

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY PRESENTS



# THE BLACKGAARD CHRONICLES™



BOOK FOUR

## ROOK'S RUSE



PHIL LOLLAR

# THE BLACKGAARD CHRONICLES™

BOOK FOUR

## ROOK'S RUSE



# THE BLACKGAARD CHRONICLES™

BOOK FOUR

## ROOK'S RUSE



PHIL LOLLAR



*Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.*  
*Carol Stream, Illinois*



The Blackgaard Chronicles: *Rook's Ruse*

© 2019 Focus on the Family. All rights reserved.

Illustrations © 2019 Focus on the Family

A Focus on the Family book published by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188

*Focus on the Family*, *Adventures in Odyssey*, and their accompanying logos and designs are federally registered trademarks of Focus on the Family, 8605 Explorer Drive, Colorado Springs, CO 80920. The Blackgaard Chronicles is a trademark of Focus on the Family.

*TYNDALE* and Tyndale's quill logo are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission of Focus on the Family.

This book is based on *Adventures in Odyssey* audio drama episodes “The Battle, Part 1” and “The Battle, Part 2”—original scripts by Phil Lollar.

Novelization by Phil Lollar

Editors: Larry Weeden and Beth Robinson

Cover design by Jacob Isom

Cover illustration by Gary Locke

For Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data for this title, visit:  
<http://www.loc.gov/help/contract-general.html>.

For manufacturing information regarding this product, please call 1-800-323-9400.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Tyndale House Publishers at [csresponse@tyndale.com](mailto:csresponse@tyndale.com), or call 1-800-323-9400.

ISBN 978-1-58997-344-2

Printed in China

25	24	23	22	21	20	19
7	6	5	4	3	2	1

**D**on't miss *Opening Moves*, *Pawn's Play*, and *Cross-Check*, books 1, 2, and 3 in The Blackgaard Chronicles book series. Available from better bookstores everywhere and at [www.WhitsEnd.org/Store](http://www.WhitsEnd.org/Store).

The Blackgaard Chronicles are based on the popular Adventures in Odyssey (AIO) audio drama series. Learn more at [www.oaclub.org](http://www.oaclub.org), including how to get access to the complete library of AIO episodes, exclusive AIO radio dramas, daily devotions, and much more.

## CHAPTER ONE



**A**-choo!

Dr. Regis Blackgaard pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his nose. “Dusty down here,” he muttered. “But then, it is a tunnel.” He replaced his handkerchief in his pocket, retrieved a folded parchment from a different pocket, unfolded it, and shone his flashlight on it.

It was a very old map detailing an intricate network of tunnels under the town of Odyssey. He held the flashlight

between his teeth, the beam still illuminating the map, and from yet a third pocket, he pulled out a compass. He checked the direction of the needle and mentally calculated how far he had come and how much farther he had to go. Not far. Three more turns and he would arrive at his destination. He replaced the compass in his pocket, removed the flashlight from his mouth, and trudged forward.

*Splash!*

“Ugh! It’s wet down here too.” He shook the water and mud from his polished Italian-made calfskin loafers and continued on. “Should’ve worn heavier shoes.”

He made one last turn, shone his flashlight down the dark tunnel in front of him, and followed the beam another twenty-five feet or so until it intersected at a T with another tunnel. He checked the map. If his calculations were correct, a left turn would take him out of the tunnels and into McAlister Park, while a right turn would lead him straight under the former Fillmore Recreation Center, now known as Whit’s End. This was it; it had to be.

He folded and replaced the map in his coat pocket and then moved several feet into the left tunnel. He stopped, pulled a test tube from his coat, fished a switchblade knife from his pants pocket, clicked it open, and scraped a goodly amount of soil from the tunnel wall into the tube. He corked the tube, labeled it, and returned it to his coat. He then retraced his footsteps back to the T intersection, retrieved another test tube from his coat, scraped more soil from the tunnel wall into it, corked and labeled it, and put it back in his coat. He then went down the Whit's End portion of the tunnel and repeated the process.

Once he had pocketed the last tube, he looked at his knife for a long moment. He was suddenly very tempted to continue down the hallway and right into Whit's End, snoop around down in the basement for a while, perhaps go upstairs for a sundae at the soda fountain, and then use the knife to retrieve the other test sample he needed. But no—there would be time for that later.

He was almost certain Whittaker was aware of these

tunnels; in fact, they were probably the reason he had outmaneuvered Councilman Glossman in purchasing the Fillmore Recreation Center five years ago. The old man was much smarter than he liked to let on. He and Whittaker would confront each other soon enough; there was no need to push things. Meanwhile, there were tests to run on the samples he had just collected.

He folded his knife, slipped it back in his pants pocket, pulled out the map, shone his flashlight on it, and headed back to Blackgaard's Castle.



“Well?” Blackgaard tapped his foot impatiently. He glared at the oily black hair that covered the back of the head of a brown-skinned man. The man wore a white lab coat and leaned over a microscope. No answer.

“Hakim, I’m waiting,” he growled.

“Patience, my friend,” came the reply, in a cultured Middle Eastern accent. “One cannot rush science.”

Blackgaard sighed, crossed his arms, and looked

around the laboratory he had outfitted in the secret room under Blackgaard's Castle. It was still pristine, except for the places where he had tracked in mud from the tunnel. The laboratory was also somewhat cluttered with boxes, some of which hadn't yet been opened. He noticed the company label was still on many of them: Edgebiter Chemical. Blackgaard made a note to have Hakim remove the labels. He would need the company for future operations; there was no sense in needlessly exposing them at present.

Above the laboratory where he and Hakim were currently, the finishing touches were being put on the arcade and game room in time for the grand opening of Blackgaard's Castle next week. And though the possibility of one of the workers—or even Glossman or Maxwell—stumbling in on them was remote, he wasn't taking any chances.

Blackgaard's Castle. He smiled at the name. Perhaps he should instead employ his family's original surname: *Blagueur*. But maybe not—it was too French for the people in Middle America Odyssey. Besides, he had

worked hard to make “Blackgaard” a name to be respected and feared. It was no small task, considering what it really meant. A *blagueur* is a jester, a joker, a prankster, even a liar. He chuckled. *That fits dear brother Eddie perfectly*, he thought. But a “blackgaard” or “blaggard” is the lowest of the low, a menial, a scoundrel, a cad—*which fits me perfectly*. He chuckled wryly again.

There was nothing amusing about the reason behind their family name change, though. His mother instituted it when they all left the Netherlands and went to live with her parents in England after World War II. All, that is, except for his father, Jannus.

The family hadn’t seen him since he joined the Waffen-SS Volunteer Grenadier Brigade Landstorm Nederland. And that suited Blackgaard perfectly, though he sometimes wondered where his father ended up after the war.

When the Canadian armies liberated the Netherlands, his mother had moved with her twin boys to England to live with her family. Afraid that the stigma of her husband’s German association would

follow them, she gave the immigration officials her maiden name, Barnett. Eddie didn't seem to care, but Regis remembered pitching a perfect fit about it. For some reason he didn't understand. He didn't want to be a Barnett. He raised such a ruckus that he recalled the security guards looking in their direction and some even taking a few steps toward them.

Panicked, his mother capitulated and gave the immigration agent their actual name. But when the agent mispronounced "Blagueur" as "Blagaard," Regis decided he liked the sound of it even better and told his mother "Blagaard" would be just fine. Eddie still didn't seem to care. So their mother kept the new name, albeit with a slightly different spelling. She filled out the immigration form as "Yvette Blackgaard," and under "Children," she listed her twin sons, "Edwin" and "Regis." Under "Spouse," she wrote "deceased."

In school, their name was the object of much teasing and ridicule—at first. Regis soon saw to it that the name became a rumored force to be reckoned with. Schoolmates who snickered at it would find their

homework shredded or their lunch infested with bugs or their gym shoes filled with mud. And a teacher who mocked the name wound up in the hospital when the front tire on his car suddenly flew off as he was rounding a curve on a country lane. “Somehow” the bolts holding the tire in place had loosened and fallen away. Though no one could ever conclusively trace any of these events back to Regis, everyone knew who was responsible. As a result, they feared him and his name. And he liked that.

When the time came to go to university, Edwin studied acting and the arts at a British academy, while Regis pursued behavioral sciences at the University of Vienna. He excelled at his studies and eventually transferred to America to do his doctoral work at UC Berkeley. There he met Professor M, a brilliant chemist, who confided in him about a project that was so astounding, Regis could scarcely believe his ears, and yet, if true, it would change the world. That project had sent Regis Blackgaard all over the planet and had finally led him here, to Odyssey, and to the soil his own chemist now examined.

Hakim rose from his microscope, took off his glasses, pulled a handkerchief from his pocket, and began polishing the lenses. "Interesting," he muttered.

Blackgaard stopped tapping his foot and uncrossed his arms. "What is? Tell me, Hakim! Is it there or not?"

Hakim put on his glasses, stuffed the handkerchief back in his pocket, and turned to face his boss. "Oh, yes. The mineral is there all right, and in great quantities."

Blackgaard smiled. "Excellent."

"That's what I find so interesting."

"What do you mean?"

Hakim shrugged. "I'm not sure why you think this particular mineral is so 'excellent.' It's just a mineral, and a completely inert one at that. It has no particular value. I can't understand why it's so important to you."

Blackgaard chuckled softly. "That is not your concern at present." He retrieved his cane and headed for the door leading into the hallway. "Thank you, Hakim. That will be all for now. Do clean up before you go—through the tunnel, of course."

“Certainly.”

Blackgaard stopped at the door. “Oh, and please remove the remaining labels from these boxes and turn out the lights when you leave.”

Hakim bowed slightly. “As you wish.”

Blackgaard opened the sealed door to the lab, stepped into the hallway, and closed it behind him, making certain he heard the soft *click* of the security latch. He then pushed several stacks of boxes in place to conceal the door completely.

He heard the workers in the main room above still slaving away and knew he should check on their progress—the grand opening was this weekend. But he needed to change clothes first—he had a spare suit and shoes in the office.

He hoped Maxwell wasn't there; the young man would certainly notice the dust and mud and ask unneeded questions about them. Then again, he didn't want to stifle Maxwell's progress. For all of his snide remarks and rude behavior, surprisingly, he had turned out to be a hard worker—or at least he appeared that

way. Who knew what was really going on with computer experts? It was unnerving.

Maxwell claimed to be setting up a “network,” whatever that was, to control all the machines at Blackgaard’s Castle and had been laying cable throughout the interior of the building. And yet, as of yesterday, he still hadn’t finished setting up the main computer system in the office, which was the whole point of even having computers here in the first place. “Perhaps today . . .” Blackgaard muttered.

He opened the office door. “Or . . . not.” The computer system still sat in boxes on and beside the desk. Blackgaard growled. “Time to lean on the sniveling little wretch again.” He closed the door and crossed the room to an antique wardrobe, opened the mirrored doors, retrieved his spare suit and shoes from it, and headed for the bathroom.

His shoes really were a fright—caked with so much dirt and mud from the tunnel that he probably could have gotten the samples he needed from them instead of the tunnel walls. He removed a small chunk of mud

from one sole and slowly rubbed it between his finger and thumb. Hakim could not have been more wrong. Professor M had told him the mineral in this soil was the catalyst of great power—and in more ways than one.

He hadn't believed the old man at first; one of the uses of the mineral was too outlandish and astonishing to be believed. But the other use was confirmed when a connection at the Department of Defense relayed information that they were working with the National Security Agency on a formula involving this mineral—a formula for a devastating weapon. A current operative at the agency had created the formula, with the assistance of a former operative: one John Avery Whittaker.

And their formula, rumor had it, was embedded in a powerful program on a secret computer concealed inside Whittaker's discovery emporium and soda shop.

A program called Applesauce.