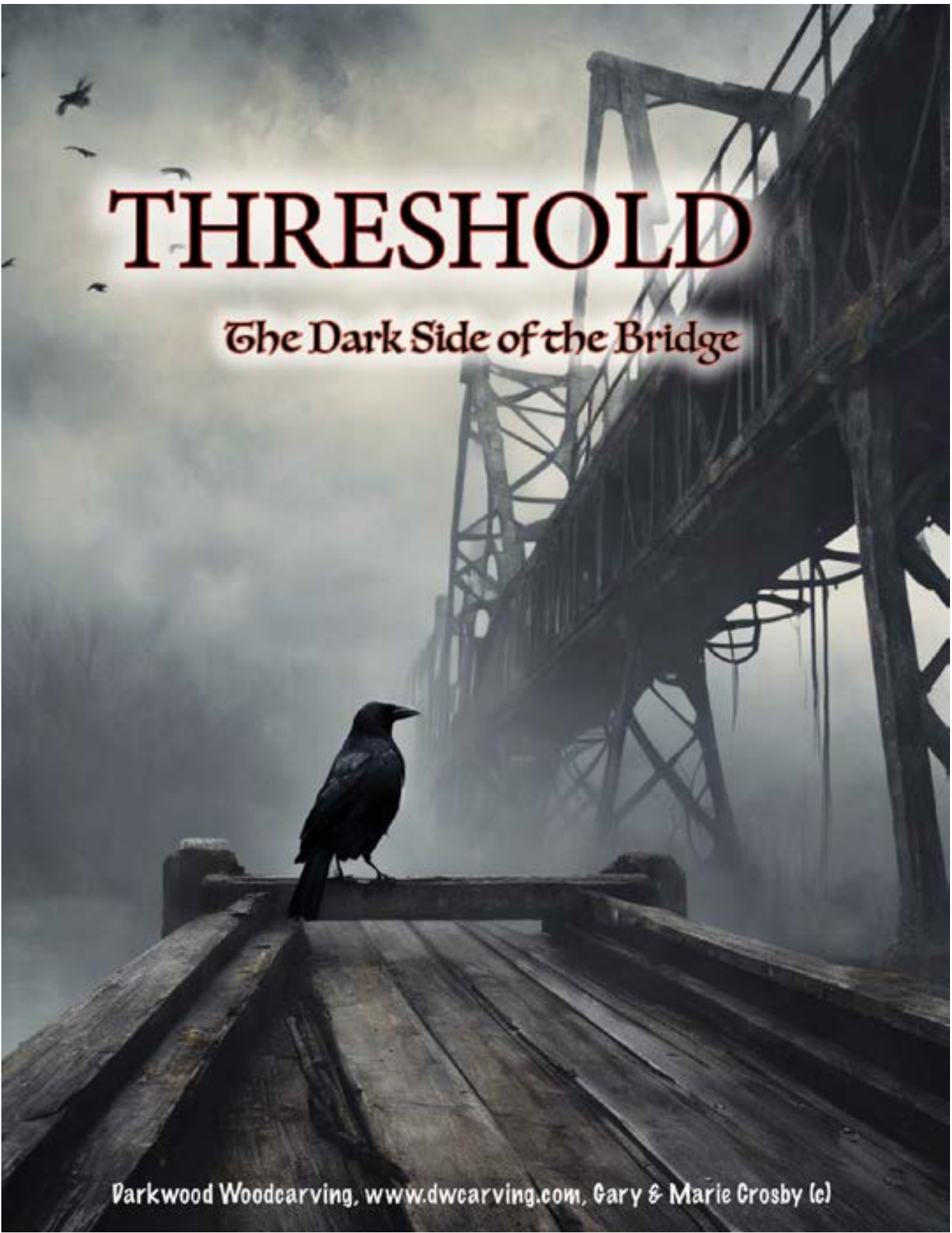




THRESHOLD

The Dark Side of the Bridge

Darkwood Woodcarving, www.dwcarving.com, Gary & Marie Crosby (c)

Declan was once again immersed in a whirlwind of knowledge at the city library, seamlessly transitioning from physics to fluid mechanics to green energy systems. He relished the challenge of intellectual puzzles, delighting in the complexities of each subject. While fiction didn't captivate him, he had explored a handful of non-fiction works that offered intriguing insights into the real world.



Declan had just finished reading Carl Sagan's "Billions and Billions: Thoughts on Life and Death at the Brink of the Millennium." The experience was nothing short of mind-blowing, igniting a spark of curiosity and opening his mind to a myriad of possibilities. Rising from his quiet seat in the back corner of the library, he made his way to return the book to its rightful place, ensuring that others could also enjoy this remarkable read. Inspired by Sagan's profound insights, he resolved to explore a different topic—one that would challenge him further and expand his understanding even more.

As he stood there, contemplating the myriad of books lining the shelf, Declan's gaze was drawn to an older, dark leather-bound volume adorned with the word "Threshold" in gold that ran elegantly up and down its spine. He reached for the book, and to his surprise, it felt as though it leaped into his hands, as if it had been waiting for him all along. "That was peculiar," Declan pondered, a sense of intrigue washing over him. The book exuded an unusual aura, a strange energy that seemed to radiate from its spine, captivating his curiosity even further. What secrets might it hold?



He walked back to his seat and gently placed the book on the table, momentarily letting it go as he pulled out his chair. However, an inexplicable urge surged within him—a powerful compulsion to hold

the book once more. Nothing else mattered; he had to feel its weight in his hands again! He reached out and touched the cover, and the initial sensation of longing was instantly replaced by a profound sense of euphoria. He sat down, his right hand never leaving the book, as if it were drawing him in, connecting with his very soul.

As he settled into his seat, Declan slid his hand along the spine of the book. Suddenly, a sharp pain shot through his right hand, causing him to jerk it back. Blood dripped from his fingertip, and he instinctively clutched it, trying to stem the flow. To his astonishment, he noticed that the blood that had splattered onto the book's cover had vanished, as if it had never been there at all.

He hesitated for a moment, confusion swirling in his mind. Then, without a second thought, he held his hand over the cover and let three drops of blood fall onto it. What happened next defied all logic. The book absorbed his blood, and a vibrant green aura began to emanate from its pages, as if it were accepting his offering.

In that moment, new writing materialized before his eyes on the cover, glowing with an otherworldly green light. It read, "Challenge Accepted."

Declan was suddenly engulfed by a wave of dread. "What does 'Challenge Accepted' mean? What challenge?" he pondered, incredulous at the thought that the book might be speaking to him. "That's impossible," he reasoned, weighing his options. Should he dare to open the book and discover what lay within its pages? Perhaps he needed a second opinion.

Just then, the librarian strolled by, casting a curious glance over her shoulder. "Excuse me," Declan said, his voice tinged with concern, "but I think there's something wrong with this book." As he held it up for her to see, he was taken aback to find that it had transformed before his eyes! The librarian took the book from his hands, scrutinizing it from cover to cover.

“What seems to be the issue?” she inquired, her brow furrowing in confusion. “This is a book about the life of the Monarch Butterfly, and it appears perfectly fine to me.”

She returned the book to Declan with a polite smile. “Have a nice day, sir,” she said before continuing on her way. Declan stared at the book about the Monarch Butterfly, now resting in his hands, utterly bewildered. He set it down on the table, trying to make sense of the situation. The moment his fingers left the cover, the book began to glow with an eerie green light, shimmering and shifting until it morphed back into an old, dark leather book titled ‘Threshold.’

Now Declan was confused and felt that his challenge was to discover what this book was all about. He opened the cover to see the first page, which to his astonishment, was blank. Declan turned the page only to find the next page was blank as well. He considered his options, what should he do? Then it came to him...Perhaps the book needs more of his blood. Every part of his body said not to go any further, however, he had to know. With that thought he dripped a drop of blood on the page.

The book began to glow green again, Declan could see writing that started to appear on the page, it said, “Welcome Declan to your challenge.” Declan asked in a hesitant voice, “What challenge?” Instantly, more writing started to appear as if being written by some outside force; it stated three words “To Stay Alive”. Declan tried to pull away from the book, but it held him tightly. His reality was changing and his world started to shrink into tunnel vision and finally darkness overtook him.

The next thing Declan knew, he found himself standing before the walking bridge that connected the north and south sides of the city. He glanced around, realizing he was utterly alone; no one was in sight in any direction. Suddenly, a sharp voice pierced the silence from behind him. “What are you doing here, Declan?”

He turned to see John Brennan, he was the ghost that helped him with the investigation into the thefts in the park. John was clad in full military uniform, standing before him. A wave of relief washed over Declan as he shrugged and replied, “Thank Heavens it’s you, John. Where am I?”

John’s expression was grave as he responded, “Declan, you’re in the land of the dead—or, more accurately, the land between life and death.”

Stunned by this revelation, Declan’s gaze drifted down the bridge, where he noticed something unusual. He squinted, trying to make sense of the shadowy figure ahead. Compelled by an inexplicable urge, he took a step forward, crossing the threshold of the bridge. Just then, he heard John’s frantic voice behind him, “Declan, no! Stop... stop!”

But it was too late. The moment Declan’s foot touched the ground beyond the threshold, the world around him began to twist and transform. The bridge morphed into something darker and more ancient, with a rush of icy air striking his face, sending shivers down his spine.

John was gone now, in fact he could not see behind him past the bridge’s threshold. It was as if there was nothing on the other side. Declan tried to take a step back across the threshold but found what seemed to be an invisible wall.

The next second the silence on the bridge was broken by a sharp, crackly old voice that seemed to be coming from an old raven with a beak that look crumpled back on itself, as if he had been pecking something hard for a long time.

Declan started to realize he was not in ‘Kansas’ anymore and he had fallen down the rabbit hole into another world. The Raven said in a sharp voice

“Look, we have a new challenger, hee,hee,hee!, Come to save your life you did, The book has chosen you! To live or die, that is your fate” Declan replied, “Wait, what are you talking about and what’s up with your beak?” The Raven looked at Declan with his jet black feathers and crumpled beak, “If you spent eternity rap tap tapping on a door, your beak would be bent as well!

But, this is not about me, it’s about you Declan!”

The raven perched ominously above the bridge, its glowing red eyes piercing through the darkness. It spoke with a voice that chilled Declan to the bone, “The bridge is divided into seven sections. In each section, you will face a question of skill and wit posed by the resident of that segment. Answer correctly, and you may survive. But be warned: each section will prove more challenging than the last. And before you even think of retreating, know this—you can only move forward. Now, take a step, or we shall tear you apart.”

As Declan gazed into the shadows, he saw hundreds of ravens with razor-sharp beaks and talons, their eyes fixed on him. Overwhelmed by fear, he instinctively stepped back, just as the first raven lunged at him. Without a second thought, Declan turned and sprinted toward the next section of the bridge. Glancing over his shoulder, he caught sight of the master raven, its crumpled beak and glowing red eyes fixed on him.

“Edgar Allan Poe was a master of the written word,” Declan shouted defiantly. “The Raven was about grief and the struggle to overcome it, not about you!” At that moment, the swarm of ravens dissolved into the shadows, leaving only silence in their wake.

A voice emerged from the darkness, “Well done, Declan, well done!”

He halted, bewildered, and turned back to find that everything had

vanished. “Was that the first test?” He pondered, a mix of relief and confusion washing over him.

Taking a deep breath, Declan steadied himself as he gazed down the length of the bridge, his heart pounding in his chest. He fought to regain his composure, focusing on the distant end of the structure that seemed to beckon him forward. With determination coursing through him, he began to walk toward the far end, resolved to reach it before the next challenge emerged. “All I have to do is get there before things get strange again,” he thought, bracing himself for whatever awaited him.

Declan squinted and noticed figures climbing over the handrails, obstructing his path. The closer he got, the more he realized these were not ordinary people; they were grotesque creatures, twisted and decayed, remnants of humanity that had long since faded. They were zombies, and there were far too many of them for Declan to get past. He came to an abrupt halt, about ten feet from the lead zombie, his pulse quickening. “Just what are you supposed to be?” He asked, his voice steady despite the fear creeping in.



The lead zombie opened his mouth to speak, but to Declan’s horror, his jaw detached and fell onto the bridge decking with a dull thud. Undeterred, the zombie raised a finger, signaling for Declan to wait a moment. He bent down, retrieved his lower jaw, and awkwardly reattached it to his distorted face. In a crackling voice, he said, “Ah, that’s better... Welcome, Declan, to your next challenge. We are both one and many—the walking dead, doomed to roam the night in search of our next victim. It seems we have found you!”

To get right to it “How many ice cubes does a person in China put in their green tea?” Declan was really confused, “What do you mean ‘ice cubes in tea in China?’ that does not even make sense! What kind of question

is that?” The lead zombie glared at Declan and cracked a smile and said, “Well boys, it looks like we have a live one for supper!” Declan could hear moans from the zombies. “Brains...brains...brains, zombie want brains!”

Declan felt a wave of panic wash over him; he had no idea what the answer was, if there even was one. He glanced up at the zombies surrounding him and began to weave his way through them, rubbing his chin as if deep in thought, mumbling the question to himself repeatedly. His goal was to slip past them and make a dash for the next challenge. Just as he was about to escape, the lead zombie bellowed, “Get him! He’s making a run for the next challenge!”

With that, the chase began. Declan broke into a full sprint, but no matter how fast he ran, the finish line seemed to drift further away. Frustrated, he slowed down, turned around, and raised a hand, shouting, “Wait... wait! Let me think!”

One of the zombies fixed its gaze on him and sneered, “Tick... tock, little bag of meat. Did the raven forget to mention that there’s a time limit on our question?” It let out a maniacal chuckle. “Tick... tock, meat bag.”

The zombies were just about on him when it came to Declan, “The answer... “The answer is, it takes just about the same amount as it does in Africa on a cold night in the desert.”

The zombies halted abruptly, their decaying forms frozen in place. The lead zombie, more imposing than the rest, shoved his way through the horde of ravenous undead. “What do you mean, meat sack?” he rasped, his voice a long growl.

Declan, unfazed, replied, “Your question makes no sense at all, therefore, the answer must be equally nonsensical. A foolish question deserves a foolish answer.”

The lead zombie stepped closer, a grotesque grin spreading across his rotting features. “Well done, meat bag,” he said, his voice dripping with mockery, before the horde began to dissolve into the shadows, leaving Declan alone in the eerie silence.



Declan took a deep breath, shaking off the deep lingering shivers that coursed through him. As he turned around, he declared to the world, “Two down and five more to go.” With renewed determination, he stepped forward, ready to face the next challenge, whatever it might be.

As he stepped onto a new section of the bridge, reality shifted in a bewildering manner. The world he had known vanished behind him, replaced by an entirely new landscape unfolding before his eyes. The bridge itself seemed to twist and turn, undulating from left to right in a disorienting dance. One moment, he found himself leaning precariously to the left, and the next, he was tilting to the right. Maintaining his balance became an arduous challenge, as the ground beneath him felt both unstable and yet surreal.

Declan could just make out a very large figure standing on the bridge about 50 meters from him in the darkness. It was huge, it looked to be at least 15 meters tall and ripped with massive muscles. He could just make out what looked to be a club in his right hand. As he dragged it along the bridge the weight of such a massive club ripped up sections of the bridge decking.



As the creature came into focus, Declan realized he was staring at a monstrous hybrid—a cyclops that seemed to have spent time with a mountain troll. The result was a fearsome being, its body marred by deep scars that spoke of countless battles fought over the years. A chill ran down Declan’s spine as he took in the sight; the creature was both

awe-inspiring and terrifying. How on earth was he going to escape this perilous situation? As the creature came closer, Declan stepped forward and addressed the monster. "Excuse me sir, but could you point me in the direction of the exit?" The monster chuckled "You must think me a fool. Just because I am hideous does not mean I am stupid. I am quite well educated, I have a masters in applied Science and I am working on my Physics PhD, thank you very much!" He stated in a well mannered voice indicating a cultured upbringing.

Declan shrugged his shoulders and said, "Sorry for stereotyping you. I made assumptions based on your appearance and not the real you. I do apologize good sir, and with that I will be on my way." Declan started to walk past the creature when suddenly the club he was holding landed in front of him blocking his way. He turned his head and looked directly into the one big eye which was now glaring at him. Declan gave him an uncomfortable smile and said "Who would of thought your depth perception would be that good with only one big eye!"

The creature smiled and said "Lets see if you are smiling when you answer my question wrong.

"I hold things together yet I am very weak, you can not see me or hear me but you can feel me if you listen very hard."

Declan folded his arms and placed his right hand on his chin, pondering this question, repeating it over and over again as he walked around the giant cyclops thing or creature, not letting it distract him.

A deep booming voice called out. "Tik...Tok, little meat sack, I may be educated, but I am still very hungry and your time is just about up!"

Declan looked up and answered "Its wind, right? Wind!"

The monster started to laugh and said, "Thank you, meat sack, you

will make a good meal.” Just then, he swung down with his hand and tried to grab Declan around the shoulders. Declan ducked and stepped back out of his way. Declan was now in panic mode, rolling and ducking the monster’s hands and swinging club, while still pondering the question, what could be the answer if it was not Wind? Just then, the monster’s hand grabbed Declan by the feet and swung him upside down, lifting him high above his head as if getting ready to swallow him whole. In Declan’s struggle, he notices his pencil slowly falling from his pocket, landing on the floor, and bouncing. Declan looked into the one eye staring at him, the monster’s mouth wide open, ready for dinner. Declan yelled, “Gravity! It’s Gravity!...Right? Gravity!”

The monster’s mouth closed as he made a face of concession, placing Declan down on the bridge deck. “Yes, yes, it is. And just so you know, I wasn’t really hungry anyway. I just ate a couple of people on the way here.”

Declan pointed to the monster’s teeth “I noticed a boot stuck in your teeth, right there; yes, that’s it.” The monster removed the boot and tossed it over the side of the bridge and replied, “Thanks, its been driving me crazy all morning.”

Declan pointed to the bridge “Am I free to go?” The monster nodded “ Yes, you are free to go. But be warned, the next few challenges will not be as nice as me!”

Declan made his way to the next threshold of the bridge. He looked back at the one he called monster and yelled “Hey! What’s your name? I can’t keep calling you monster!” The creature turned and smiled, “My name is ‘Bone Crusher the third’ but you can call me Bob.” Declan smiled and replied, “See you later Bob,” as he step across the next threshold of the bridge to his next nightmare.

This time, there was no twisting bridge or darkness with monstrous figures creeping over the bridge. Everything appeared perfectly normal, except for one small detail: a tiny snake lay basking in the warm sunlight in the middle of the bridge, seemingly content and enjoying life. Just then, Declan caught a glimpse of movement out of the corner of his left eye—a majestic bald Eagle swooping down, poised to snatch the unsuspecting snake for its next meal. Without a moment's hesitation, Declan lunged forward, determined to shield the little creature from the eagle's grasp, just in the nick of time.

Declan stood up, a broad grin spreading across his face as he gazed at the snake. "There you go, little one; you've been granted another chance at life." As he stepped past the small creature, the sky darkened ominously, and a colossal shadow loomed over him from behind. An instinctive dread gripped Declan, urging him not to turn around; deep down, he sensed that whatever awaited him would be far from comforting.

A hissing sound echoed from behind Declan, sending chills down his spine. "Welcome to my realm," it said with a hiss, the voice dripping with malice. "I see you have found my youngest daughter, Tasha. My name is Mortem Dentem, but you may call me Morss for short."

Declan could sense the massive serpent slithering closer, its scales rustling on the bridge. When it finally halted, the voice hissed, and said "Now turn around and face me."



Declan slowly turned around to face the creature that was behind him. It was incredible, it was a giant Basilisk; the serpent king. Declan made sure he did not look into its eyes, instead he kept Mors in his peripheral vision. It is said that if you look into a Bas-

ilisk's eyes you will die. Mors hissed and said "Well aren't you a ssssmart one! You know what I am and I sssuppose you know what my name meansss?" Declan nodded and replied, "Yes, Death Fang," Declan was now terrified to a point he could not move!

Declan's voice trembled with fear as he asked, "I assume you have a challenge or a riddle for me to solve?" Mors, with a sinuous grace, coiled around him, encasing him in her grasp. He realized, with a sinking feeling, that he was now completely trapped!

Mors put her massive face beside Declan and said, "You have already been tessed." Declan considered this for a moment and replied, "The baby snake,...your child, that was the test?" Mors hissed "Yesss you made the insstinctive move to ssave my child from cccertain death,..hiss. A life deserves a life! If you had not ssaved my child you would be sssupper by now...hiss." Declan looked down at his feet to see the small snake looking up at him, it said with a hiss, "Thanksss Declan, that wasss very ssweet of you."

Mors pulled away from Declan without touching him and faded into the darkness hissing, "Good luck meat sssack, you are going to need it, hisss"

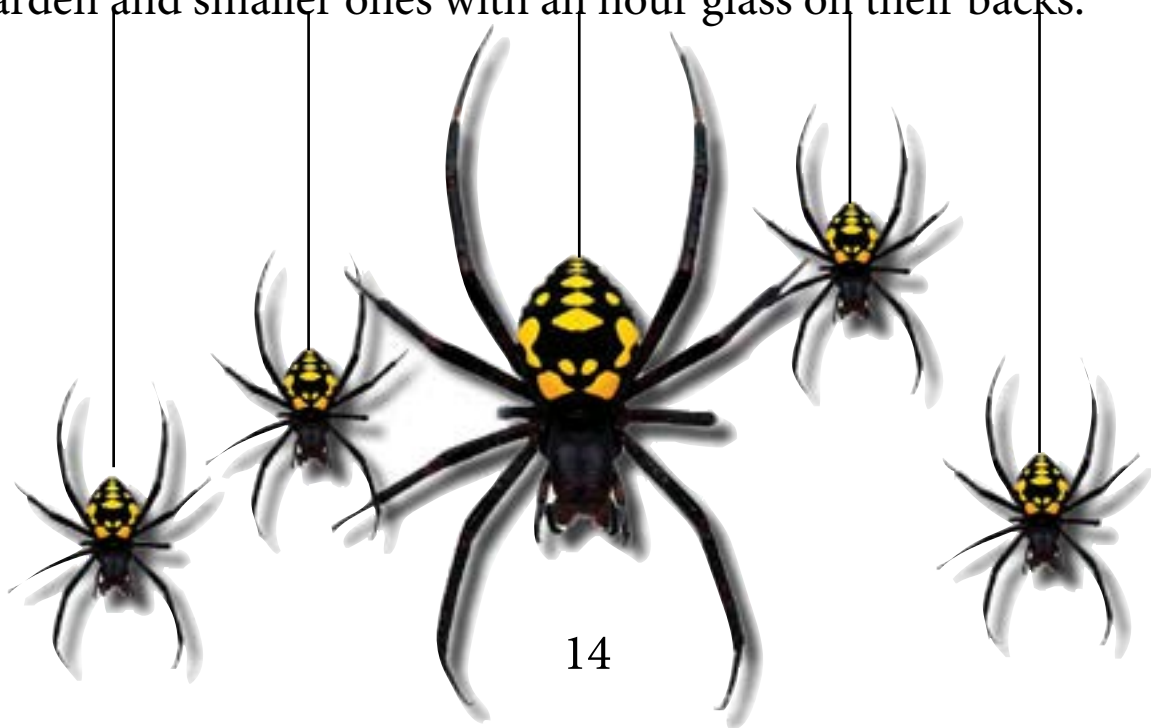
Declan stepped across the next threshold, a sense of anticipation building within him. He could feel that he was nearing the end of his journey. As he approached the new challenge, a question lingered in his mind: as would he be transported back to the library, or would he simply step off the walking bridge and return to the familiar realm of normal space?

Once across the threshold, Declan found himself in utter darkness, he could not even make out the steel structure of the bridge. "Now what?" he said in a low voice, not to disturb whatever was coming for him this time.

Declan couldn't see anything but could hear sounds of things moving in the darkness that were getting closer.

Suddenly, Declan's tunnel vision began to dissipate, unveiling the intricate architecture of the bridge before him. The decking came into sharp focus, stretching invitingly toward the next threshold, beckoning him to continue his journey. Perhaps this challenge was merely a step toward the next one. He chuckled at the notion that there might not be a significant obstacle this time. As his vision cleared, he noticed movement atop the bridge along the crossover supports. These robust steel beams spanned the bridge's upper structure, meticulously designed to provide stability and support on both sides.

Declan forced his focus, squinting and trying to bring whatever that was at the top of the bridge into focus. Declan's eyes opened up wide, "No way....No...can't be!" Declan started to hyperventilate, his finger tips started to tingle, his legs and arms felt heavy, his heart was pounding! "No, not...them, it can't be them....No!" It was the one thing that terrified him the most in the real world. But here they were huge; and so many of them crawling all over the top of the bridge. He could see clearly now that the bridge was full of giant spiders. These weren't just spiders but a colony of giant spiders of all different colours. Big fat juicy ones like you would see in your garden and smaller ones with an hour glass on their backs.



Declan thought to himself, “Why did it have to be spiders? Of all things, why these creatures from my nightmares?”

Declan could now hear a chorus of voices echoing around him. “Look, fresh meat.” they taunted as he approached the next threshold. He mentally prepared himself to face the upcoming challenge, but also keeping in mind the possibility of needing to make a quick escape if things went awry. They were spiders after all, giant spiders.

Declan noticed one of the massive spiders descending in front of him, blocking his path to the next threshold. It spoke in an old voice as if it had been around for a millennium. “Juice sack why are you here, what brings you to our realm. Are you offering your juices to us? We are very hungry”

Declan answered very quickly “No... I am here for the next challenge. No juices....I will keep my juices...I can’t believe I am saying this.---What is your name king of the spiders.” Just then an angry voice roared from the large spider, “I AM NO KING! I am the Queen of the Spiders. My name is Aranea Regina, but you can call me ‘Rose’ as I am royalty in my realm.”

Declan smiled and slightly bowed displaying his respect for the queen. “Your majesty, I am simply traveling through your realm.” “No more words juice sack.” Replied the queen. “I know why you are here, and I know once you fail our challenge, you will be our dinner. So answer this!

I am life, I am death, I come and I go, I can go forward but never backward. I do not smell, but I can create smell. Everyone knows me, but struggle to understand me. What am I?”

“Well juice sack what’s your answer, we are getting hungry!”



Declan weighed his options once more. Should he make a run for it, fight his way through the swarm of spiders, or attempt to answer the question posed to him? Perhaps a combination of both strategies would be wise. After all, even if he managed to answer the challenge correctly, there was no assurance that the spiders wouldn't still devour him.

Declan cautiously navigated his way through the large spiders that loomed before him. As he bobbed and weaved around them, he feigned curiosity, posing a series of questions. "What type of spiders are you?" he began, then added with a slight bow, "Ah, I see you're a giant garden spider, and of course, the Queen." He continued, "I can spot wolf spiders, black widows, Huntsman spiders, and cellar spiders. And you there," he said, gesturing toward one, "you resemble a fishing spider." With each step, he maintained his playful demeanor, intrigued by the fascinating array of arachnids surrounding him. After all, this charade was not about the spiders, but about getting closer to the threshold and his escape.

Declan began to sense that he was on the brink of freedom, with no spiders standing between him and his escape. He turned to confront the Spider Queen, who had been trailing him ominously. "Your challenge, is an interesting one, Queen of the Spiders but I would ask can you please repeat the question. Thank you!" He said in a voice steady despite the tension in the air.

The Queen let out a low growl, "I am life, I am death, I come and I go, I can go forward but never backward. I do not smell, but I can create smell. Everyone knows me, but struggle to understand me. What am I? Now, answer the question, time is running out, and my children are getting hungry!"

Declan frowned for a second and with a commanding voice brimming with confidence "It's tomorrow!"

The Queen let out a low growl again, “WRONG MEAT SACK! Feast on the his flesh and juices my children. Just then in unity, all of the spiders started to move towards Declan. By now Declan was up against the threshold. However, as he tried to step across he found out the way was blocked. He now knew that he would have to answer or die a thousand deaths by giant spiders.

Declan paused, contemplating the question once more as the spiders drew nearer. He raised his hand to halt their advance. “Now, just wait a moment! If it’s not tomorrow, then it must be... TIME! Yes, the answer is Time!” he declared, a confident smile spreading across his face.

The Queen stepped forward, her voice smooth and commanding. “Indeed, you are correct, my dear. So succulent... So incredibly juicy! Rest assured, we shall still indulge in your essence regardless.”

Declan felt the threshold wall dissolve beneath his fingertips. Glancing up at the rapidly approaching spiders, he declared, “Not today...Not today!” With a determined step backward, he crossed the threshold, hoping this would be his final challenge.

As Declan stepped through the threshold, a wave of oppressive heat enveloped him, making it feel as though he had entered a furnace. The temperature was stifling, easily exceeding 35 degrees Celsius. Within moments, his vision began to sharpen, revealing a breathtaking yet unsettling scene. The cavern appeared to be carved from obsidian rock, with its glossy black walls reflecting a dim flickering light as if on fire. Giant claw marks marred the surface, suggesting that some monstrous entity had desperately tried to escape this prison cell. Declan’s gaze shifted to the next threshold, that was visible and approximately 50 meters away. It wasn’t far, but he instinctively knew that reaching it would be a formidable challenge, there was something waiting for him.

Declan's eyes widened as he discerned what appeared to be an enormous heap of gold and precious gems. In fact, there were several such mounds scattered throughout the cavern. However, the sight of charred human bones strewn across the cavern floor sent a chill down his spine.

As he began to connect the dots—piles of gold, remnants of human remains, and the ominous claw marks etched into the obsidian walls—it became clear to him: this could only be the lair of a dragon, and a formidable one at that. But where was it? Declan's heart raced as he scanned the shadows, searching for any sign of the beast.

Declan cautiously advanced toward the distant piles of gold, each glimmering under the dim flickering light of the cavern. One mound lay just ten meters from the next threshold, beckoning him closer. Yet, what exactly was this challenge all about? Was it the allure of the gold, the threat of a dragon, or perhaps a combination of both?

He remembered the legends of dragons that fiercely protected their hoards of gold. The thought of taking even a tiny piece of their treasure sent a shiver down his spine; he knew it could rouse the beast, leading to a fate as grim as the scattered bones that lay strewn across the cavern floor. Yet, he also recognized that to confront the challenges of this realm, he would need to awaken whatever lived within it.

Declan stood directly behind the final hoard of treasure, just meters away from the next threshold. He reached in, carefully sifting through the gleaming riches, all the while observing the threshold beginning to fade. He quickly returned the treasure to its resting place as the barrier reappeared before him. In that instant, Declan understood that he needed to possess some of the treasure to pass through the threshold.



Declan now knew he needed to be smarter than the dragon. With that, he reached into the hoard and scooped out a handful of gold and stones.

A deep voice seemed to come from everywhere all at once. “Someone is trying to steel my hoard! Put it back or become my dinner.”

Declan yelled. “Show yourself creature, so I can see who I am talking to.” The deep voice replied “PUT MY HOARD BACK NOW!” Just then, out of the shadows, he could see a massive deep red dragon with scales that looked like red obsidian gleaming in the light. The massive dragon was moving towards him faster and faster. Declan realized the hoard in his hand was driving the dragon forward. He could run for the threshold but would not make it in time. He tossed the handful of gold and stones back into the hoard. The dragon stopped and looked at Declan with deadly intent and said, “Touch my hoard again and you will pay with your life!”



Declan replied “You would eat me then?” The red dragon leaned back as if disgusted with the notion that he would eat meat. “I am a vegetarian! How disgusting, eating meat. Oh gag me with a spoon!” Declan replied, “So you would not kill me?” The dragon turned back and looked at Declan with sharp dark eyes. “Oh I will kill you,..just not eat you!” Declan smiled and replied, “Well, thank goodness for that!” As he was backing up towards the threshold.

The dragon looked down and cracked a smile, “Where do you think you are going human? The way is blocked, you need to steal some of my hoard to cross the threshold. Without it you’re going nowhere!”

By now Declan was up against the threshold, he looked up with a confident smile and said, “You are absolutely right, I do need something from your hoard, and since you can sense gold, all I need is one small gemstone!

Declan put out his hand and revealed one 60 carat Ruby. The dragon reacted by drawing in air as he got ready to spray fire. Declan smiled and stepped backwards through the threshold, hearing the dragon screaming and releasing its firestorm. Declan looked around, he was back in the library, the dark leather book called Threshold was gone and replaced by a book on the life of a Monarch Butterfly. Declan wondered, was this all a dream? He looked at the palm of his hand, which revealed one bright red Ruby. He smiled and looked up just in time to see a young lady walking past with a red Ruby pendant. He smiled and whispered “It was real.”

Declan the Master Detective
Happy Halloween

