

“Here!” Dan called out.

He was standing in front of a group of larger rock formations that blocked their view of the beach they had seen earlier. The cave was in a natural depression. From the shore, the rocks looked no taller than Dan, but the seabed sloped lower here. The rocks were taller than Nellie, and the water was up to Dan’s waist.

The girls joined him. The cave opening was a little wider than one person but not quite wide enough for two, and just high enough so that Nellie could have entered without ducking. Dan picked up a stone from the seabed and threw it into the opening.

It made only a splashing sound, which meant that it hadn’t hit a wall.

“It goes in pretty far,” he said.

“Ta-da,” Nellie said, taking the coil of rope off her shoulder and holding it up.

They tied themselves together: one end of the rope around Dan’s waist, a couple of yards of slack between him and Amy, and Nellie holding the coil.

“If you’re not back in fifteen minutes, I’m coming in after you,” Nellie said.

Dan was already inside the cave. “Here, kitty kitty kitty,” he called. “Meow? Anybody home?”

“Wait,” Amy said. She turned back toward Nellie. “We’ll pull twice if—if we need you to come in before that,” she said.

Nellie nodded. She leaned against a rock a few feet away from the entrance and got busy tying the rope around her waist.

Amy took a few steps through the water, then paused again. One more step and she’d be in the full gloom of the cave. She looked around carefully. Once, when they were in a tomb, they had missed an important hint that was right on the stairs as they entered. She didn’t want to make the same mistake again.

“Dan!” she said, her voice quiet but urgent.

She was looking at the wall right above the cave entrance.

At a crude carving of a bear — the top half, its head and front paws, with their vicious claws.

The symbol of the Tomas clan.

