

The time traveler, Andrew Coppersmith returns to Medieval England and discovers nothing is at all what he expected.

**The Rogue Knight From Wyre Forest:
A Sequel to A Knight's Quest**

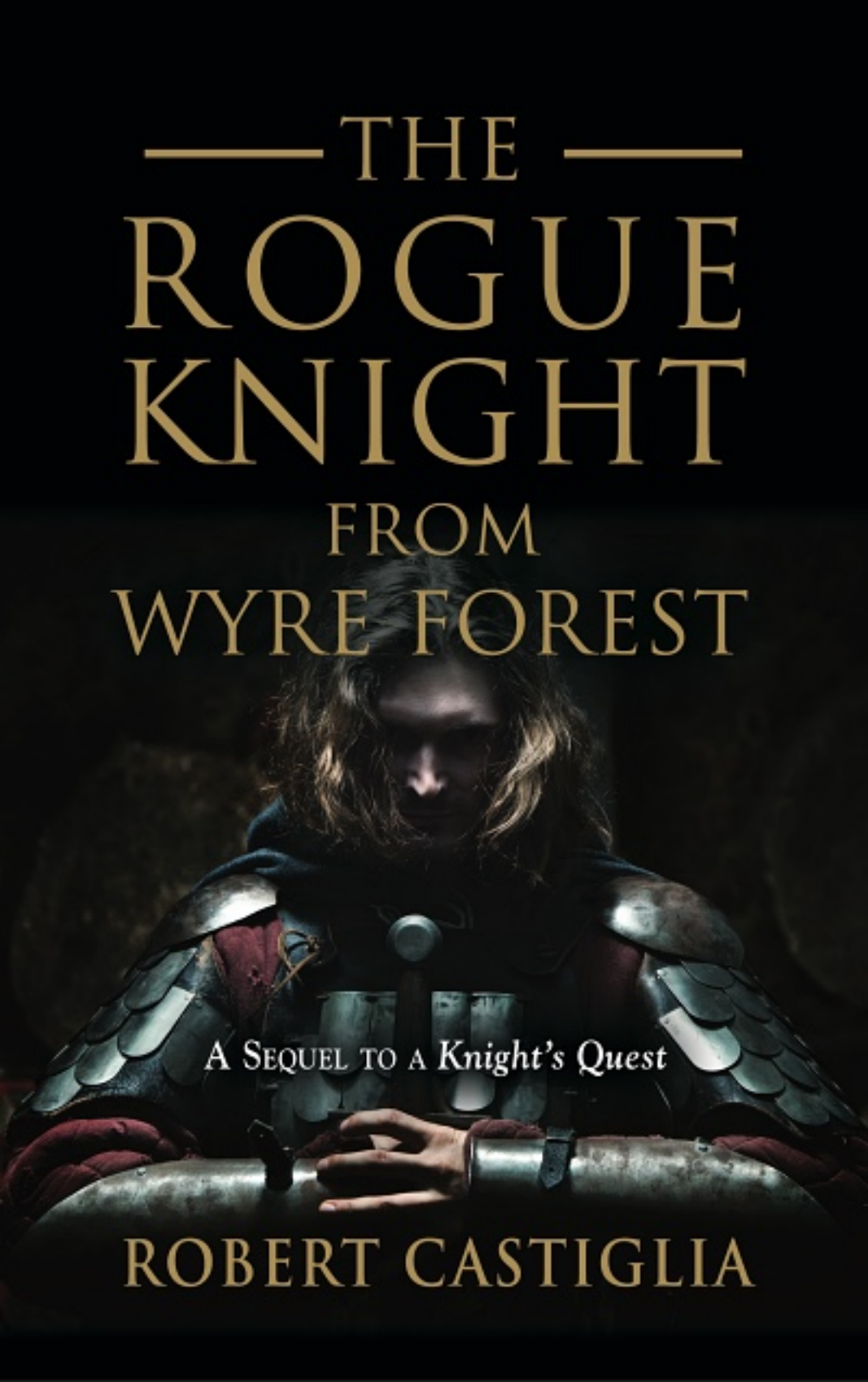
By Robert Castiglia

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— THE —
ROGUE
KNIGHT
FROM
WYRE FOREST

A knight with long, dark hair is shown from the chest up, wearing dark, scale-like armor. He is looking down intently at the hilt of a sword, which is resting on a surface in front of him. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the textures of the armor and the knight's features.

A SEQUEL TO *A Knight's Quest*

ROBERT CASTIGLIA

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Though this is a work of fiction, some of the events and characters in the book were real, though many years dead. Historical events and characters have been altered to dramatize the plot. Any other characters or events depicted in this novel are fictitious, and any resemblance to actual individuals is entirely coincidental.

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CHAPTER I

Andrew Coppersmith wore a chainmail top under a light armor breastplate with an open-face steel helmet for protection. With his free hand, the freshman college student poked his straw-colored bangs back into his helmet; his other hand held a wooden broadsword. No more than a foot from Andy was Jose Diego Marques the school's fencing champion. It was the last event of the Oxford, Ohio Annual Spring Renaissance Festival.

After Andy had recovered from his yearlong coma, he had returned to college to finish his first year. It had been six months, and he was at the fair because his roommate, Doug Hartford, convinced him he needed a break from his studies. So, to appease his friend, Andy participated in the same events he did when he attended the festival during his senior year of high school. However, unlike then, and to his roommate's astonishment, Andy managed to win every event and was close to winning this final contest.

The freshman and the fencing champion stood side-by-side as they raised their swords to salute the judges and the crowd. When they turned to face each other, Andy noticed that at six-foot he was almost a head taller than his Argentinean opponent.

The two contestants began their match by taking a couple steps back and bowing. After which, they proceeded to circle each other while they both held their blunt swords in the on-guard position.

Jose brushed back a strand of black hair as his dark-brown eyes flashed at his adversary from under heavy brows. He sneered at the freshman, “You know you don’t stand a chance against me. I’ve been the NCAA National Fencing Champion for the past three years.”

Andy’s blue eyes twinkled when he smiled in return. “Well, I’ve managed to make it this far in the tournament. I may not be a national champion, but this sword sure seems to fit my hand.”

The Latin man’s face darkened as he charged at his foe. Andy instantly parried the blow and went on the defensive. The freshman student may have been new to the sport, but he was extremely adept. As quickly as Jose would strike, Andy’s sword was there to block. The two acted as knights, attacking and countering. They fought back and forth across the field in an unending echo of wood-on-wood, slashing and stabbing relentlessly with neither willing to give an inch.

The spectators cheered and coaxed their favorite combatant. Soon several of the students were passing money back and forth, as they made bets on who would win. Around and around the field the two advisories went. Each determined to outdo the other. The swords were mere blurs in front of the swordsmen as they fought.

Suddenly, Andy found an opening and his weapon struck Jose’s steel cuirass, splinters flying as the wooden blade creased the thin armored plating.

The freshman stepped back and beamed at his opponent. “Oh sorry — my bad — I hope that armor’s insured.”

“Insured or not, when I’m done with you there won’t be enough left of your armor to file a claim,” the senior hissed.

Jose intensified his efforts. He attacked Andy with a rage that forced the underclassman backward toward the stands. When Andy reached the barriers at the field’s perimeter, he lost his footing, knocked over a sawhorse-blockade, and fell onto the grassy ground. Seizing the advantage, the national champion raised his sword with both hands to execute the winning blow.

Andy was far too nimble for the senior. He rolled flat onto his back and kicked his opponent in the groin, causing Jose to drop his weapon and bend over in pain. Andy quickly rolled away from the injured man and sprung to his feet. While the Argentinean was still stooped over, Andy raised his sword and struck the senior on the helmet with the broadside of his weapon. The NCAA National Fencing Champion's legs folded beneath him, and he collapsed to the ground dazed.

Andy lowered his weapon to his side and removed his helmet. "Do you surrender?"

"Yeah, I've had enough — touché," Jose said between clenched teeth.

The freshman reached down and helped the Argentinean to his feet. Andy, with his sword in one hand and Jose's hand in the other, raised his arms in victory as the crowd went wild — cheering, whistling, and applauding the two contestants.

As elated as he should have been, Andy could only force a smile. He could not get over the feeling of *déjà vu* as he stood before the crowd. He was sure he had done this before — in another place and during another time.

He shook it off. Doug would insist that it was memories from the dream he had had while in a coma from his near fatal car crash.

Andy did not remember being in any accident. The last thing he remembered was going to the laboratory of his quantum physics professor, Dr. Davis, and trying the professor's infernal machine.

It had looked like an elevator car surrounded by massive electromagnetic coils that was controlled by a large supercomputer. Andy had been a video game fanatic and thought the professor had created a simulator called the *Time Traveler's Program*. However, it was more.

Andy remembered getting into the pod and hearing the device activate; there was a bright flash of light and he had passed out.

When he awoke, he found himself in the district of Worcestershire, England in the year 1105 A.D. There, he was befriended by a Sergeant John the Red, a young soldier in the army

of Lord Rowan, the Earl of Worcester. Andy saw this mishap as an opportunity to fulfill his childhood fantasy of becoming a knight. Sergeant John, and another friend of Andy's, Darrick the Black persuaded him into enlisting in the earl's army.

During the ensuing months, Andy was required to learn how to do battle with the various medieval tools of warfare. Though the gamer was familiar with these ancient weapons from his cyber worlds, he found operating the real things quite different from the virtual ones and he soon discovered he was woefully unprepared. All the same, after many cuts and burses, and a lot of perseverance, he was able to overcome these obstacles.

As soon as Andy became a soldier in the earl's regiment, his life was filled with spies, secret schemes, damsels in distress, and fierce battles. Furthermore, the college student became entangled in a struggle between King Henry I of England and the King's oldest brother, Duke Robert Curthose of Normandy. Andy was instrumental in saving King Henry's life and stopping Duke Robert from seizing the crown of England. Throughout his quest, Andy used his knowledge from playing videogames to help him get through his many escapades.

In addition to these adventures, Andy fell in love with Lady Helen, Lord Rowan's beautiful young cousin. After a brief courtship, he proposed to Helen, but before his wedding with the girl of his dreams, he was brought back to the present where he was told the entire experience was only a coma-induced dream.

Andy shook the thoughts from his head as he walked to the bleachers. He looked up and saw his big friend lumbering onto the field to meet him. Though Andy and Doug were about the same height, his friend outweighed him by a good sixty pounds.

"Dude — I remember you taking fencing classing when we went to summer camp, but I don't remember you ever being that good. Where did you learn to fight like that?"

Andy's lips formed a thin line. "When I was at Worcester."

"Worcester? Hey man, we've already been over this. That was a coma dream. Your imagination."

“Well then, how do you explain my newfound skill at sword fighting, or archery for that matter? I not only out shot everyone else yesterday, but I was the only one who could hit a target at a hundred yards.”

Doug stared at Andy through his dark-brown bangs. “I can’t, but if you’ll remember, we couldn’t find any evidence of there ever being a Lord Rowan or a Lady Helen either.”

“No. But, there is a Worcestershire and a Herefordshire. And there was a King Henry I and Duke Robert Curthose of Normandy.”

Doug shook his head. “Remember what Dr. Kendrick said? A lot of what you believe happened could be a mixture of your imagination and what you’ve learned from your history classes.”

Dr. Kendrick was the physician that treated Andy after he awoke from his coma. When Andy told the doctor his story, the physician explained to him that many coma patients, after they recovered, recalled vivid dreams they had while they were unconscious. Often these dreams were a blend of reality and make-believe events.

Andy wasn’t convinced.

After he’d been released from the hospital, Andy returned to school. Since he had been absent for so long, he had to start over. Except unlike the previous year, Andy was more serious about his studies.

Before his accident he would stay up night-after-night, playing games, often at the expense of his studies. Now games didn’t hold the same excitement. According to Doug, Andy was a completely different person.

“You seem much older — more serious and mature,” Andy’s friend would say.

He didn’t feel any more mature; he just had different priorities. He wanted to learn as much as he could, graduate from college, and start a family. Most importantly, he wanted to return to Worcester Castle --to the life-- and love, he had left behind.

Yet, that wasn’t possible.

Or was it?

No matter how much his friend tried to convince him of the contrary, Andy was positive he had been transported back in time to the Middle Ages, and he was the Earl of Worcester. If he could only prove it.

Doug shook his friend's shoulder. "Hey dude, where'd you go?"

Andy smiled weakly. "I'm sorry bro, I was just thinking."

"Well, what do you say we get out of these silly tights? They're beginning to cramp my style. And then," Doug's hazel eyes flashed, "let's go get something to eat. Watching you do all that fighting has made me hungry."

"You're always hungry. Come on you big lug, I'll buy," Andy said chuckling.

###

"I've been thinking," Doug said while chewing on a mouth full of pepperoni pizza.

Andy raised an eyebrow as he looked at his big friend. "That must be a new experience for you."

"No, I'm serious. There're too many things that don't add up."

"Such as?"

"Well, for one, that button from your backpack I found in Professor Davis's laboratory after the accident. I mean, how did it get there? You left your book bag in our room before you went to see the professor that afternoon. And whose body was that in the morgue if it wasn't yours? And the most puzzling of all, is that scar on your arm. It couldn't have been from the crash; it looks too fresh to be a year old."

On the day Andy recovered from his coma, Doug had gone to visit him. He had explained to Andy the events that took place following the accident. Doug described how a Detective Carter had called him the morning after Andy went to the lab and had him come to the police station to identify Andy's body. However, the body was so severely burnt he wasn't sure it was Andy. Doug had

identified him anyway, and when Professor Davis took him to the lab, there was no metal container sprouting coils, only a supercomputer and several virtual-reality workstations. Everything seemed plausible to Doug, until he saw that scar on his friend's arm. The scar Andy said he received when he fought Sir Lyman at the battle of Tinchebray in Normandy.

Andy grinned at his friend. "You're preaching to the choir."

Doug took another bite of his pizza and nodded. Upon finishing his first piece, he continued, "What if Professor Davis really did build a time machine? Then keeping it secret, would be particularly important to the government — wouldn't it? You know national security and all that stuff."

"Yeah, one would think so."

"Well," Doug took a drink of soda before working on his second piece of pizza. "I would think, if you did go to the professor's lab that night, and there was a time machine in there, and you did try to use it, wouldn't they try to hide the evidence?"

"You're starting to sound like me."

"What if Professor Davis had the machine moved from the laboratory and replaced it with those virtual-reality terminals I saw. Then wouldn't the real machine still exist somewhere else?"

"Yeah, I thought of that too. But, how would we find it?" asked Andy.

"I don't know. You'd think the professor would still have to work on it. He'd have to have access to it — wherever it is. We could find out where he goes on the days he's not on campus. Maybe that would give us a clue."

"And how do you suggest we do that?"

Doug shook his head while taking a bite of his third piece of pizza. He chewed and swallowed it down quickly. "Well, here's my idea."

###

Andy hung up his bookbag as he entered the room and threw his jacket on the bed. Sitting at the desk, Doug was feverishly

typing on his computer keyboard. Since their discussion at the pizza parlor a couple days ago, the two friends spent hours searching the school's websites looking for any clues as to where Professor Davis's machine might be.

Andy leaned over his roommate's shoulder and peered at the screen. "Have you found anything yet?"

"Yup — I think so. There seems to be a pattern in the use of the school's cars. I hacked into the college garage's service page and found their registration records. Whenever a member of the facility uses one of the school's vehicles, the mileage is logged."

"So?"

"I'm getting there. It seems our Professor Davis, P-H-D, has been repeatedly using a college car once every two weeks for over a year. On each trip he travels a total distance of approximately eleven hundred and forty miles — give or take a few."

Andy sighed. "That could be anywhere."

"Yeah, that's what I thought. Then I realized, wherever the professor went, he had to come back. Therefore, I divided the mileage in half and shrunk the radius to five hundred and twenty miles. After doing a map search, I narrowed down the possible locations to a dozen. From those, I did another search for government sites. And what do you think I found?"

"You got me, what?"

"Ithaca — Ithaca, New York. It seems there's an old nuclear weapons plant just north of the city on the shore of Cayuga Lake about twenty miles from town. The plant was closed fifteen years ago, but recently it was reopened as a research facility — the *Ithaca Research Center* to be exact. I'd bet my last dollar that that's where Professor Davis's machine is located."

"Can you get any satellite pictures of the place?"

Doug brought up an image of the complex on the monitor while Andy leaned closer to get a better look. "Can you zoom in on the parking lot?"

Andy's friend grinned as he enlarged the image on the screen.

“There! Doesn’t that look like one of the college cars?” Andy pointed to a black Ford sedan parked near the entrance to the main building.

“Yeah.” Doug squinted as he bent forward. “And there appears to be a marker in front of the parking space. Give me a moment...”

Doug mumbled to himself as he zoomed in on the photo and waited for the image to resolve. The sign read: Reserved for Dr. Anthony Davis, PhD.

Andy slapped his friend on the back. “I’ll be damned! You did it! That’s the place. That’s where he’s keeping that devil of a contraption.”

“Well, what now?”

Andy’s smile broadened. “Have you checked to see if they have a website?”

“No. I just discovered the location when you walked in, but I doubt there’ll be one. I mean, why would a classified government facility have a website?”

“Just try and see.”

Doug typed a few more commands into the computer and turned to his friend grinning from ear to ear. “Not only do they have a website, but you can also make reservations for a guided tour. It seems visitors are welcome. The center isn’t even classified.”

“Well, maybe not all of it. Just the same, I’m willing to bet the professor’s machine is inside that complex. I think we should pay them a visit. Don’t you?”

Doug shook the bangs out of his eyes and glared at his roommate. “That coma really has made you goofy. That’s a government site. Though it’s not high security, I’m sure there are still areas that are off limits. You can’t just walk up to the gates and say, ‘let me in I want to see Professor Davis’s time machine.’ They’d lock you up before you even got to within a hundred feet of the thing.”

“I know that. I’m not stupid!” Andy mischievously grinned at his friend. “However, I do have a plan.”

CHAPTER II

“Where did you find this car?” Andy asked his big friend.

Doug gave Andy a cheesy grin as his stepped out of a nineteen-sixty-six metallic navy-blue Chevy Impala Super Sport. “It’s my dad’s. He bought it at a consignment sale from the estate of some dead farmer. It seems the old geezer kept it under a tarp in one of his barns. When dad found the old beast, it only had sixty thousand miles on the odometer. Other than a lot of dust and a few mice droppings, it was in excellent condition. So, he and I spent all last year fixing it up. We rebuilt the engine and detailed the body and interior. You like it?”

“Yeah, it’s cool. But, why this?”

Doug looked at his friend as if he had just crawled out from under a rock. “Duh! It can’t be tracked. No computer or GPS. We’ll be completely off the grid. You couldn’t ask for better mode of transportation.”

Remembering the horses he rode when he was at Worcester, Andy gave his friend a patronizing smile. “Well, as a matter of fact, I do know of something better, but we don’t have any of those. So, I guess this’ll have to do.”

The two young men packed their duffle bags and camping gear in the trunk and climbed into the front seats. Once they were both strapped in, Doug started the car, and the three-ninety-six cubic inch engine rumbled to life. He pressed the clutch pedal to the floor and shifted the transmission into first. The rear tires gave a brief

squeal as the young Hartford let out the clutch and drove away from the dorm.

Andy raised his eyebrows as his friend shifted the Chevy into second gear. “Wow, a four-speed manual transmission. This thing really is an antique.”

“That ain’t the half of it,” Doug said with a grin. “Under the hood is a four-barrel carburetor instead of a fuel injection system, and the ignition system is mechanical instead of electronic. You could zap this puppy with a gazillion volts of electromagnetic energy and it would still run. I’d like to see the County Mounties try to stop this thing with one of their EMP devices. Oh, and by the way, did you leave your cell phone back in our room?”

“Yeah, we’ll have to stop by a convenience store and pick up a couple disposable ones.”

“There’s a small general store about twenty miles north of here. The old couple that runs the place is very technophobic. Their cash register is one of those antiques with a crank on the side and there are no surveillance cameras to be found. The old man only takes cash, ’cause he doesn’t believe in ‘*damn plastic money.*’ In fact, the only reason they even stock cell phones are their grandchildren convinced them to add a few to their inventory.”

Andy shook his head. “Where do you find these places?”

“Oh, my parents. They like to stop by little mom-and-pop stores when they are out antiquing. Dad says most of the best auctions are posted on country store bulletin boards. He’s on a first name basis with the owners of every two-pump establishment within a hundred mile of here.”

As soon as they were out of town, Doug turned off the interstate and drove north on a narrow two-lane county road. Thirty minutes later, the Chevy pulled into the gravel driveway of Jim and Betsy’s General Store. The store was an old box style wood frame structure with a long veranda that went completely across the front. On either side of the double-door entrance were two large picture windows. One displayed various wares, from bags of feed grain to farming utensils, while the other revealed the

inside of the building, filled with rows of shelves containing dry goods and hardware. Though it was evident the building was old, it was well maintained. The clapboard siding was freshly painted in white, while the trim and porch railings were a dark red.

Sitting in one of the rocking chairs situated next to the entrance was an old scarecrow of a man with white hair sticking out of a bright yellow ball cap advertising Orkin feed. His pale brown eyes were nested under a deeply wrinkled forehead with bushy white brows. They were accented by a long beard that hung halfway down the front of his bib overalls.

As soon as Jim saw the Sixty-six Impala turn into the drive, he unfolded his lean frame from the rocker, and walked over to a seldom-used pump that had Ethyl printed across a large globe sitting on top. When the car came to a stop and Doug got out of the driver's side, the old man's white beard parted to reveal even whiter teeth.

Just as Doug began pumping gas into his dad's car, Jim said in a voice that was hard of hearing, "Douglas Hartford, what in God's name brings you out to these parts?"

The young Hartford grinned in return. "Hey, Mr. Jefferson, how's the missus?"

"Still as mean as ever." The old man pointed a bony finger toward the store. "She's inside tending the register. Why don't you go on in while I finish fillin' your tank?"

Doug turned to Andy. "Come on, I'll introduce you to Miss Betsy."

The two college students left Jim to tend to the car while they sauntered toward the entrance. A small bell tinkled when Doug opened the door, and they both stepped into the store. The first thing Andy noticed was the familiar smells of fresh spices, aged wood, and oiled leather. The aromas reminded him of John the Red and Mary's home back in Worcester, England. Andy sighed while he surveyed the shop's interior for at that moment, he had a pang of homesickness.

The Rogue Knight From Wyre Forest

Next to the display window and in front of one wall, was a long counter. The entire structure ran almost half the length of the store. At the window's end of the counter was an antique brass cash register, just as Doug described. On the other end was a butcher's cooler with a wide variety of cold meats and cheeses neatly arranged under its glass front. Behind the counter were floor to ceiling shelves containing food goods and glass canisters filled with an extensive assortment of spices, dried beans, and penny candies. Next to the cash register sitting on a wooden barstool was a plump elderly woman wearing a ruffled calico apron that covered a plain blue frock. Her salt and pepper hair was tied back into a ponytail and perched on the end of her nose was a pair of half-moon glasses. Upon hearing the doorbell ring, she put down the crossword puzzle that had her attention and peered up over her half-moons at the entrance.

A grin grew on her ruby-red lips when she saw the two boys enter the store. "Why Douglas Hartford, it's been a coon's age since I saw you last. How're your parents? Haven't seen much of them lately either. And who is this handsome young man you're with?"

"Miss Betsy, I like you to meet my friend and roommate Andrew Coppersmith. Andy, this is Miss Betsy the proprietor of this fine establishment."

Betsy smirked as she eyed the young man from head to foot over the top rim of her glasses.

In response, Andy's cheeks colored while he bowed his head. "Nice to meet you, Mrs. Jefferson."

"Oh please, call me Betsy."

The grandmotherly woman turned back to Doug. "What brings me the good fortune of having two fine looking young men in my store?"

"We're on a road trip. Andy and I thought we'd take the scenic route instead of the interstates," Doug replied.

"Where're you off to?"

“We thought we’d go to the Adirondacks for a few days. Might even do some fishing,” Andy said.

“Well, the trout are in season, but you won’t catch much else.”

Doug nodded. “I know. Oh, by the way, do you by chance still stock those prepaid cell phones? We accidentally left ours back at school.”

Betsy raised an eyebrow. “It’s not like you young folk to leave your gadgets behind. I think my granddaughter’s phone is permanently attached to her hands. Are you in some kind of trouble?”

Before Doug could reply, the bell over the door rang, and Jim entered the store rubbing his hands clean with a well-worn red grease rag. “She’s all filled up. I checked the oil and radiator. You might want to change the water hoses sometime soon they seem a little weak. That’ll be sixty-eight dollars. Sorry ’bout the cost — I just can’t believe gas is so damn high.”

The Hartford boy halfheartedly smiled at the old man. “It’s okay. That’s the price one has to pay when you drive a classic.”

Doug turned his attention back to Mrs. Jefferson. “No, we’re not in trouble — at least not yet. But I would appreciate it, if someone were to ask, you would tell them you haven’t seen us.”

Betsy glared at the two boys. “Douglas Hartford, don’t tell me you took your daddy’s car without his permission.”

Andy studied the floor, while Doug meekly smiled. “Mine is in the shop, and we needed wheels. Besides, Dad doesn’t mind.”

“Well, I won’t lie for you, but the Adirondacks do cover a lot of territory. If I don’t know exactly where you’re going, I sure can’t tell someone. Now can I?”

“Thanks, Miss Betsy. What do we owe you for the gas and phones?”

Betsy looked at her husband who nodded in return. “Six-eight for the gas and the cell phones are on us. However, you two have to promise you’ll stay out of trouble — none of them wild parties and such. You hear?”

“Yes ma’am,” the boys said in unison.

“Now let me fix you both a couple sandwiches, while you get a soda out of the cooler in back. I won’t have you two traveling on empty stomachs.”

Fifteen minutes later, the two college students were driving east toward the Ohio-Pennsylvania border eating corn beef and cheese sandwiches along with potato chips while drinking from ice-cold glass bottles of Mountain Dew.

###

Professor Davis waited a moment after he entered the dark room. The only light in the closet-size compartment came from three computer screens mounted along the back wall. Once the professor’s eyes adjusted to the dim light, he saw the silhouette of Justin, an FBI cyberagent sitting at the workstation in front of the monitors. The federal agent was hunched over a keyboard pecking in commands while a small network of computers sifted through several hundred files of data.

Justin was a young man in his mid-twenties with shaggy black hair and a youthful appearance that made him look several years younger than his actual age. On the young agent’s face was a pair of black-framed designer glasses that covered ice-blue eyes. He was wearing faded blue jeans and a navy-blue tee shirt with the moniker of some rock group printed across the front. Despite his appearance, Justin was one of the best computer techs in the agency. He could worm his way into any internet site on the internet and never leave a trace of his presence.

The professor walked up to the young agent and tapped him on the shoulder. “Anything new?”

The lenses on Justin’s spectacles flashed when he turned to address the individual who interrupted him. “Oh, Dr. Davis, I didn’t hear you come in. Yeah, it looks like our marks have found us.”

“You mean they discovered this location?”

“Bingo — and it didn’t take them as long as I thought it would either. Once they were able to hack into the college motor pool’s

webpage, it was a simple matter of a few more searches and deductions. In fact, they've made reservations for one of our tours."

The professor furrowed his brow. "Oh really — when?"

"A couple days from now. The thing that puzzles me is that at present they are not traveling here. According to their cars' GPS locators, neither vehicle has left the dormitory parking lot for the past several days."

The crease on the professor's forehead deepened. "Maybe they went by some other mode of transportation."

"I checked all the plane, train, and bus transactions for the past few weeks. No one using their name or fitting their description has purchased a ticket. I even checked the locations of their various friends' cars, and all those are accounted for. The best I can tell, the marks are still at school, sitting on their hands."

"Contact the agency and have them send in a couple men to check on our wayward students. Let's see if we can discover what those two are up to." The professor stopped as he opened the door and spoke over his shoulder, "Oh — and Justin — good work."

CHAPTER III

A couple hours after Andy and Doug left the Jefferson's, they were nearing the Pennsylvanian border winding their way down a narrow gravel back road. Andy was behind the wheel, while Doug sat in the passenger seat studying a road map.

Doug scratched his head as he squinted at the symbols and squiggly lines. "If I read this thing right, there should be a blacktop just over that ridge. How in the world did our grandparents get anywhere without GPS? This map is next to impossible to understand."

Andy laughed at his friend's frustration. "It's really not that difficult. You should try reading one from the Twelfth Century. Now that's a challenge."

Suddenly steam began rolling out from under the hood splattering the windshield with droplets of water. "Oh-oh, I think we may have a problem. I don't believe all this smoke is a good thing."

Soon after, a red warning light on the dashboard came on, and Andy slowed the car to a crawl. He turned the vehicle into a drive that led to one of the cornfields along the road.

Doug threw the map in the back seat and frowned at the fog in front of the windshield. "Oh shoot! Shut it off. Let's see what's wrong."

As soon as Doug opened the hood, a large cloud billowed out from the engine compartment. He fanned away the steam with one

hand as he tried to examine the motor. When enough of the vapors dissipated so he could see, he noticed steaming water seeping down the front of the engine block.

“Just what I was afraid of — busted water pump. We’ll have to replace it before we can go any further.”

“How far is the nearest town?”

Doug sighed. “Too far. We’ll never make it with a broken pump.”

“We passed a farmhouse about a half-mile ago. Let’s go there and see if we can get some help?”

Hartford nodded. “Good idea. A lot of farmers do their own repairs; maybe this one will have a set of tools we can use. Besides, we can’t move the car until the engine has cooled.”

Ten minutes later, the two college students were walking up a driveway that led to a large two-story white farmhouse with a double-decker porch in front. Next to the house a few feet in front of a side door was an old hand-cranked water pump mounted on a four-foot square concrete slab. The driveway flowed into a graveled yard to the right of the house and at the end of the lot was a large red barn. In front of the barn was a wooden horse-drawn buckboard wagon, like the ones Andy had seen in old western movies. In one of the fields that ran next to the driveway were a half-dozen Morgan horses and in another pasture were a couple dozen Jersey cows.

As the boys approached the house, a couple of black and white border collies came barking toward them. Doug’s eyes bulged at the sight of the dogs, and he immediately froze in mid-stride.

Andy simply stood still and sniggered at his friend. “Don’t panic, and they won’t bite.”

Doug swallowed his heart back down his throat. “Don’t worry, I couldn’t move even if I wanted to.”

As the dogs came closer, Andy squatted down on his heels, stuck out a hand, and coaxed the two canines to him. “Come on boys. Come here. I won’t hurt you.”

Both dogs immediately stopped their barking and came trotting up to the extended hand. They began licking Andy's right hand while he patted the animals with his left. Both dogs rolled over on their backs hoping for a belly rubs, and Andy obliged by scratching a dog with each hand.

Doug exhaled a sigh of relief and stepped over to join his friend. "Since when've you been so good with dogs?" he asked as he stroked the head of one of the collies. "The last I remember; you were as scared of them as I am."

Andy chuckled. "Since I've been to Worcester. In a world without modern conveniences, you have to learn to get along with all kinds of animals. Come on, let's see if anyone's home."

Both boys stood and continued their trek to the farmhouse with the two dogs leading the way, occasionally looking back to see if their new human friends were still following them. As the two travelers neared the house, the side door opened, and a middle-aged man dressed in black dungarees and a neatly pressed blue work shirt stepped out. On his tanned weathered face was a black beard trimmed in the Amish fashion. Though the man was bareheaded, it was evident by the pale top-half of his forehead it usually supported a hat.

Just behind him was a woman wearing a plain navy-blue dress under a crisp white starched apron. Her dark hair was rolled into a bun under a small blue bonnet. Though the farmer appeared to be in his mid-forties, she looked many years younger.

Upon seeing their master, the two canines ran ahead to greet him. The farmer reached down and gently scratched both animals behind the ears. It was obvious to Andy from the calluses on the man's hands that this guy did a lot of hard work. When the farmer finished petting his dogs, he looked up at the two young strangers.

"They like thee," the farmer said in a Pennsylvania-Dutch accent. "My boys do not often take to strangers. Thou must be good God-fearing men, for His creatures know those who are not."

The farmer warmly smiled and extended a rawhide hand toward Andy. “My name is Seth Calvin, and this is my wife, Rebecca. And who might thou be?”

Andy shook the older man’s proffered hand and fell back into his Old English accent when he replied. “We are stranded travelers. I am Andrew Coppersmith, and this is my friend Douglas Hartford. Our vehicle has broken down, and we are in need of aid.”

The man nodded. “Ye speak the King James English. I have not heard one from outside the community talk in such a fashion in many years. What brings thee to these parts of the country?”

“We were passing through on our way to the state of New York, when the water pump on our automobile broke.”

Andy went on to explain the make and model of their car. However, the Amish farmer informed the young men that he didn’t have any such parts. He explained that his particular sect did not believe in the use of any modern convenience whatsoever. “Thou can leave thy car here, and I will take thee into town where thou can buy what thy needs.”

“Thank you, milord, but we will be needing water before we can move our vehicle.”

Within five minutes, the two college students were being led down the driveway by the border collies, Jacob and Jonah. In Andy’s hand was a five-gallon can, filled with water to replenish the car’s radiator.

Feeling guilty letting his friend do all the work, Doug said, “Do you want me to carry that for a while?”

“Nah, I’ve carried things a lot heavier than this much farther.”

“Was that also part of your knight’s training?”

“Yeah, in a manner of speaking, though I think it was more for punishment.”

Doug searched his friend’s face for anger, but all he saw was a content smirk. “You know we really haven’t had much time lately to talk about it. And, now that I’m more incline to believe you, what was it like?”

“The training?”

“Well yes, but also what was it like living back then?”

“To begin with, the food is different. It’s not as bland as you’d think; it tastes richer. You don’t need a lot of spices because there’s already so much natural flavor in it. I think that is because there are no additives, antibiotics, or preservatives to mask the taste. After eating that diet for only a few days, I felt more alert and energetic than I’ve ever felt — even today.

“And where we’ve been led to believe the people back then wore rags and lived in squalor, everyone and everything was neat and clean. In a lot of respects, the medieval city of Worcester was better maintained than most cities of today.

“However, the thing that surprised me the most was the lack of noise. Yeah, there were sounds, but nothing like the din that constantly bombards our ears from today’s machines. It was indeed very serene and something I grew to enjoy.”

By the time Andy finished his description of medieval life, they reached the Impala. Upon which, Doug immediately took the can from his friend and began refilling the radiator while Andy ran the engine. The two border collies sniffed the tires. As soon as they finished, the two college students drove back to the farmhouse with their dog friends resting in the backseat. At the end of the drive, they saw Seth standing in front of the barn harnessing two of the Morgans to the farm wagon.

Doug no sooner parked the car than Andy jumped out of the passenger seat and ran over to the farmer. “Here, let me help you with those horses.”

“Thou knowth how to yoke an animal to a wagon? Thou art full of surprises.”

“Yeah, I’ve had a lot of experience with livestock, especially horses.”

Soon after Seth and Andy finished hitching the Morgans to the farm wagon, the three humans along with their two canine friends were riding down an old gravel lane toward the nearest town. They bumped down several county roads for nearly an hour until Seth

turned into a small village and pointed the wagon toward the only store in the burg.

Like Jim and Betsy's General Store, the little establishment was a simple one-story clapboard building with a long porch across the front and a couple gas pumps in the drive. Seth parked his wagon in the front of the store and tethered the horses to the porch railing.

Doug frowned at the building and turned to the farmer. "Are you sure we can get the things we need in there?"

"Aye, they keep many kinds of automotive and farm implement replacement parts."

Though the establishment appeared on the outside like Jim and Betsy's, the inside had all the trappings of a modern convenience store. Sitting behind a gleaming Formica counter fronted with a display of assorted candy bars and magazines was a twenty-something girl texting on her cell. On the wall behind the counter was a rack of cigarettes and a locked glass case filled with various brands of liquor.

Seth walked up to the counter and addressed the girl. "Miss Kate, these two young men are seeking a part for their automobile. Does thou think thee can help them?"

Kate silently finished typing her message and then looked up at the farmer. "Ah Mr. Calvin, I didn't hear you come in. What was it you wanted?"

The Amish farmer frowned at the girl. "You know that contraption is the devil's work? Why do ye insist on poisoning thy soul with such devices? The Good Book would serve thee far better."

The young woman's face turned nearly the same shade as her red hair while she slid her cell phone into the pocket of her smock. "Oh Mr. Calvin, I can assure you my phone is not demon possessed. It's simply a modern convenience and nothing more."

"Aye, that may be so, but it is a convenience that consumes your every minute; any such device can only be a product of the devil."

Kate pretended to ignore the comment and continued. “So, what do you need?”

“I said, these two young men require a part for their automobile.”

The young woman’s smile broadened when she saw the two college students standing behind the Amish farmer. “Oh, I’m sorry, how can I help you?”

Doug stepped up to the counter and gave the girl a big toothy grin. “Yeah — Hi. We were on our way to the Adirondacks when the water pump on my car went out. Do you think you might have a replacement?”

After he had finished explaining the year, make, and model of the car, the girl said, “I’m sorry; we don’t keep parts for cars that old. However, I can order it for you, but I’m afraid it’ll take at least three weeks to get here.”

Doug looked at his friend. “We really don’t have much of a choice. We can’t drive the car until it’s fixed.”

Andy nodded, and Doug turned back to Kate. “Okay, go ahead and order the pump for us. You can call me when it gets here.”

After Doug gave the girl his information, the three men left the store and rode back to Seth’s farm. While the wagon rumbled down the lane that led to the farm, Doug sighed at Andy. “Now what’re we going to do?”

Andy stirred from his musing and smiled. “Well, we can’t wait around here for three weeks that’s for sure.” He turned to face the farmer. “Mr. Calvin, do you have any riding tack?”

“Aye. What do ye have in mind?”

###

Professor Davis looked up from his paperwork when he heard the knock on his office door. “Come in.”

Justin’s face poked around the door’s edge. “You got a minute, professor?”

“Yeah, what is it?”

The young computer tech stepped into the room and sat in one of the leather chairs in front of the professor's desk. He was wearing a pair of black jeans, and a matching black tee shirt that read, Hack the World. Behind his designer glasses was an expression of concern. "The agency called and said there's no trace of Andrew Coppersmith or Douglas Hartford at the university. Their room was empty, but their cars were still in the student parking lot. No one has seen either of them since yesterday. However, when the agents interviewed Hartford's parents, the father said the boy borrowed his Sixty-six Chevy to take on a road trip. Shall I have an all-points bulletin put out on them?"

"No. My guess is they're on their way here. If we just wait. They'll come to us. I wouldn't be surprised if we saw them on tomorrow's tour. Send a description of the vehicle and their photos to security. Have the guards at the gate keep a close eye out for that car when it comes in. An automobile that old should stick out like a sore thumb."

###

"Now this is what I call Amish hospitality. That Mrs. Calvin sure can cook some mean fried chicken," Doug said as he waved a drumstick at Andy.

Andy laughed. "You'd think anyone hospitable as long as they gave you food. So, which way do we turn?"

The two wayfarers were riding two of Seth's Morgans on the Ohio back roads toward Pennsylvania. After they had returned to the farm, despite Doug's apprehension, Andy had used the Impala as collateral to persuade the farmer into allowing them to borrow the two animals. Thirty minutes later, they were on the road, with their duffle bags and camping gear lashed behind the saddles, and picnic baskets filled with fried chicken and biscuits hanging from the pummels.

Doug tossed the bone from his piece of chicken to the side of the road and continued, "Let me guess, riding was also one of the

The Rogue Knight From Wyre Forest

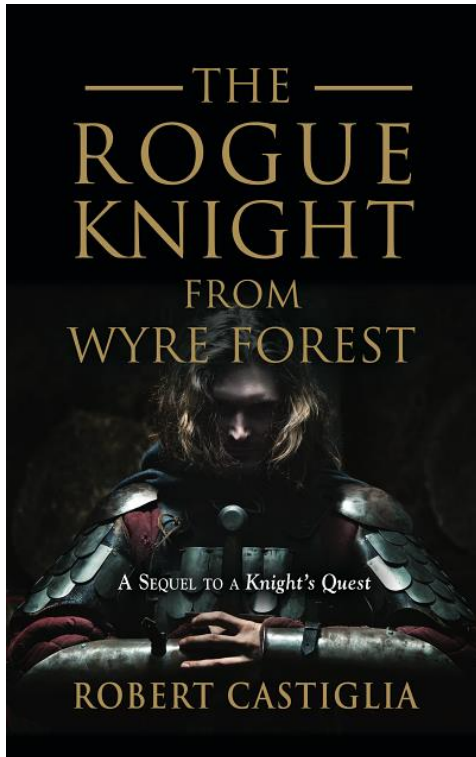
things you learned while in Merry Old England. Because the last I remember, you'd never ridden a horse before."

"Yeah, well you can't be a knight if you don't know how to ride. A knight only fights on foot after he's been knocked off his mount; to do otherwise is considered bad form. So, I had to learn, though it wasn't without several falls and bruises.

"Now, do you think you can stop stuffing your face, long enough to tell me how far it is to the nearest camp-grounds?"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mr. Castiglia began a career in teaching, after graduating from college. Robert has also worked many more years as a computer professional and consultant. Originally from Iowa, Robert now lives in Missouri where - when he is not writing - he spends his spare time reading science fiction, fantasy, and adventure novels.



The time traveler, Andrew Coppersmith returns to Medieval England and discovers nothing is at all what he expected.

**The Rogue Knight From Wyre Forest:
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