

The Fearless Four. Chapter Six.

'There,' said the Messenger. 'Do you see it? Vlad's stronghold.' And there it was. A huge wooden fortress just as Albert had described it. Squatting on the sea and the land, where the sun did not seem to shine.

'Time to work out a plan of attack,' said the Messenger.

'Gosh!', said Bloodblade. 'How are we going to get in there? It's so big!'

'Easy-peasy,' said Twinblade. 'Submarine.'

'Don't be silly,' said Emily. 'We haven't got a submarine.'

'Well,' said the Messenger. 'Actually we do. But I don't think it will be much use. We need to get troops in to subdue the pirates and then find your parents. Their boat isn't there.'

'Ooooh,' wailed Lily.

'Oh do shut up,' snapped Twinblade. 'We'll find them. Just stop snivelling. You'll give us away to the pirates.'

'Actually,' said the Messenger. 'She won't, because we're invisible to the fort. We have our stealth shield on.'

'Gosh!' said Bloodblade. 'A stealth shield.'

'Good thing too,' grumbled Twinblade.

'Well,' said the Messenger. 'Let's get planning. Ginger!' Ginger came running in balancing some note-books, a roll of paper and a biscuit tin.

'I've done a map of the stronghold, Sir,' he said. He unrolled the large piece of paper and they all stood round. The stronghold was circular in shape except where the walls ended with a tower on each side of an inlet from the river, to allow boats inside. Ginger had drawn in a picture of a thick iron chain lying across the water between the two towers.

'That's for keeping boats out,' he told the children.

'So,' said the Messenger. 'There's one entrance on the river and another at the back on the landward side. H'm. We don't want to go in by the river. The chain would slow us down. So we'll have to attack at the back. Children. Make a list of supplies you think we might need, while I go and have a word with Major McCallum. Ginger. Send a drone camera up for a look at the walls.' He went out and Ginger followed.

'Do you think there are any biscuits in that biscuit tin?' asked Twinblade.

'Better not touch it,' said Emily.

'But I'm hungry,' wailed Twinblade.

Oh, shut up,' said Bloodblade. 'Let's make a supplies list.'

'Good,' said Twinblade. 'Biscuits and Mars bars.'

'I'll write down the list,' said Emily, finding a pencil and opening one of the note-books.

'Night glasses,' suggested Bloodblade.

'How do you know we'll be going in at night?' asked Twinblade.

'Ooooh,' wailed Lily. 'I'm not. I'm staying here. So there!' Everybody ignored her.

The list grew very quickly. Stink bombs. Water bombs. Peashooters. Peas. Crash helmets. Electric guns. Water pistols. Water in bottles. Badges. Suckers.

'What's suckers?' asked Emily.

'You put them on your hands and feet and crawl up walls,' explained Twinblade.

'Sounds weird to me,' said Bloodblade. 'What about motor cycles?'

'They won't be much use on sand and getting over walls,' replied Emily. Bloodblade thought for a moment.

'No. You're right,' he agreed. At that moment the Messenger came in with Major McCallum.

'I presume you all want to be involved in the attack on the stronghold?' he said.

'Rather!' shouted three of the children. Lily said nothing.

'Lily,' said the Messenger. 'Would you like to stay behind and get a meal ready for us for when we get back. You know. Baked beans, cakes and so on. That would be very helpful.'

'Oh yes, please,' answered Lily.

'Right,' said the Messenger. 'The Major and I think that a couple of diversions would be a good way of confusing the enemy when we make our attack. Ah, Ginger.' Ginger came in, carrying a screen and a projector which he set up on the table, and switched on.

'We have a drone camera taking a look at the walls,' explained the Messenger. 'Watch the screen and you'll see what it sees.' The children watched, fascinated, as a picture of the walls of the stronghold unfolded on the screen. The picture was not entirely clear because it was getting dark but they could make out the walls and occasionally a bit of the interior of the stronghold.

'Stop right there!' said the Messenger. Ginger hit a button on the projector and the picture froze.

'Look at that, Major,' said the Messenger. 'They're being lazy. They should have repaired that part of the wall.'

'Quite, Sir,' replied the Major. 'That's our way in.' The children looked puzzled. The screen showed a hole in the wall, but the hole was completely filled in by some very strong-looking, thick wire mesh, right up to the top.

'Recognise it, Major?' asked the Messenger.

'I do. It's our old favourite. S.28 mesh, machine-gun and bomb proof metal gridding. 18 feet high. Razor wire on top.'

'Excuse me, Sir,' asked Bloodblade. 'Er. How do you get through that?' The Major grinned. 'You'll see,' he replied.

'Now,' said the Messenger. 'The diversions. This is where you come in, Emily. And you too, Twinblade.'

While this conference was going on, Mr. Million was striding down the beach towards the jetty at Beaulieu, followed by Miss Schutzenfuffen who was admiring the clouds.

'Leave this to me,' he said firmly to Miss Schutzenfuffen. She didn't know what 'this' was so she wandered over to the beach café and sat down. A waiter appeared with a menu.

Miss Schutzenfuffen, not being good at French but being hungry, pointed at a few things on the menu and said, 'Merci. Deux.' The waiter nodded approvingly and went off to the kitchen. Mr. Million came back, a look of triumph on his face.

'All done and dusted!' he shouted. 'The chase is still afoot!'

'Eh?' said Miss Schutzenfuffen.

'We're on our way! I have persuaded a fisherman to sail us around in search of those horrible children! Hah! We'll have them, yet!'

'But you don't know where they've gone!' protested Miss Schutzenfuffen. Mr. Million

tapped his large nose.

'I'll sniff them out!' he said. 'Great Heavens! What's that?' The waiter had appeared with two steaming plates of long-legged, wiry lobsters which he plonked down in front of them.

'I can't eat this muck!' shouted Mr. Million. The waiter re-appeared with two further steaming bowls, these full of mussels.

'Aaaargh.' said Mr. Million. The waiter came again with two bowls of bubbling soup in which small fish seemed to be struggling.

'Why is this fool bringing us this horrible muck?' shouted Mr. Million. Miss Schutzenfuffen looked aghast as the waiter re-appeared with two plates of some sloppy mixture of cream and custard.

'Enough! Arrêtez!' shouted Mr. Million at the affronted waiter. 'Combien?'

'But, Monsieur,' protested the waiter. 'Ees the vairy best. Michelin stars soon. You eat!'

'Tell me combien or I'll pull your nose!' shouted Mr. Million.

'Really!' exclaimed Miss Schutzenfuffen. 'That's no way to behave when you're abroad!' She was quite appalled.

'Really! Mr. Million. Your conduct is deplorable.' She sounded just as though she was talking to the children. Mr. Million threw a large note on the table.

'Take that, and eat that filthy muck, yourself,' he shouted at the waiter. A large fat man came out of the kitchen holding a very big wooden spoon, the size of a spade. Mr. Million grabbed Miss Schutzenfuffen's arm and pulled her away swiftly, towards a boat where a thin, rather dirty-looking fisherman with a squint and a smelly pipe was waiting. 'Away! Vite!' commanded Mr. Million, and the boat swayed off from the jetty, Miss Schutzenfuffen clutching at the mast.