

Installment nine: Yellow: Yearn to Learn (about ourselves, others, and the mystery)
We affirm and promote acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations.

Our story thus far... An ordinary kitchen boy name Jared has become the somewhat unlikely hero foreseen in an ancient prophecy entitled The Quest of the Rainbow Dragons. Along with his best friend, Delia, and a funny, furry little guide named Lou, he has successfully won the blessing of the Great Red Dragon, Krasnova. His encounter with the Amber Dragon, Yantarov, however, was a mixed bag. While he survived, the dragon is withholding his blessing and watching over Jared to see whether or not he heeds the demands of justice in his further adventures.

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When Jared told Lou and Delia about his encounter with Yantarov, he expected them to be disappointed in him. They weren't. Delia said simply, "Wow. What a scary experience. I don't think anyone could have passed that test, Jared! You should feel lucky that you came through alive."

"Justice's demands are huge, Yantarov's known to be a real stickler, and honestly, Jared, I think this is the best we could have hoped for. What did you learn from your experience, though?" asked Lou.

"I learned that justice isn't just about what happens in the court, with judges and lawyers. It's about the choices we make in our life, the way we treat people, stuff like that. Justice demands that we speak up even when it's hard, and even when it may be dangerous."

"Good. Good," said Lou, stroking the hair on his belly absent mindedly. "Now, I asked you that question for two reasons. First of all, you need to keep Yantarov's charge in mind as we go forward, and secondly, the next dragon we must meet is all about learning. Over the next part of this quest, you need to ask yourself that question... "What did you learn"... as often as possible. So! Tell me what the prophecy says next."

Jared closed his eyes and recited, "Far across the sea, in the lost library of Atlantis, the yellow dragon waits, hungry and powerful. Enter empty handed, but bearing the perfect gift. Ask the question that sets her heart free. She shall feast until she is sated. Then shall ye conquer the great dragon Zheltizna."

"Very good!" said Lou. "You've got a great memory, kiddo. So...where's the nearest port?"

"Lou," chimed in Delia, "It's almost winter time. It'll be tough to find a ship captain willing to start a long journey now."

"Very true," answered Lou thoughtfully.

“Also, what are we going to pay the captain with? We didn’t bring enough money to finance a long journey,” added Delia. “Plus, how are we supposed to get to Atlantis? It’s a mythical kingdom, said to have fallen off the edge of the earth more than a thousand years ago!”

“Hold on just a sec,” said Lou. Then he vanished. Jared and Delia just stood there, their mouths wide open.

A minute later, Lou popped back into view. “So, here’s the deal. You’re a smart kid, Delia. We have to head South. I have a friend in Alexandria. He’ll probably take us at least part of the way for free, though we might have to help out on board his ship. Obviously, he’ll have to stop a ways before we get to the edge of the earth. A ship that gets pulled over makes a terrible mess...and then there’s all those people to get back. So we’ll have him drop us off on some islands down near the edge...”

While Lou was talking, he was gathering their things and getting ready to leave. Finally he looked at the two of them. They looked very confused. Lou said, “Close your mouths before you swallow a fly or something! We’ve got to get moving, and moving fast. It’s warmer in the South but not THAT warm.”

They traveled as they had traveled before; they walked quite a bit, stopped to stay with Lou’s many friends when possible, and camped when it wasn’t. They were often wet and chilly, sometimes altogether miserable, but they kept on going. They entertained each other by telling stories, sometimes true stories from their lives, and sometimes fanciful stories they made up.

When they arrived in Alexandria, they headed straight for the waterfront. Lou made a few inquiries and discovered that his friend, Captain Petroklus, was unfortunately already away at sea. “Well,” harumphed Lou, “That puts us in a fine pickle!”

Delia said, “If we have to wait a while, can we explore the city a bit? I’d love to see the great library...”

“Delia, my girl,” said Lou, snapping his fingers excitedly, “You’re a genius! That’s exactly what we need to do. Let’s go to the library. We’re sure to find something that’ll please Zheltizna there!”

“What do you mean?” asked Jared.

“Isn’t it obvious?” answered Lou. “The Yellow Dragon lives in a library. She’s addicted to books, stories, and facts. Can’t get enough. The library in Atlantis is, admittedly, about ten times the size of the library here in Alexandria, but surely, they must have something out of the ordinary here that we can read or learn or even borrow to take with us to Zheltizna.”

“We can’t take anything,” said Delia. “Remember? Empty hands...”

“You’re right again,” crowed Lou. “Delia, you are a bright little thing. Zheltizna’s going to love you.”

They dropped off their things at another of Lou’s friends’ houses (where they would stay while waiting for Captain Petroklus to return), and after a quick meal and a bit of a wash, they headed off to the Great Library of Alexandria.

At the entrance, and very tall, impressive gentleman looked down his very long, very large nose and said (in a voice that sounded quite stuck-up), “This is a place for scholars, not a playground for children and...animals.”

Lou bristled, Jared huffed and puffed, but yet again, Delia came up with the right answer. “Oh, yes, sir, we know where we are, and that it’s quite presumptuous of us to ask for entry. But we’re on a great quest, and we need the help of the scholars within to succeed. Are you, perhaps, a great scholar yourself?”

The tall, impressive gentleman snorted through that long, large nose and said, “I am the greatest scholar of all, but I have no time to waste on foolish quests of children and beasts. Polly?” he called out.

A discombobulated young woman came running at his imperious command, with scrolls haphazardly piled in her arms, at least one precariously sliding toward the floor.

“Yes, sir?”

“Can you help these...people? Make sure they don’t dirty or damage the scrolls, and most of all, keep them quiet and out of the way so that they don’t disturb OUR important work.”

“Of course, sir,” answered Polly. She scuttled away, and Jared, Lou, and Delia trailed after her. She dropped her armful of scrolls onto a table and gave them a big smile. “What can I do for you?” she asked.

Jared looked at Lou. Lou looked at Jared. Delia looked at Lou, then at Jared, and then she shook her head. “Oh, honestly, you two. Do you think you could show us everything you’ve got on dragons, prophecies, and the land of Atlantis? If you have any stories that mention the Mirror of Justice, they might be helpful, too, and, um, let me think. Oh! Maps...of the waters south of here.”

“Wow!” said Polly. “That’s a lot. How long do you have?”

“A couple of weeks,” answered Delia, smiling. “But we’re fast readers. Can you help us?”

“Of course,” said Polly, and wandered off, muttering to herself. “The journals of the explorer Marco Polo, to start, of course. We’ve got an intriguing volume on dragon behavior from a scholar up north...let’s see. Let’s see.”

They followed her through the high stacks of books and scrolls, each of them gathering an armful. Finally, she turned to them and said cheerfully, “That do for a bit, then?”

“Absolutely,” smiled Delia. “Thank you, Polly! You’re a real treasure.”

“Oh!” said Polly. “You’re welcome! What nice manners you have. So many of these scholars barely give me the time of day.”

No sooner had she spoken then they heard someone booming out Polly’s name. She scampered off, and Lou, Delia, and Jared set to work. Day in and day out, they studied, and discussed, and planned for the next leg of their journey. Many times, they ran into obscure references, and Polly was able to track down rare, dusty scrolls in answer to their questions.

Finally, the word came that Captain Petroklus’ ship had arrived in the harbor. After packing their things, the three travelers were about to head for the boat when Delia said, “Oh! We can’t leave without saying goodbye to Polly!”

They detoured by the great library, and imagine their surprise when they saw Polly on the steps, crying as if her world had come to an end. “What’s the matter?” cried Delia, running to the young woman she now considered a friend.

“I’ve just been fired from my job,” said Polly. “I’ve been the clerk for Jedidiah, the scholar you met on your first day, for ten years. I misplaced a few scrolls this week, though, and he can’t tolerate mistakes, so he hired a new clerk, muttering the whole time about the inconvenience of needing to train someone new. Meanwhile, I’ve got no place to go! I love those books. They’re like my children! What will I do without them?”

“You’ll come with us,” said Delia decisively, ignoring Jared, who stood behind Polly, shaking his head wildly. “We’re going on a dangerous journey, but at the end is a library ten times the size of this one. I bet you’d be welcome, there.”

“Delia,” Jared started, but Lou interrupted. “That’s a fine idea,” he said. “We’d be honored to have such a wonderful scholar accompany us on our journey.”

“Oh,” said Polly. “I’m not a scholar. Just a lowly clerk. Or at least, I was a clerk...” Her tears started flowing again.

“You’re not a lowly anything,” Delia interjected staunchly. “You knew that library better than anyone! Without you, Jedidiah is going to have to find his own books, and I bet he’ll be begging you to come back before the end of the day.”

Polly shook her head. “Not at all. You see, he taught me everything I know. He’s not very kind or polite, it’s true, but he knows this library like the back of his hand. He’s more than capable of training someone new. I just wish I’d been more careful.”

“Everyone makes mistakes,” said Delia. Then she continued, “Surely, you’d enjoy a little fresh air and adventure? The chance to explore a new library? The chance to meet a dragon?”

“I’m not sure,” said Polly. “Dragons eat people, don’t they?”

“Actually, they much prefer fish,” Jared tossed in.

“Please come with us!” Delia pleaded.

“Well, I suppose,” said Polly. “You say the library where you’re headed is ten times as big as this one?”

With that, the three travelers became four, and after a quick stop at Polly’s house so that she could say goodbye to her parents and pack her things, they boarded Captain Petroklus’s huge ship, “The Aegian Maiden” and set sail for unknown waters, wondering what kind of adventure awaited them in the mysterious land of Atlantis, beyond the end of the world.

Dragon Task: Visit a library and find a book you’ve never read before.