

The Raven Prince – chapter 1 - Corvidae

By Martin S. Beckley

The crow's death call startled the four friends as it hurtled towards them; its lifeless body hit the pile of dead animals at their feet. Olivia squealed and hid behind Raymond. He comforted her, but mainly to hide his own fear. Edward studied the window near the top of the keep; it appeared to have a faint greenish glow. 'I think it fell from that window,' he said. Nina ran around to the other side of the keep, eager to get a head start on Edward. 'Come on, it's this way,' she called, climbing the stairway. It took all four of them to force open the heavy wooden door. Edward barged forward, leading them along the gallery until they reached the stairwell in the corner. He turned, barring the way ahead, and faced Raymond, 'This time if we find anything, "Prince," we share the reward, OK?' Then with a huge grin, he dove up the stairwell, taking two steps at a time. Nina scrambled up after him.

During last year's holiday, Edward led them in an exploration of the caves at Red Rock Cove. Raymond had discovered a trove of jewels and gold coins – stolen from the King. As a reward, the King bestowed the honorary title of "Prince" upon Raymond. This year, Edward was investigating the rumours of a witch occupying Carcer castle.

Olivia and Raymond made their way slowly to the top. 'It's no good,' said Nina, 'the door's locked.' Edward stood in his thinking pose; arms folded and head bowed. Behind him the door swung silently open. A soothing voice filled their minds, inviting, coaxing, and enticing them into the darkened chamber. All four knew they should run away, but the incantation lured

them in. The door closed and locked quietly behind them. Flames sprouted in the fireplace illuminating the chamber with an eerie glow. A chilling carpet of lime green smoke hugged the floor and wafted around their ankles. A figure emerged from the shadows, her black dress and hair emphasising the creamy whiteness of her face that seemed to float in the air. 'I have waited a long time for your visit, Prince Raymond.' She said and conducted him towards the fireplace. She turned to face the others. Her eyes glowed green as she muttered 'Selidifai.' The smoke crept up their bodies and froze, leaving just their heads free. She turned to address Raymond again. 'My name is Corvidae, and I need your help.' Her eyes shone bright green and she chanted, 'Corvus Corax Trazmogrifai.' A chill spread through Raymond's body. He felt sick; his head became fuzzy, and black feathers grew all over his body. The skin around his mouth and nose stretched, hardened and became a beak. Olivia fainted. Edward and Nina watched in horror, as Raymond became a raven. Corvidae laughed, 'Now my Prince, do as I say and I will restore you. Fail me and remain a raven forever,'

