

# 1

“LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, girls and boys, welcome to the D23 presentation we’ve all been waiting for! Eight years ago Disney Imagineers, under the direction of Disney Legend Wayne Kresky, came up with an innovative and game-changing alternative to our old friend, Pal Mickey. Five young men and women from Orlando became our first Disney Hosts Interactive, or DHIs. That’s also an acronym for Daylight Hologram Imaging! Which gives you a small hint of whom you’re about to meet!”

The packed crowd in Ballroom B, Level 3 of the Anaheim Convention Center broke into thunderous applause. The speaker, a man named Joe Garlington, a well-known Disney Imagineer, was like his boss, Bruce Vaughn, considered a Disney celebrity.

“As hologram characters within the parks, these five courageous young people have not only introduced thousands of families to the magic of our attractions, but they’ve also, as a group, become known to all of us as . . . wait for it . . . the . . .”

Hundreds of people screamed in unison: “Kingdom Keepers!”

Another brace of applause rattled the folding walls separating the line of ballrooms.

“That’s right! So please help me give it up to the five people most responsible for saving our beloved Disneyland from outside threats: Finn, Willa, Philby, Maybeck, and Charlene—our company treasure, the Kingdom Keepers!”

The crowd jumped to its feet, cheering and waving, shooting off photos in a blinding explosion of flashing white lights.

The five teens charged up onto the riser and waved back at the crowd. They slipped onto raised stools, grabbing the wireless microphones left there for them.

The interview began in earnest. Finn Whitman, who’d matured from a gawky middle-school boy into a young man with a strong jaw and penetrating eyes, was identified as the leader of the group. Dell Philby, a redhead with a soft British accent who was both a rock climber and a computer whiz, was dubbed the MacGyver of the group, though the old television show reference was lost on many in attendance. The gorgeous blonde, Charlene, received additional applause because she currently starred in a Disney Channel show. By far the most athletic of the five, she answered questions about how some of her more

difficult battles with Disney villains had helped lead to the rescue of Disneyland. Terry Maybeck stood slightly over six feet tall, his dreads making him look even taller. He made jokes about being the only African-American of the five, but became uncharacteristically serious when discussing his artist's eye and his tendency to take great personal risks when required. The clear stud of the group, Maybeck received the most screaming from the girls when his short interview concluded.

Willa Angelo spoke softly; Joe had to pry responses from her. She begrudgingly admitted that she'd assumed the role of Philby's high-tech counterpart. Joe also coaxed from her that she'd received a 34 on the ACT, a nearly perfect score, and had earned full scholarship offers from UCLA, Washington University, and Wellesley College. She wouldn't tell the group which she'd accepted, however.

The event lasted a total of fifteen minutes. Another roar of applause sent the Kingdom Keepers off to a greenroom where they would wait before being led to a poster-signing event in the main hall.

Accompanied by a pair of Cast Members, the five cut across a wide concourse on their way to the room. A large gathering of well-wishers and fans already crowded the area, cheering for the Keepers like they were actors or rock stars. Event programs waved; people called out

for autographs. The Keepers were happy to oblige, stopping to sign their names or pose for a quick selfie.

During one such photo-op, Finn Whitman caught sight of a girl with dark olive skin and a hint of Asian eyes, squinting with concern. Amanda. He winked at her. But she shook her head vigorously, her eyes darting to her left. Following her gaze, Finn caught sight of Jess, held back by the cluster of fans. No great surprise. The two girls traveled everywhere together. “Two peas in a pod,” Maybeck’s aunt Bess called them.

Jess waved her arms, clearly signaling *No*. Finn worked to communicate through facial expressions, *What?*

Jess pointed to her head. Amanda made a signal like she was sleeping. Finn understood: Jess had dreamed something bad—a special ability she possessed. Amanda pointed across the hall and shook her head more violently.

Finn and the others were aimed where Amanda was pointing as she called out, “Don’t go in there!”

Finn tugged on Philby’s shirt. “Not the greenroom.”

“Are you kidding me? We stay out here, we’ll be eaten alive.”

“Amanda and Jess.” Finn pointed them out. The crowd took on a life of its own, pushing and surging in the direction of the greenroom’s door. The fans knew

where the Keepers were headed, and in the process of following them, they were herding the Keepers in that direction.

Amanda and Jess slipped behind the crowd, Amanda looking as if she might cry.

“Seriously,” Finn shouted to Philby, “I think Jess dreamed something bad about this.”

He won Philby’s attention. Jess’s dreams were not to be ignored. As Philby stopped short, Finn crashed into him. Finn planted his feet, resisting, but the crowd’s will won out.

“This is ugly!” Charlene cried.

The dreaded door swung open.

“We do not want to go in there,” Finn said.

“I get it!” Philby said. “But I don’t think we have . . .”

The Keepers were pushed into the greenroom. Cast Members fought off the fans and shut the door.

Willa screamed.

A man in a waiter’s uniform lay writhing on the floor, green foam oozing from his mouth and nostrils. His eyes were rolled back into his head, showing only the milky white of his eyeballs. He twitched and jerked. A seizure.

Maybeck hollered, “Someone call an ambulance!”

# 2

THE PARAMEDIC TEAM left the greenroom in a hurry, an oxygen mask held tightly over the face of the unconscious man.

“At least he’s alive,” Willa said. “He didn’t look it at first.”

“It’s coincidence,” said Charlene. “Nothing more.”

“Let’s hope so,” said Philby.

“What? You can’t be serious!” Finn objected.

“Don’t go all conspiracy theory on us, Whitman,” Maybeck said. “Do *not* start with that whole ‘Wayne left us a message’ thing again.”

“He did, but so did Amanda and Jess. Out there in the hall, Amanda tried to stop us from coming in here. Jess knew it was dangerous! Look, we all agreed to figure out the connection between Wayne’s watch and Walt’s music box. What happened to that idea? Why didn’t we see it through?”

“See?” Maybeck raised his voice, angrily. The Keepers occupied a large, round table. He and Willa drank coffee. With the paramedics gone, this was their first opportunity to talk privately.

“Please, Finn, do not blow this thing up to more than it is.” Charlene looked at him over the rim of a plastic cup.

“What it is,” Finn said loudly, “is tampering. That poison was intended for us!”

The other Keepers scoffed.

“Did you see how big that guy was?” Finn said. “He survived because he didn’t eat that much. Anybody want to dig through the trash and eat a whole sandwich, and see how you do?” Finn waited. “Didn’t think so. There was only one group of people that food was meant for. Us. This is our greenroom. Think about it.”

“The Overtakers are dead, dude,” Maybeck said.

“I’m not saying they aren’t. But Walt’s pen is not in those photos, and not in Jess’s sketch of Walt’s desk, either.”

“That’s because if we hadn’t found his pen in One Man’s Dream, we’d never have redrawn the park with Wayne.” Maybeck sounded defensive. “We’d never have saved the park. Solving the Stonecutter’s Quill would have been for nothing.”

“And my argument was,” Willa said, “that the park *is* whole again, so obviously none of this message stuff matters.”

“The park is whole because we fixed it!” Finn cried. “We fixed it using a pen that isn’t in the original

photos of the attraction. So how did the pen get there?”

No one had an answer.

“You’re saying we chase down some recording in Walt’s apartment—a recording we don’t even know exists.” Charlene sighed, and then added, “I have a TV show to shoot, let’s not forget.”

“I have college coming up,” Willa said.

“Imagineering school,” Philby said.

Maybeck said proudly, “Art Center.”

“You gotta let it go, Finn.” Charlene sounded genuinely concerned. “I know Wayne anointed you as his successor. I get how that weighs on you. But seriously, you are obsessed.” Her eyes softened. “We just want to help you.”

“We’re still the Keepers. We’ll always have that,” Willa said, “but we’re moving on.”

“Someone tried to poison us,” Finn repeated. “Jess saw it coming. That means nothing to you guys?”

“Food poisoning, dude. No worries.” Maybeck tried for a joke that didn’t land.

“Have any of you considered the alternative?” Finn directed this at Philby. Although the two boys often found themselves on opposite sides of the playing field, they had also figured out how to work well together over the past several years.

“Why don’t you tell us?” Willa said.



“Don’t act like you’re my therapist!” Finn said bitterly. “This is *me*, you guys!”

“You’re paranoid,” said Maybeck.

“Slightly psycho,” said Charlene, “but we love you.”

“Seriously, though,” Philby said. “What’s the alternative?”

Finn moved his attention around the table slowly, meeting each of his friends eye to eye. Then he spoke in a smoky, furtive voice that didn’t sound anything like him.

“Why does Wayne leave us a message from the grave? Why did he instruct Wanda to give me his watch with a code on it?”

“You need to grieve, dude. The rest of us have come to terms with losing him.”

“Okay. I need to grieve. Note to self. But, *why would he do that?* I’ll tell you why! Wayne has been working for years, maybe decades, to figure out *how all of this happened in the first place*. Where did the Overtakers come from? That means he’s done all sorts of research. Right? Stop smirking, Maybeck. Hear me out. Philby, after the Disneyland thing, you tried to tell us that the Overtakers were still around.”

“I was delusional.”

“Maybe. But if it’s not the Overtakers, who tried to poison us? I mean, *if you’ll accept for a moment that it*

wasn't coincidence that food intended only for us nearly killed someone," Finn added sarcastically. "That's a big stretch, I know. But let's say I'm right—as crazy as we all agree I am. Wouldn't that point to someone, as in a human, a living human, who's trying to put an end to us? This is the only time we've been together in public since the final battle. That's coincidence?"

A few seconds of silence overtook the four others. Then they all nodded at once, mumbling, "Yup." "Coincidence." "Of course it is."

"I'm going to say what no one else is going to say." Charlene sounded grim. "And only because I care so much about you, Finn! No other reason than that." She paused for effect. "We're moving on. Our holograms are still in all the parks. We'll live on there until they replace us. Hopefully that'll be a long, long time from now. But the real us . . . We've graduated, Finn. From high school, and from the Kingdom Keepers. The war's over, and you're like one of those guys on a street corner in an army uniform with a cardboard sign. I feel sorry for you, okay? We all do. And that's a creepy, awful way to feel about someone you're so close to."

More heads bobbed. Finn felt about two inches tall. His throat caught. He couldn't speak.

"We need to get to that music box and find whatever Wayne left for us." Finn tried to hide his trembling,

but his voice belied his efforts. “We need Walt’s pen to end up in One Man’s Dream. Without that pen, the parks don’t make it.”

“Once you let go of this, any one of us is eager to help, at any time,” Willa said. “All you have to do, Finn, is reach out. But if you won’t listen, what are we supposed to do?”

“And what am I supposed to do if *you* won’t listen to *me*?” Finn was almost shouting now. “That guy was foaming at the mouth. He nearly died! That means nothing to you?”

No one spoke. They all looked sad and disappointed.

Finn stood. “Nothing?”

Nothing.

He marched out without looking back.

# 3

“I KNOW WHAT YOU’RE UP TO,” Finn’s mother, a former NASA rocket scientist and the smartest person in any room, said, glowering at him from across his bedroom. She drank from a mug of tea, flavored with milk and fake sugar.

“Don’t know what you mean.” A plane flew loudly overhead.

“Pull down the covers.”

“I’d rather not.”

“Finn. The Overtakers are defeated. Are you crossing over for fun now? The Imagineers allow that?”

“Don’t involve them, please.”

“So there *is* something going on!”

“I’m trying to tie up some loose ends.”

“That’s what I’m supposed to tell your father? He will have your head. You’re supposed to be focused on college.”

“How exactly does one focus on college, anyway?”

“Don’t get smart with me! You know I fight for you at every turn.”

It was true. His mother had personally suffered at

the hands of the Overtakers—they'd put her under a malevolent spell that had lasted for weeks. She understood their power and the danger of that power better than anyone outside of Finn and his friends.

"It's got to stop. It did stop."

"Let me ask you something," Finn said. He still had the bedcovers pulled ridiculously high to cover his street clothes, which he wore for the purpose of crossing over. "Do you remember me telling you about Walt's pen? In the Magic Kingdom?"

"Of course."

"Right. Well, we got Walt's pen off his desk from the exhibit inside One Man's Dream."

"The reconstruction of his office. Yes."

"It was in a mug, you know, with pencils and stuff."

"I recall."

"That pen saved the Magic Kingdom, Mom. It saved us. But just recently, we saw the last photographs taken of Walt's desk before his stuff was archived. Warehoused. Years later, these are the exact things installed in One Man's Dream.

"Mom, there's *no pen* in those photographs. It's not there. Plus, before this, Jess dreamed Walt's drawing table. She sketched it out the way she'd dreamed it. You know what her visions mean! Those things come

true. Her drawing showed the same mug. Walt's mug. Pencils, ballpoint pens. No fountain pen."

His mother said nothing.

"Wayne wanted us to notice the missing fountain pen, Mom. He wanted us to know it wasn't where it needed to be."

"I think I see where you're going with this."

"Where?" Finn said, meeting her gaze belligerently. "Where am I going?"

"You believe the pen's placement is your responsibility. But how does that make sense, Finn?"

"It doesn't. I know that. Willa and Charlene would be the first to point it out. They say the pen ended up where we found it, so that's that. But you're the rocket scientist. What would Einstein say?"

"What does your becoming a DHI tonight have to do with any of this? Is what you're doing dangerous?" Spoken with a mother's deep concern.

"I don't think so. I don't see how it could be."

"That doesn't sound convincing."

"I appreciate the effort you make with Dad."

"He's worried about you. That's all. He loves you. We just think . . . you're holding on to all this stuff."

"Sounds like the parents have been talking."

"Not just the parents. Your friends are worried about you, too, Finn. I can't condone your crossing over. If it

puts you in danger, physical danger, what kind of mother could sign off on that? Especially when it might be for nothing!”

“What about Imagineering school?” Finn said, testing the waters.

“Don’t change the subject.”

But he felt forced to change the subject. If he allowed the argument to continue, she was going to forbid him from crossing over; and that wasn’t an option.

“I could take a gap year,” he proposed. “You know how few people are ever offered this chance? No one even *knows* about Imagineering school, not unless they’re invited to join. A year, two at most, and I can transfer knowing a lot more about what I want to study. Dad’s just jealous because he hates his job.”

“That’s unkind and uncalled for, Finn, and you know it. I can’t believe you’d say that!”

“It’s true! He says I earned my full college tuition by being a Kingdom Keeper? Well, that was the deal you and Dad made with Disney, not me.”

“I see what you’re doing! Changing the subject! Nice try. We’re talking about crossing over.”

Exasperated, he gave in. “Wayne left me a clue. Me, Mom. Not the others. Me.”

“Some say that you’re exaggerating that.”

“Do you think I am?”

Mrs. Whitman gave her son a long, hard look.

“No,” she said.

“Thank you.”

“Wayne told you that it was your kingdom now. He should never have said that. You’re eighteen. You are not the second coming of Walt Disney. That was the kindness, or maybe the delusion, of a dying man.”

“He meant it, Mom. He meant every word.”

“You’re upset.”

“Wow, you’re a real mind reader.”

“Do not take that tone with me, young man!”

Finn’s phone buzzed. He pulled it from the pocket of his pants under the bedcovers.

“Philby’s all set. It’s time I get to sleep.”

“Then I’m going to keep you awake.”

“Let me tie up these loose ends, Mom. Please. If I’m going to move on, this is something that has to happen.”

“That’s the first well-reasoned argument you’ve made.”

“Thank you.”

“The pen, Walt’s pen, was put into the mug sometime after his office went into storage,” she said, as if mulling over what her son had told her. “But before his office came back out as part of One Man’s Dream.”

“Right. But by who? And why would Wayne think we could help that? Change that? It must have



happened thirty years before we were even born.”

“You know the answer, Finn. It happened! The pen made it into the exhibit. That makes it a rhetorical question.”

“Wayne wants us, me, to identify whoever did it.”

“Because whoever added that pen to Walt’s desk mug eventually saved the Magic Kingdom,” Mrs. Whitman said. Her eyes were far away.

“More importantly: knew the Magic Kingdom would need saving!”

“So I suppose it’s Finn to the rescue?” She made him sound like a lunatic.

“Et tu, Bruté?” Finn said.

His mother smiled. “You’re quite clever, knowing how I react to you showing off your education.”

“Please, Mom.”

“This once. And I want a full report.”

She switched off the overhead light and closed the door before Finn could thank her.

# 4

**F**INN'S DHI HOLOGRAM walked through the back door to Walt Disney's former apartment. The decorations hadn't been changed in forty years. A colorful carpet, a pair of antique chairs, a standing lamp, and two daybeds resplendent with needlepoint pillows. A small round table held the historic glass-domed lamp Walt Disney had once used to announce his presence in the park.

Knowing his time was limited, Finn went directly to the music box. Philby had reluctantly agreed to cross him over—alone—but he'd also expressed his concern; he expected a phone call from Finn every ten minutes so as to ensure Finn's continued safety. Those calls would need to be made from landlines.

Finn worked quickly. The last time they'd crossed over to Walt's apartment, the Keepers had focused on the ballerina music and the unique-looking disc currently on the player. Now Finn opened the glass case and inspected the other twelve discs stored there. Unlike the one on the player, they had all been manufactured by the Music Box Company, and they all looked older than

time. They were identical—except for their titles. Finn recognized only one of the songs, “The Star-Spangled Banner.” He switched discs to make sure the music on the disc was as labeled. It was.

With the chords of the national anthem plucking out of the music box, Finn kept searching for something to explain the cryptic message Wayne had left him. His mentor had engraved the back of his wristwatch with images and a false address. Then he’d concocted an elaborate plan to pass his watch along to Finn. There had to be a reason. True, the images on the watch had ended up saving Disneyland, but the reasoning behind the false address was still a mystery, one that haunted Wayne’s protégé.

Finn scoured the music box for a disguised switch or button to release a hidden drawer. Nothing.

The center drawer remained locked, with no key anywhere. Taking a deep breath, Finn reached his version 1.6 hologram hand through the face of the locked drawer. The tricky part was allowing his hand to go slightly solid in order to feel around, which caused intense, burning pain in his wrist where it made contact with the drawer. The first few tries proved too painful; he yanked his hand back.

On his third try, he worked fast in order to keep the pain to a minimum. He shoved his hand inside; his

fingers found the metal tab that locked the drawer, and he rotated it. The drawer unlocked.

Finn withdrew a larger vinyl disc, one that didn't match the others in the set. Its label was marked WK. Wayne Kresky.

His heart pounding with joy and surprise at the discovery, Finn looked around the small apartment and, disc in hand, approached an old gramophone across the room.

It took him a moment to realize that the device wasn't electric. You had to crank a handle on the side. Finn did so, and the gramophone disc played. After a few seconds of crackling static, a man's voice said,

*"Match the music to the source.*

*Ride the tune on a Christmas horse.*

*Transported now, you're right on course."*

Finn played it twice before returning the disc to the drawer, which he locked painfully. He then called Philby from the apartment phone—the first of his required check-ins—and explained his find.

"The label says WK; the voice is scratchy but close to Wayne's. You still think I'm nuts?"

"Hey, I crossed you over. Don't lay that on me!"

"I could use a little support here," Finn said.

“You have more than you know.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Finn asked.

“I convinced Maybeck and Charlene to cross over into MK and check out Wayne’s apartment.”

“You . . . did . . . not!”

“I didn’t tell you because I was afraid they might bail. But they went ahead. Granted, I knew they missed each other, what with Maybeck being in Orlando and Charlie doing that show out west, but for whatever reason, they agreed.”

“So you bribed them.”

“I found effective motivation. I study physics, Finn. I understand leverage. Call me back in ten minutes. Promise you won’t do anything until then.”

Philby hung up before Finn had a chance to argue.