

Praise for *Tangle*

Tangle was a fabulous book. Through battles and plot twists, I kept wanting to read more. And a warning to all future readers: this book is very hard to put down.

—**Gavin Montgomery**, age 10

Brock Eastman's writing reflects his personality: full of life, full of truth, and most likely to hold your attention to the very last moment.

— **Donita K. Paul**, Author, *The DragonKeeper Chronicles* and *Realm Walkers Series*

The *Quest for Truth* series is an entertaining fusion of archaeological mystery and space adventure. It's *Indiana Jones* meets *Star Wars*—but with family values and spiritual truth as its warp core. The first three volumes kept me reading . . . sometimes far past my bedtime! *Tangle* is a satisfying addition to the sequence.

—**Jeremiah W. Montgomery**, Author,
The Dark Harvest Trilogy

Wow! *Tangle* has left me wanting more. As a father and bookstore manager, I'm glad that there still is good, clean kids' fiction. I highly recommend *The Quest for Truth* series.

—**Chris McCormick**, Manager,
LifeWay Christian Stores

Read this before your friends do. Full of twists, this action-packed installment in *The Quest for Truth* is sure to be your favorite.

—**Jerel Law**, Author, *Son of Angels Series*

Just when I thought *The Quest for Truth* couldn't get more exciting, along came *Tangle!* Book 4 is the best yet, with mys-

teries unfolding in ways my children and I never imagined. Above all, I love hearing my kids' excitement about the Wikk family's spiritual discoveries. Brock Eastman has outdone himself once again!

—**Ann Hibbard**, Senior Editor, Home Educating
Family Association

TANGLE

THE QUEST FOR TRUTH

TAKEN

RISK

UNLEASH

TANGLE

HOPE

TANGLE

THE FOURTH ADVENTURE IN
THE QUEST FOR TRUTH

BROCK EASTMAN



P U B L I S H I N G
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To my Elsie Mae:

Your smile could light up the darkest place.
Your beautiful eyes melt my heart.
Your sweet kisses and hugs bring me happiness.
Your graceful dance delights.

You are certainly a princess of our King.
I'm blessed to call you mine.
I love you.

And, yes, I will cuddle you a bit longer.

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Acknowledgments

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Elsie Mae, Mommy and Daddy have found that you're an entertainer. You love to dance, act, and sing. Whatever God has in store for you, I pray you'll always use your talents for Him. I love how you start your nightly prayer, "Dear God," but it sounds like *Gawd*. And, yes, I shall always ask you, "Why are you so cute?"

Waverly, my little laughter bug, you are a delight to hold and to tickle, always watching the world around you and always excited to see me. As you run to me and I scoop you up, you giggle wildly. If ever I need a smile, I simply need to look at you.

Declan Grey, we may still be very outnumbered (four girls), but you're going to be such a great daddy and husband someday because of it. I'm excited about the adventure of growing you into a man of God.

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Prologue

The winter wind swept flurries around the man as he trudged through the knee-high snow. The forest thinned, and a plain covered in heavy drifts of snow lay before him. A wall of blue steam rose from a lava river at the far edge, turning the snow closest to it into slush. It cloaked the entrance to the secret valley: a door hiding answers that the man hoped would finally end his search.

He paused before taking his next step—a step that would expose him to any onlooker. He could have sent his soldiers, but he knew that uncovering this secret would take more than brute strength and powerful weapons. Research had made it clear that the only way to learn this secret was from the people who held it—the Gläubigen. Many times before, they had escaped when threatened, taking with them the information he sought. He'd seen the ruins of their past settlements. Only he and a few other top officials knew of the remnant of these people, now living just beyond the blue curtain of cloud. And if the Gläubigen truly had the knowledge he sought, the man didn't trust any of his comrades to return and share the answer to his lifelong quest. Although they were united by a single goal, their alliance was a fragile one. He still wasn't

sure that their loyalties went further than discovering the secret for themselves.

This was the moment. He had with him only a few essentials that a traveler might have, but none of his regular comforts or any markings that might reveal his true identity. The outfit itself was secondhand, as the bite of chill wind on his skin reminded him.

A handful of razor-thin electronic components were sewn into the lining of his outer jacket. With these pieces, he would build a communication transponder to send and receive simple messages in an ancient code called Morse. These transmissions would be picked up and sent by a discreet beacon circling the planet high above. There was to be strict communication silence until he called for extraction, except for a brief update every six months—or news if his men discovered a clue of dire significance. Until then, he would remain a resident in his new home.

He was ready for a long mission. Secretly he welcomed the break from the rigorous searching and exploring that had yet to yield anything significant. If something was discovered while he was gone, his men had orders to break silence and retrieve him immediately.

He looked toward the sky one last time, at dark gray clouds laden with snow. He'd better get in before the next blizzard struck. He stepped into the open and started across the plain, dragging his feet as if weary from days in the cold forest. He could hear the waterfall ahead and the sizzle of water and lava below. He fell to the ground by the edge of the chasm and let out a desperate moan.

The wind howled in response and dusted him with new snow. A fleeting thought crossed his mind that his men had gotten the location wrong.

He moaned again, his voice echoing around him. Then it came: the creaking of a pulley. Two wooden poles broke through the steam and rested on solid stone a dozen feet away. *The end*

of a bridge? He heard hooves galloping toward him. Two riders armed with bows leaped from their horses and approached. Three more men stepped out of the steam.

The man fought back a victorious smile and groaned. A blue hand grasped his shoulder and lifted him to his knees.

“Feng, is he alive?” a soldier asked.

“Yes. But we must get him in before the blizzard hits.”

The foot soldiers came forward and lifted him on their shoulders, then hurried back toward the bridge and across it. The two horsemen followed. The moment they were all across, a horn blew and the bridge began to rise.

He was in. His mission could officially begin.

Archeos Security Brief

Case 07.06.20.15

Funding by



Ancheos Personnel

Elliot Wikk



Laura Wikk



Oliver Wikk



Tiff Wikk



Mason Wikk



Austin Wikk



Ancheos Personnel

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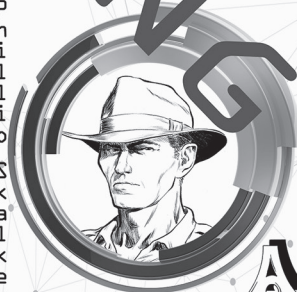
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Suspects



Phelan O'Farrell

Recently linked to Corsairs

Last seen with Wikk children
on Jahr des Eises



Captain Vedrick

Stalking Wikk and McGregors
over last year

Potential connections to the
Übel society



Red Cloak

Identified in recently
obtained security footage

Constant proximity to Wikk
and McGregors





Awaken

Mrs. Wikk leaned over Mason, a cold wet cloth in her hand. She slid it across his forehead. What a wonderful dream. He was with his mom.

“Mason,” she said, a tear rolling down her cheek. She brushed back his bangs. “My sweet son, you’re finally awake.”

His breath caught. He wasn’t dreaming? “Mom? Is it—really you?”

“It is.” She looked away. “Elliot, come quick,” she said, her voice laden with urgency.

Mason’s dad came into view.

“Dad?” Mason started to push himself up but fell back.

“Son, just rest. You’ve been out for several hours. You need to recover,” Mr. Wikk said. His dad’s eyes glistened. Mason couldn’t recall the last time he’d seen his dad cry. “You were stunned multiple times.”

Mason’s mom’s cheeks flushed with anger at the words.

Mason had thought for the briefest of moments that perhaps everything that had happened—the Übel, the Corsairs—had all been nothing more than a bad nightmare and that he was finally waking up.

Instead, it was true. All the past days' events had happened. Mason shivered, and his mom tucked his covers beneath his chin.

"Where is everyone?" he asked.

"Your brothers and sister escaped," his mom said.

"We're on the *Skull*," his dad added.

Mason's memory was foggy, his thoughts jumbled. He recalled the large room of the cathedral and the invasion of the soldiers. They'd attacked; he'd tried to rescue Obbin. Now he was a prisoner of the "darkness," as Sister Dorothy had described the Übel.

At least he was with his parents. He had so much to ask and tell them.

"What about Obbin?"

"He's in another cabin down the corridor. Most of his family is here," Mason's dad said. "Nice people."

"They told us about your visit," his mom said.

A sense of guilt flooded Mason as he remembered the valley. Austin and his arrival and departure had attracted the Übel's attention to Obbin's home.

The intercom buzzed. "Minus three hours until destination." The intercom beeped and went silent.

Mason's eyes slid shut. He forced them back open, fighting a sudden onslaught of sleepiness. "Where are they taking us?"

"A place called the Valley of Shadows," his mom explained. "The king of the Blauwe Mensen insists that there should have been twelve crosses at the location and that we will need all of them for the quest."

Crosses? Truth? Memories were surfacing. The Valley of Shadows sounded oddly familiar.

"Vedrik still won't admit that he followed us there, kidnapped Hixby and Skalker, and stole the crosses right from under our noses," Mason's dad said.

"Maybe he didn't," said Mason's mom. "I don't think Hixby and Skalker were seeking the place of our origin. They might have sold the crosses' locations to someone else."

Mason's dad shook his head. "I'm telling you, those two were solid, Laura. They weren't treasure hunters."

"I never trusted them," she said. "Not after they forced their way into our expedition."

"*Forced* is a strong word," Mason's dad said. "Though you're right: they did invite themselves."

Mason tried to keep his eyes open as his parents debated. His eyelids were heavy, but he didn't want to sleep; he wanted to analyze the clues with his parents and learn about their past week with the Übel.

"So there are more crosses at this valley?" he asked.

"The king insists that there are twelve hidden crosses," his mom said. "Our original map only showed seven. We attempted to access four of them, but in the end only reached two."

"The king had some books, *The Chronicles of Terra Originem*, that mentioned the valley," his dad added.

"I've heard of those," Mason said. "Obbin's brother Rylin took the books so he could trade them."

His mom smiled. "The missing prince has the missing books."

Mason imagined that the Blauwe Mensen were worried about Rylin. He was only slightly older than Obbin.

"And we found some paintings with a hidden map of the valley," Mason added. "We were copying it onto an e-papyrus."

"Did you see how many chambers might have contained crosses?" his dad asked.

Mason frowned. "We hadn't gotten that far. We didn't have the e-journal, and we were trying to find information in books that we'd recovered from the libraries on Evad and Jahr des Eises."

His mom patted his shoulder. "That's okay. This information will help get back some of the king's credibility with Zebra Xavier."

"Why?" Mason asked.

"An Übel tactical team was sent back to the Cobalt Gorge, but they were unable to find the books in the library. Vedrik

accused the king of setting a trap for his men.” Mason’s dad smiled. “The Übel finally got some of their own medicine.”

“What do you mean?” asked Mason.

“Two Übel soldiers on the mission were captured by the Blauwe Mensen. The Übel also lost one of their shuttles,” his dad said. “This time the Blauwe Mensen were ready when the Übel arrived. It sounds like it was a pretty fierce fight.”

Mason was glad the Blauwe Mensen had fought back with some success. Outgunned and out-teched, they still had plenty of courage.

“If there were twelve crosses, that would leave five in the valley,” Mason’s mom said.

“If Vedrik extracted crosses from all the marked chambers and found the one we started to remove,” Mason’s dad said. “But we don’t know if the crosses were still in each location. They could have been removed prior to our expedition.”

“And if Vedrik isn’t admitting how many he has, then we don’t know how many remain,” Mason said.

“Assuming that he has any at all,” Mason’s mom said.

“The Archeos extraction team saw the *Vulture* swoop in and attempt to extract at least four crosses before our men were evacuated,” his dad said.

“We don’t know if the *Vulture* belongs to the Übel,” Mason’s mom said. “We’ve been with the Übel for a week now, and not once have we even heard them mention the *Vulture*.”

“That doesn’t mean it’s not running another mission elsewhere,” Mr. Wikk said.

“Fair point. But I don’t see why Vedrik wouldn’t admit to having the crosses if he actually did have them,” his mom said.

“He could be holding back to use this to his advantage.”

“He’s been awfully straightforward with us on the expeditions.”

Mr. Wikk took his wife’s hand. “You may be right. The captain is on a short leash. Zebra Xavier has warned him that he doesn’t have time for lies that cause delays.”

“Captain Vedrik seems like a puppy compared to a wolf like Zebra Xavier,” his mom said.

Mason’s dad laughed. “Now you’re just teasing me.”

Mrs. Wikk squeezed her husband’s hand. “We’ve got to keep smiling, don’t we?”

Mason’s dad put his free arm around his wife and kissed her forehead. “Yes, we do.”

It was nice to see his parents in good spirits, and Mason was interested to hear what their interactions with the captain had been like. Vedrik was indeed as cruel as he’d been when Mason had run into him on Evad and Enaid. How much more evil must Zebra Xavier be, if a man like Vedrik was a puppy compared to him? Mason knew his mom was exaggerating, but it sounded like Zebra Xavier unsettled Vedrik, and Mason was sure that Vedrik wasn’t easily intimidated.

Again Mason’s eyes began to slide shut; his spurt of adrenaline was waning. He asked another question to keep himself awake. “So we’re headed to the valley without the books, even though Vedrik doesn’t trust the king?”

“Zebra Xavier overrode Vedrik’s decision,” his dad said.

“And we’ve been piecing together other materials and artifacts that were recovered,” his mom explained. “We believe we have created a nearly complete map.”

“So we’re going to explore the Valley of Shadows?” asked Mason.

“That’s the last we were told,” Mason’s mom said.

“Vedrik trusts us less every day,” Mason’s dad said, ruffling Mason’s hair. “We haven’t exactly been good allies.”

Mason surged with pride. His parents had been fighting against the darkness also. They’d just used different tactics.

“We couldn’t sabotage them too badly, or we risked losing you,” his mom said. “We only needed to stall them long enough to ensure that the four of you had the information you needed to continue the search.”

“What about when they destroyed the basin on Evad?” Mason asked.

His mom turned away.

“Son, that was the *scariest* moment of our lives,” Mason’s dad admitted. He placed a sturdy hand on his wife’s shoulder as a sob escaped her lips. “Vedrik used it as a warning to us to make sure we started helping. We expect that he knew you were safe but wanted us to believe otherwise to show what he was capable of.”

It was hard for Mason to hear his mom cry. He reached out and took her hand. “I love you, Mom. I’m glad I’m with you.”

Mrs. Wikk smiled at him and wiped a tear from her eye.

“We’re glad we found you,” Mr. Wikk said. “We’ll get your sister and brothers back soon—don’t you worry.”

Mason smiled. “I know.” He yawned as he started to lose the fight with sleep. “How will Oliver and Tiffany and Austin find . . .”

Everything went dark; Mason couldn’t stay awake any longer.