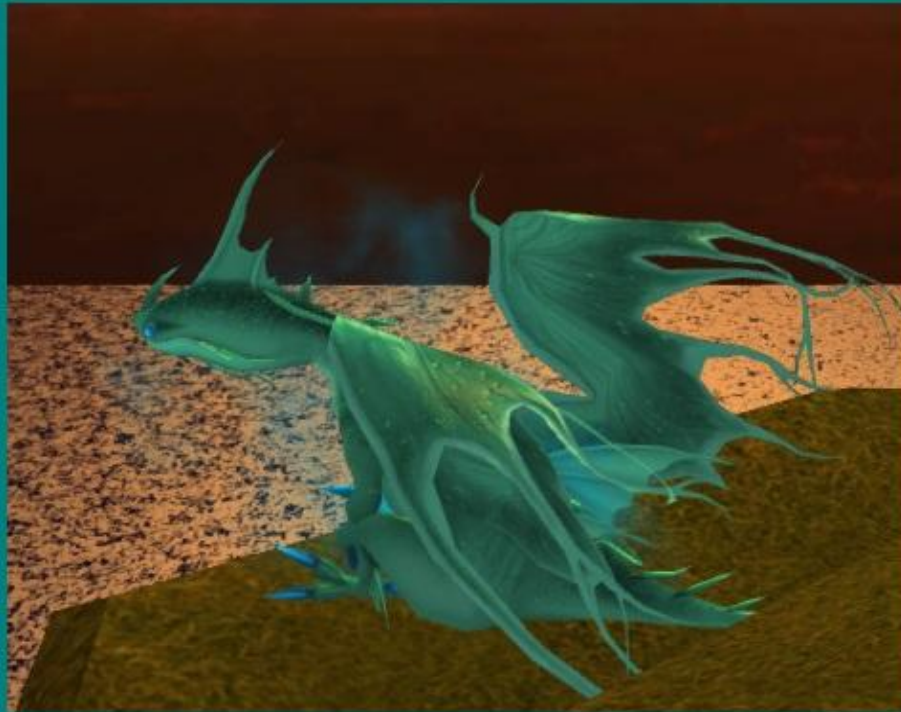


# How To Train a **DREADSTRIDER!**



**By Kaiser Slogum**

**This book is dedicated  
in memory of Danielle Juno (DJ)  
The best friend anyone could have**

How To Train A Dreadstrider, First Edition, revised and updated.

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For information address HamsterPublishers Inc.

Cover Art: Copyright by School of Dragons

Editing: Kaiser Slocum

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For information, please contact: [slocumkaiser@gmail.com](mailto:slocumkaiser@gmail.com)

Or visit: <http://citstudent.lanecc.edu/~slocumk473/HowToTrainADreadstrider/buyPage.html>

Designed by Kaiser Slocum

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Slocum, Kaiser Peter

How To Train A Dreadstrider / Kaiser Slocum

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# Table of Contents

<b>Opener</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Chapter 2</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Chapter 3</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Chapter 4</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Chapter 7</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Chapter 8</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Chapter 9</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>Chapter 10</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Character Relations:</b>	<b>98</b>

## Opener

Honestly, I don't know why I'm doing this. I guess it's mostly just for Hiccup. If I had my way, I would have just let these eggs get destroyed; it's not my duty as chief dragon to tend to a bunch of eggs that aren't mine. But then, when I thought of Hiccup, I couldn't bear the thought of what he would say to me if I let that happen – no matter what the dragon egg was. So here I am, flying above an endless array of dark storm clouds and trying to breathe with two large eggs in my mouth.

After a good hour of flying, I figured that I was coming close to New Berk, so I dove underneath the clouds and met the heavy rainfall. Unfortunately, I could barely see anything, but what I could see was just water. I knew New Berk was around here *somewhere*, but it was so hard to find it when the clouds were so high and everything was so dark. Thus, I pumped my wings and flew over the clouds again. After another hour of diving and climbing, I still hadn't found New Berk. *Well, you did all you could Toothless, if you can't find the island, you can't find it. Time to head home and rid yourselves of these eggs.* And yet, I felt like I had to try *one* more time. So, breathing a deep sigh, I dove underneath the clouds and almost collided with a tall rock spire. *Finally!* I expertly glided to a flat patch of rock and got a good look at my surroundings as rain poured over me and lightning and thunder flashed a few miles away.

*Wait a minute! This isn't New Berk! New Berk is considerably more green, whereas this place was almost all just rock.* As I thought about where I could possibly be, I sensed two figures to my left. I growled deeply and hunkered down underneath a rock overhang. To my right now, two girls appeared. When they reached a large mud puddle, one of them pulled out a shovel and began heaping great amounts of mud into the bucket held by the other.

Then, I recognized them. They were the children of Ruffnut and Tuffnut. My legs were already starting to cramp up, and I really wanted to get back to the Hidden World, so I figured that I could leave the eggs with the girls, and they could get them to Hiccup. Despite their shortcomings, Ruffnut and Tuffnut had always proved to be reliable on important matters. So I emerged from the outcropping and walked right on over to them. The girl shoveling the mud was so surprised that she fell backward into the mud puddle. The other girl, seeing this as an opportune time, dumped her bucket of mud on the fallen girl's head. After depositing the two eggs in front of them, I took back off - sensing their eyes following me as I shot back up into the clouds.

*Whew!* I was finally done and could go home to get some rest.

## Chapter 1

"A little over to the left. Wait, NO!, to the right – TO – THE – RIGHT!!!!!" screamed Magur at me. "I'm trying!" I shouted back at him, "But it's hard to direct it into place and communicate with a flying Dreadstrider at the same time."

"It's just a small log. What's your problem?" Magur taunted.

"Well then," I said as I finally guided the freshly cut log into place over the building, "How about you direct Powder with the next one, and I'll help Slizer lift some of the wall pieces up."

At this turn of events, Powder growled with displeasure, but I silenced him with a finger to my lips.

"Give it a try," I said gallantly – gesturing with my hand towards the several ropes that were strapped to Powder.

"Alright then," Magur said confidently. He walked over to another one of the monstrous logs used for the small houses we were setting up and carefully tied Powder's ropes to it.

"Up!" he commanded Powder. With a monstrous heave and a little help from me standing nearby, Powder did manage to get the log into the air. However, he also moved a little forward in the process (as was the habit for dragons gaining altitude, or so my dad said). Thus the huge log plowed straight into Magur.

Five minutes later and still holding his head, Magur said weakly, "I'll let you manage Powder."

"Good idea!" I told him, "Come on, Powder! If we finish the roof on this house we can go to the beach!" I knew Powder loved the beach, so I hoped I could get a little more work out of him.

Powder was a teenage Dreadstrider, a cross between a Flightmare and a Speed Stinger. His Speed Stinger dad, Slizer, was still alive and currently helping Magur snap the wooden walls of this house into place. I had found Slizer's egg frozen in an icicle about nine years ago, and now he knew everyone and everything pretty well. In addition, he was well acquainted with the habits of humans and worked well with almost anyone. On the other hand, Powder was just a little over half a year old, and considerably more aggressive than Slizer. However, Powder could fly, and Slizer couldn't, which made Powder perfect for lifting the roof logs into the air and to where they belonged. On the other hand, Powder was more playful and excited, which made him less suited to doing jobs which required considerable amounts of concentration and patience.

With a last grunt from both man and dragon, I heaved the final log in place on the Glears' new home.

"Alright, Powder," I told him, "Let's go pick up your dad and head to the beach!" A few meters away, Slizer was now helping drag particularly large logs from the forest into the clearing where we could process them. Powder and I watched as Slizer and Tweary maneuvered the logs towards our construction zone – neither of us wanted to help but we both probably felt bad about not. That's when I heard a young voice behind me.

"Excuse me, Kaizar. Could I, I mean, would you – allow me to ride Slizer for a little bit?" I turned around to see the Glears' son looking up at me with big, pleading eyes. I couldn't quite remember his name, but I knew how much it meant to the younger kids to get a ride on Slizer. I smiled a huge grin and said, "How about you and I ride Powder instead?"

The kid's eyes got even bigger, and he quickly answered, "Yes please!"

Slizer had amazing ears, and I knew he could quickly catch up, so I jumped on top of Powder and hoisted up the boy onto my lap. I grabbed firmly on Powder's light, leather saddle and gently squeezed Powder's body. With a fast running start, Powder blasted into the air and pumped his wings rapidly to gain altitude. Within seconds, we were soaring through the air towards the East beach. The small boy screamed with pleasure and practically wrenched off my arms trying to hold on (with practice I realized that you don't need to hold on nearly as tightly as you think while flying a dragon).

"What's your name again?" I asked the boy.

"Gartley," he replied through big breaths.

"Well, Gartley, let's see what Powder can do!" I told him

"Wait, do you think that's a – AAAH!" the boy screamed as I directed Powder through a sharp 360 degree turn and then proceeded to do a few corkscrews. The only thing more fun than riding Slizer was riding Powder, for sure. When the boy finally caught his breath, Powder did one of his famous dives down toward the beach below – sending the poor boy into another cascade of screams.

Finally on solid ground, Gartley sighed deeply.

"That was so much fun, but also super scary!" he told me.

"Yep, it took me a lot of practice to get used to him."

"Hey look! It's Slizer," Gartley said, pointing behind me.

Sure enough, Slizer was quickly bearing down upon us from above the last big hill. When he reached us, he kept on running by and plowed into Powder – causing them both to roll around in the sand in a mock fight.

"How come Powder can already fly?" Gartley wanted to know.

"That's because Dreadstriders grow really fast," I told Gartley, "or so my Dad and Hiccup said."

"Why don't they have to go to the Hidden World with all the other dragons?" Gartley asked again.

"Well, Dreadstriders and other dragons normally don't get along with anyone but their parents, so I don't think Powder could ever go, but Slizer may be able to someday. Last time, he didn't want to, but who knows?"

"Cool, I hope Powder stays with us forever!" Gartley announced to me. As much as I agreed, I couldn't help but think that we were in the dire situation we were in now because of Slizer, a dragon. Wanting to capture the dragon, the War Lords from the North had attacked us during the summer and killed many of our people as well as devastated our island in the process. Only about 30% of our tribe lived, but our consolation was that we dealt an even bigger blow to the War Lords' boat armada (whose masts could still be seen sticking out of the water everywhere in our main bay) and their soldier forces.

"Wanna build a small sand castle?" I asked Gartley.

"Sure, but we probably should get back soon to keep on helping out," Gartley said as he ran off to find some shells.

"Thanks Mom!" I yelled to him sarcastically.

We were just putting on the finishing touches to our sand fort (as Powder had destroyed it twice before), when our only functioning warning horn blasted.

Both Gartley and I stood up quickly and scanned the watery horizon.

"Is that a ship?" Gartley said, pointing to a small dark object in front of us (to the island's east). I nodded grimly, "Let's hope it's just one. You take Slizer back to the village, and I'll check out the boat with Powder."

Gartley obeyed immediately, but he was still small so I had to help him onto Slizer's saddle. My Dad, Mom, and I had carefully crafted a saddle for both Slizer and Powder that was both comfortable for them and the rider as well as light so it could be left on all day. Having been promoted to leader of section "Dragon" last spring by my uncle/king/chief Dagur, I commanded attention with the younger warriors of our tribe (though they also realized that I was a normal person as well – hence Gartley getting along so nicely with me).

As Slizer took off back towards the village and with the warning horn practically breaking my ear drums (despite it being at least two miles away), I mounted Powder, and we flew off toward the incoming boat.

"Let's get a little more altitude," I told Powder. Thankfully, the sky was pretty clear of clouds, so we could get high without losing visibility. As we approached the ship, it became clear that there were only two of them but perfectly in line with each other. When we were high enough to be out of arrows' range, I nudged Powder into a large circle over the incoming boats and carefully scrutinized them.

"Oh, are you ready to meet the famous Wing Maidens, boy?" I asked Powder, patting him on the back of his head, "Let's go down and say 'Hello!'"

Powder immediately dove straight downwards. I still wasn't used to his steep dives, but Dad said he hadn't seen any dragon that loved to dive so steeply, so I guess that I had the exception. At the last possible minute, Powder straightened out and came to an abrupt halt on the deck, which completely dislodged me from the saddle and flung me across the deck. Luckily, I know how to land. With a quick Berserker roll and traction flip, I righted myself and slid to a halt right next to a short, stocky man.

"Well, well, well. Look who showed up first?" he said.

"What's up Snotlout?" I replied, "I see you're just as adventurous as normal, huh?"

"You know me!" Snotlout announced, "I wanted to come over and visit and see how life on your island's doing."

"Well, it's not as nice as it used to be, but you're welcome to it," I replied. Meanwhile, Powder had come up alongside me and was looking at Snotlout.

"Is it just me or has Slizer sprouted wings?" Snotlout wanted to know.

"Don't be silly honey," said a middle aged lady coming up from behind Snotlout, "That's probably the death-strider or something that Sulpher was telling us about."

"Oh, yes, of course," Snotlout quickly agreed, "I was just going to say that."

Needless to say, Snotlout always made me laugh.

"So, uh, where's Sulpher?" I asked Minden.

"Oh, she's on the other boat behind us," Minden replied, "Where should we dock?"

"Oh, um, I'd recommend docking on the East beach over there, because the main docks are filled with lots of pointy masts that are big hazards."

"Okay," Minden replied, "Tira? Aim for that beach over there. We'll anchor a little ways out and take the rowboats in." On the second deck of the ship, another Wing Maiden standing at the

ship's wheel turned the ship towards the East dock. Behind us, the other Wing Maiden vessel followed in perfect tandem.

"Excuse me, but does anyone else hear that *awful* racket?" Snotlout asked – pointing in the direction of the Berserker warning horn.

"Yes, actually. That would be our warning horn," I told him.

"Why would your warning horn be going off? Are you being invaded?" Snotlout asked.

"Only by you!" I laughed, "Let's just hope they don't fire that spear crossbow at us before they realize who we are!"

"Their what?!" Snotlout exclaimed.

"Hey, did you get a new hammer?" I asked Snotlout.

"Yep! He replied proudly, pulling the hammer off his back. The other one was getting too small and light – so, I upgraded!" Sure enough the hammer was bigger than the last one he had. The rock hammer was so large it probably weighed about as much as I did. I had no idea how he could handle such a heavy weapon, although I guessed it had something to do with his massive muscles.

When we came within rowing distance of the East beach, both of the Wing Maiden ships dropped their anchors and lowered their row boats.

"If it's okay with you. I'm going to pick Sulpher up," I told Minden and Snotlout as they pulled a few boxes of supplies into their row boats. I hopped onto Powder, and we swiftly flew to the other ship. Like the other Wing Maiden ship, this ship had at least a dozen Wing Maidens hustling about doing odd jobs and such, but unlike the other ship, this one was considerably more weighed down with weapons and catapults. Off to the side was a girl about my age staring up at Powder and I as we alighted onto the deck. The other Wing Maidens barely gave us a second glance, but the girl did the opposite.

"KAIZAR!" she screamed, running up to me.

"Roar!" Powder growled, planting himself in between Sulpher and I.

"Woah boy, it's okay. I'm Sulpher," She told Powder. I gently placed my hand on Powder's back to let him know it was okay, and he grudgingly moved aside.

"So this is your Dreadstrider?" Sulpher said, gesturing to Powder.

"Yep, and he's a lot more aggressive and protective than Slizer," I told her.

"You said you'd visit!" Sulpher teased me.

"Well, I was planning on it, but I never really got the time. You'll see what I mean when you come to the village," I told her.

Sulpher gave me a big; then I offered to take her for a ride on Powder.

"I'd love to!" she told me. I let Sulpher sit in front, and I sat behind her. Thus, it was a little squished, but I figured we could manage - though Powder wasn't happy about it.

With a quick nudge, we soared into the air.

"Woah," Sulpher breathed, "This is awesome." We blasted by the Wing Maidens rowing toward the beach and onto the main land. Then, Powder banked to the left and started climbing up as we headed toward the village.

"I've missed you a lot, and so has Slizer!" I told Sulpher as she looked at the scenery below.

"Me too, but I see what you mean. Your island is a wreck – there's hardly any greenery around the base of this mountain," Sulpher replied.



"Yeah, the elders are worried that we may not be able to survive the winter here with the meager amount of supplies we have."

"It's a shame really. All the hurt and pain that those War Lords caused to just get a dragon that they never ended up getting."

"Tell me about it," I muttered.

"Hey, are those your parents?" Sulpher said, pointing to two people in the midst of a large group of warriors all heading to the East beach.

"Yep, and maybe we should tell them that we aren't being invaded," I wisely considered.

"Ya' know, that may be a good idea..." Sulpher commented.

I forced Powder into a gentle dive that curved around the group, and we landed shortly next to my Uncle Dagur and Aunt Mala.

"It's just the Wing Maidens!" I told them.

"We know," Mala said, "One of our lookouts told us just before we left."

"Who's this?" Dagur said, pointing to Sulpher.

Sulpher and I slid off Powder, and Sulpher introduced herself, "I'm Sulpher Jorgenson, daughter of the great Snotlout and Minden Jorgenson."

"Good to meet you," Dagur said, shaking Sulpher's hand in his usual death grip – which Sulpher managed to return. (Sulpher was also super strong - I guess it ran in the family)

"I don't know how *great* he is," Dad told Sulpher and I as we walked along.

"It's just for affect," I told Dad, "Just like I'd say I'm the son of the great Fishlegs and Heather Ingerman."

"Ha, and you really aren't a great warrior – just a superbly smart friend," Mom chimed in.

"Well that's very kind of you; I think..." Dad replied.

"Kaizar!"

I recognized Bartley's voice and turned around to see him approaching – still on Slizer.

"I see you enjoy your ride!" I told him, "You're really learning fast!"

"That's me!" Bartley announced. When he reached Sulpher and I, he expertly slid off and ran off to find his parents in the massive greeting party.

"You wanna take Slizer, and I'll ride Powder?" I told Sulpher. Sulpher smiled and climbed on Slizer who danced around with excitement to see Sulpher again. I had forgotten how well Sulpher and Slizer got along.

"So," Sulpher told me once we were back on our way near the end of the party, "What have I missed?"

"Oh, not much. We've pretty much just been planting what crops we can – wherever we can – and rebuilding as many shacks and houses as we can. Powder hatched pretty quickly after we arrived back here, and I've been busy training him to help with various chores as well as keep under control. He's still a teenager you know!"

"He's grown so much! It's so hard to believe that those Dreadstriders can grow so fast," Sulpher commented.

"Yeah, I know right?"

We rode on for a little while in silence before Sulpher asked another question, "So, uh, what kinds of friends do you have?"

"Oh, well, I don't really have any best friends, but I get along nicely with everyone in the village. I typically just hang out with my parents and Slizer and Powder," I replied.

"Do you have any girlfriends?" Sulpher wanted to know next.

Now that I thought about it, I couldn't think of any girls in the village that I came in contact with on a regular basis. Even during warrior training school, I worked primarily with boys.

"Actually no, none but you and whatever you could count Puffnut, Nuffnut and Zephyr as," I told her.

"Oh."

Our caravan of Berserkers and Defenders of the Wing carried on for a while before we met up with the Wing Maidens who had just offloaded on the East beach.

"Snothat! My! How you've grown!" Dagur yelled across to him.

"You've gotten old, Dag-Big Face!" Snotlout yelled back.

Dagur, enraged on multiple levels by the comment, charged Snotlout. However, Snotlout met Dagur's frontal attack with a punch to the stomach. Dagur was obviously not ready for this and was launched backward a good few meters.

"Oh, yeah! That felt good. You can't boss me around anymore, Dagster, and I don't even have Hookfang!" Snotlout announced proudly.

Dagur stood up and fell into a boxing stance, but Mala pushed him out of the way and shook hands formally with Snotlout.

"Nice to see you master Snotlout. I trust your travels have been safe?" Mala said.

"Without a hitch. You've met my wife Minden?"

Minden and Mala shook hands, and Atali came over to shake hands as well.

"We realize we weren't exactly invited, but I wanted to come over and see how our neighbors are doing," Atali explained.

"Well, you are very welcome here. As you can see, our island isn't in the best of condition and our accommodations aren't very good, but you're welcome to whatever you can find," Mala graciously answered.

"Nah, we're good. Why I remember sleeping out multiple times in our Dragon Training Arena with just a blanket and Hookfang," Snotlout said.

"Yeah, my back still remembers," Dad added.

"Why don't you come this way," Mala said gesturing towards the path we had just taken from the main village.

The way back to the village was fraught with conversations and remembrances of old times. During the chaos, Sulpher (with Slizer) and I were separated, so Powder and I just walked along with everyone else. When we reached the village, Mala led the head Wing Maidens and the elders of our village (including Mom and Dad) into the biggest building we had, which served as our meeting area. I followed along, but Dagur wouldn't let me in.

"You're not a village elder, Kaizar," he said.

"Yeah, but I'm an important part!" I declared.

"So are all the Wing Maidens, but they can't *all* come in," Dagur stated, "Move on."

"But *Uncle*, can't you make an exception."

"No exceptions," Dagur said again as he let Magur inside, "Well, except my son."

Magur grinned at me as Dagur slammed the door shut behind him.

I backed off with Powder and found a nice big log to sit on near another building that was half finished.

"How come *they* get to have all the important meetings, Powder?" I asked him.

Powder didn't seem to care but was sniffing around for something too much. Unlike his mom, Powder didn't need to just eat glowing algae. He could also eat most grains and vegetables as well as meats like his dad.

As I was sitting there, I noticed Sulpher and Slizer over by the meeting hall, and Sulpher had her ear pressed up against one of the walls.

*What was she doing?*

I pulled an apple out of my side bag and fed it to Powder who eagerly wolfed it down, but I kept an eye on Sulpher. Presently, she hopped back onto Slizer, and they came straight towards me.

"Kaizar!" she called, "I thought you were in there with them!"

"I thought so too, but my uncle wouldn't let me!" I replied.

"That's too bad," Sulpher said while dismounting Slizer and sitting next to me on the log, "Dad wouldn't let me participate either – that's why I eavesdropped on what they were talking about."

"What'd they say?" I asked.

"Oh, they were just talking about the island's conditions and your tribes' chance of survival here. I guess your relatives are considering temporarily moving to our tribe," Sulpher explained.

"Well, that'd be interesting. I just can't imagine they'd agree to that. We've been here for so long, and we're pretty proud of our island," I replied.

Sulpher shrugged her shoulders, "We'll see."

We sat there for a while looking at the horde of Berserkers and Wing Maidens milling about and trying to find something productive to do, but all wanting to be in on the meeting.

"Well," I finally said, "It's getting close to evening, so maybe you want to go on a flight with me?"

"Sure, but how about a run; so I can be on Slizer," Sulpher replied.

"Works with me!"

I whistled over to my dragons and mounted Powder.

"Where are we going?" Sulpher wanted to know.

"I don't know. Just around the island I guess. Anything to keep my mind off the meeting," I chuckled.

Despite the lack of greenery and majority of scarred earth, the jaunt was quite nice and the evening sky was glorious. I decided on a roundabout but fairly level path around the mountain that I used to train Slizer and Powder for speed running.

"I can just imagine what this place looked like before the great battle!" Sulpher said as she rode alongside me.

"Yeah, there were lots of flowers up there, and a really nice green forest over there," I pointed out.

"What's your favorite place to view the island?" Sulpher asked.

"Hmm, well, I guess it's a little place up the mountain a ways. There's this perfect ledge where Slizer and I would play 'scout'."

"Can we go there?"

"Well, I guess, but we'll have to make it quick because the sun is already starting to set."

We continued along the main path for a mile; then I took a side trail that rose steeply up around the mountain. After another mile, I took a very small, faint trail to a large flat ledge that projected out over the village which was many miles down below.

"This is it!" I told Sulpher as I got off Powder and sat down on the grassy null, "One of the few places left on the island with grass!"

Sulpher also got off Slizer and sat next to me on the ledge. We just sat there for a while and gazed at the island and evening sunset with glowing clouds. I guess Slizer and Powder got tired, because they curled up for a nap. Meanwhile, Sulpher rested her head up against my shoulder. I felt like this was a great moment to tell Sulpher how much I liked her, but I didn't know how to say it. All I could remember is that Dad would hold Mom's hand some nights as we all sat out on our house's back deck. So, I did that. I reached out my right hand and grabbed Sulpher's left hand in mine – gently. Sulpher smiled and didn't refuse.

"It's too bad the world has to be so violent at times and can't enjoy our moments on earth like these," Sulpher whispered silently as if talking too loudly would ruin the moment, "Kaizar?"

"Yes?"

"Part of the reason we came here is because I wanted to go to Whispering Death Island to pick up a few more scales for my projects at home," Sulpher began, "Would you like to come with me and a few Wing Maidens on a three or four day trip?"

"Yeah, that'd be nice, but I'll have to ask my parents first. They may need me here at home. Also, I'd have to bring along Slizer and Powder, because they don't like being without me for long," I replied.

Slowly, ever slowly, the sun started to disappear behind the horizon, but neither Sulpher nor I wanted to go back. Finally, I pulled the cork on the moment.

"Well, we probably should go back now," I said.

"Yeah, uh, we should... definitely go now," Sulpher agreed. I retracted my hand and stood up.

"Come on Powder. Dinner is waiting for us at home!" I told him.

At the mention of dinner, Powder awoke quickly and came over.

"Race you to the bottom?" Sulpher asked.

"See you there!"

## Chapter 2

"Really? That was the only other reason that you guys came?" I said the next morning to Snotlout and Sulpher.

"Yep! You just can't have too many of those scales!" Snotlout declared. Then, he leaned in next to me and whispered, "Plus, I'm an expert at tying them together."

"He's right," Minden agreed, completely hearing everything Snotlout said, "He is the best sewer and knot tier among us."

"If I hadn't seen your handy work, I wouldn't have believed it," Mom chimed in.

"So Heather?" Sulpher addressed Mom, "Could I borrow your son for a few days?"

"Hey," Dad interrupted, "You're supposed to ask *me* that question!"

"She recognizes authority when she sees it, and you don't have any!" Snotlout teased Dad.

"See if you ever get *any* favors from me!" Dad replied.

"Sure, but you'll have to bring his dragons along too, so you need to be careful to stay out of the way of War Lord goons," Mom answered Sulpher.

"After all, Mom," I told her, "I'm supposed to be doing exploration in keeping with my occupation's description."

"Right you are!" Dagur chimed in from halfway down the table, "Exploration *and* fighting for the Berserker cause."

"Hopefully none of that," Dad quickly added.

"We've already arranged for several of my Wing Maidens to escort them in our attack ship. If they are decently lucky, they should have it filled up with scales in two days," Snotlout told Mom, "Then, it'll take them another two days to reach Wing Maiden Island and drop most of the cargo off, and an additional few days to get back here."

"That sounds like a lot more time than it originally was supposed to be!" Mom realized aloud.

"Yeah, but I have Powder, and he can help pull the ship!" I reminded Mom.

"You've trained him to do that?" Dagur interrupted again.

"Not exactly," I mumbled, "But almost!"

No sooner had I finished my breakfast biscuits and berry jelly that the Wing Maidens had brought when Sulpher yanked me away from the table.

"Hurry up, Kaizar!" she said, "We don't have all day! Get your stuff!"

Dad was already involved in a conversation regarding the War Lords' next plans, but Mom winked at me as I was pulled outside of the food shack (as we Berserkers and Defenders of the Wing called it).

"Where's your house?" Sulpher asked me as we jogged down the street.

"It's actually just a large tent," I reminded her.

It took me about ten minutes to pack a large crate (generously provided by the Wing Maidens who were always very orderly and clean) of various supplies I would need for the week trip.

"How do I look?" I asked Sulpher as I emerged from my tent pushing the crate.

"Hey! That's the outfit I gave you last spring – complete with the helmet!" Sulpher noticed.

"Yep! This kind of trip only happens once every few years," I told her, "Well, that is – disregarding last spring."

With the help of a few strong Berserkers; a half dozen Wing Maidens, Sulpher, and I headed towards the beach to board the ship. I was carrying a large barrel of Powder and Slizer's favorite salted cod, which meant that they were both following me closely. Then again, Slizer might have just been following Sulpher since she was right next to me, but it was kind of hard to tell.

"Did any of you hear the results of last night's meeting?" I asked the group.

All of the Wing Maidens and Berserkers shook their heads, but one of the Wing Maidens said, "I overheard Snotlout say that they didn't come to any conclusion, so they are going to meet again after a day or two. I just don't know what they are making decisions about."

On that note, we trekked through the last of the East beach trail and onboard the small rowboats which would lead us out to the magnificent Wing Maiden attack ship. The ship was only as large as our average Berserker ship, but it was so perfectly made and designed that it was surely a thing of beauty to behold.

Slizer and Powder didn't look very excited to spend several days on a boat, but they didn't balk when I led them into the row boats.

"Have fun!" one of the Berserkers said, "And don't take too long, because I don't want to plow my entire field without Slizer's help!"

I smiled and waved goodbye as we pumped the oars.

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Seven hours later, Sulpher and I were eating a late lunch in the main cabin, when a Wing Maiden ran in and said, "There's something big coming toward us, and in the air!"

Sulpher and I jumped up from the table and ran outside onto the deck. I couldn't see anything, so the Wing Maiden handed me her telescope, and that's when I saw two very small specks of black coming roughly in our direction, and they were seemingly flying as well.

"What could they be?" I asked them.

"They're too big to be birds and too dark to be storm clouds," the Wing Maiden told me, "So I'd guess dragons."

"Are you sure?" Sulpher questioned, "Dragons are super rare."

"I know," the Wing Maiden replied, "But what else could they be?"

"The only black dragons I know of, are the Deathgrippers from Scout Island and the two Nightlights," I told them, "And Nuffink always rides Pouncer, which makes me pretty sure those aren't Nightlights."

"But why would there be just two Deathgrippers. Isn't that a little dangerous?" Sulpher wanted to know.

"That's my question, and I guess there's only one way to find out what they are," I told her,

"Powder and I will have to go investigate."

"Are you sure that's the best idea master Kaizar?" the Wing Maiden worried.

"We'll be safe, and Powder is a very fast flyer," I reminded her.

With a piercing whistle, I called Powder up onto the deck and mounted him.

"I'll be back in two shakes of a yak's tail!"

While the Wing Maidens loaded a few of the ship's catapults, Powder and I soared into the air.

"Climb pretty high," I told Powder, "We want to stay a good distance above them."

Powder complied, and we were soon bearing down upon the possible dragons. In about ten minutes, I pulled out the handheld telescope and looked at the large black blobs.

"Wait a minute," I told Powder, "Those aren't Deathgrippers. Those are... some really ugly dragons that I don't recognize?... but the riders are... the riders are Puffnut and Nuffnut!"

We circled high above them as they flew underneath. After another few minutes, they appeared to notice the Wing Maiden vessel and changed their course slightly – angling for the boat.

"Uh, oh," I told Powder, "We better get back and warn the Wing Maidens before they attack Puff and Nuff!"

With the speed and grace of a Dreadstrider, Powder powered through the air, easily passing up Nuffnut and Puffnut. Then, he dove sharply (like always!) and swooped to a near-perfect landing on the deck.

"Don't fire at them!" I yelled to the Wing Maidens, "It's Puffnut and Nuffnut from the Outcast tribe."

"What are *they* doing here?" Sulpher asked, coming up to me.

"I don't know, but I want to know where they got those ugly dragons," I told Sulpher.

"What'd they look like?"

"Sort of like Boneknapper, but a little sleeker and with a pointier head," I described.

"That's weird," Sulpher said while racking her brain for a dragon that fit that description.

With our boat sailing towards them, and Puffnut and Nuffnut flying towards us, it didn't take them long to reach us.

"Hi there!" Puffnut syelled to us from above. They circled the boat once; then gently came in for the landing. However, Slizer beat them to it.

Slizer had been sleeping peacefully on the deck – soaking in the sun – when suddenly he jumped to his feet and dashed to the edge of the ship. With an angry roar and a lot of snapping teeth, he tried to prevent Puffnut and Nuffnut from landing. Similarly, Puffnut's and Nuffnut's dragons seemed to get agitated and started trying to whack Slizer with their large, bludgeon-like tails.

"What's going on with Slizer?!" Sulpher panicked.

"How could I have forgotten!" I said, slapping my hand onto my forehead, "Hybrid dragons don't like normal dragons, and likewise, normal dragons don't like hybrids unless they are the parents. The rule doesn't just apply to Dreadstriders!"

"Oh," Sulpher said, connecting the dots, "Which means that Nuff and Puff's dragons are hybrids as well!"

"Exactly!"

A quick glance at Powder, who was contentedly standing next to me and looking at the chaos, confirmed my suspicion.

"Powder, spray down Slizer," I gestured to Powder – pointing at Slizer. I had been working with Powder to be able to fire his paralyzing spray on command, and I had gotten to the point where I think Powder understood. Powder did indeed understand, but he didn't want to spray his Dad.

"Come on, Powder," I said, exasperated, "You've got to do *something*."

With an agitated growl, Powder trotted over to Slizer and roared in his face. Slizer roared back, but continued to snap at Puffnut and Nuffnut's dragons. Finally, Powder opened his mouth and

blasted Slizer with a large cloud of paralyzing mist. Slizer turned his head in surprise, and promptly froze up – collapsing to the ground.

“Come on Sulpher. Let’s carry him back into the cabin,” I told her.

After Sulpher and I had finished placing him carefully in the main cabin and locking the door behind us, we went out to meet Puffnut and Nuffnut formally.

“Aaaand, he can blast lightning bolts out of his mouth that are like a hundred meters long!”

Nuffnut was telling a Wing Maiden nearby.

“Hey Kaizar!” Puffnut yelled to me, “Sorry about your Speed Stinger. I don’t know *what* his problem is!”

“Turns out he doesn’t like any hybrids that aren’t his kid,” I told Puffnut.

“Oh, yeah, that’s what your Dad said, right?” Nuffnut commented.

“Where did you get these guys?” Sulpher asked.

“Wouldn’t you like to know?” Puffnut said, “Well, one day I was trekking through the dense foliage on a random island in the archipelago when a giant hammerhead yak jumped out of the...”

“Toothless dropped their eggs off at our island,” Nuffnut interrupted.

“Hey! I wasn’t even close to finishing my story!” Puffnut yelled.

“Are you serious? Why would Toothless drop them off with *you*?” Sulpher asked.

Nuffnut shrugged her shoulders, “Who knows? Maybe he meant them for Hiccup but missed the island. Whatever the case, he gave them to us. BUT, neither of our parents knew what to do, so we took them to Hiccup. He confirmed they were a Skrill-Boneknapper hybrid and -.”

“Oh! So that’s the hybrid,” I exclaimed, “I thought it might be that.”

“Stop interrupting you two!” Puffnut told Sulpher and I.

“Anyway, Hiccup said that normal dragons don’t like hybrids and gave us instructions for raising them,” Nuffnut continued.

“Okay,” I said. Puffnut glared at me, and Nuffnut kept on going.

“So, they hatched pretty quickly, and they grew super fast! We were out of fish after their first week. Dad said we had to catch fish for them ourselves, so we used them to catch their own fish,” Nuffnut stated, “Pretty genius right?”

“Not really, I do that with Powder,” I commented.

“Oh,” Nuffnut and Puffnut said together.

“Continue,” Sulpher prodded.

“Well, so they grew up pretty big in just this half a year, and we use them to visit Berk like once a week which is pretty cool because Berkians are terribly easy to prank!” Nuffnut continued.

“Then,” Puffnut cut in, “Our parents said we should show your parents our dragons, so that’s what we were going to do before we met you guys!”

“Fascinating, what are their names?” I asked.

“Mine’s Zap,” Puffnut said.

“And mine’s Bash,” Nuffnut replied, “Where are you guys heading?”

“Oh, we’re going to pick up some Screaming and Whispering Death scales from an island,” I told them, “Wanna come along?”

“Kaizar!” Sulpher whispered to me, “Do we really want *them* coming along!”

“Sure,” I whispered back, “They can help us.”



Sulpher groaned, but Puffnut and Nuffnut didn't hear because they were busily poking around the catapults.

"What are we going to do about Slizer, though?" Sulpher asked.

"We'll have to train him to be nice," I replied, "If that's even possible. We'll have to use you a lot too, because he really likes you."

"Oh great," Sulpher replied, "I have to help control a mad and dangerous Speed Stinger – just what I want to do."

"Well, if it makes you feel better, Puff and Nuff have to control their Skrillnappers as well," I reminded Sulpher.

"Good point."

"I'll go check on Slizer," I told Sulpher.

The Wing Maidens were busy performing various activities, so I unlocked the cabin and checked on Slizer. He was still lying where Sulpher and I had left him, but he could now blink his eyes. I dragged Slizer across the floor boards and out onto the deck where Zap and Bash were. From deep within his frozen form, a menacing growl vibrated Slizer's body. Zap and Bash, in turn, turned around quickly and roared back.

"NO!" I told them, "Share!" I grabbed some bread from my side pouch and offered a little bit to each dragon. When I put a chunk next to Slizer, Zap lunged forward and snapped it up.

"Hey!" Puffnut yelled at Zap while hitting him on the head, "Have you not even graduated from kindergarten?!"

"Alright, Zap," I said directly to him, "Give this bread to Slizer." I handed Puffnut another chunk of brown bread, and Puffnut repeated the instructions to Zap and laid it carefully in front of Zap. Zap completely ignored us and wolfed it down again, while Slizer growled even more angrily – though he still couldn't stand up.

"We're getting *nowhere*," Sulpher told me. Finally, Powder, who was watching everything from nearby, stood up and trotted over to me. He went first to Slizer and roared a massive, powerful blast in his father's face. Then, he moved over to Zap and Bash and repeated it. His roar was so loud and piercing that I was forced to cover my ears both times. This seemed to work somewhat. Zap and Bash stopped growling and backed up, while Slizer stopped growling as well.

"I wish I could do that!" Puffnut exclaimed.

"You can cry like that," Nuffnut reminded her.

"Untrue! I don't cry really loud and piercing; just kind of blubbering like," Puffnut responded too hastily – quickly realizing the word trap that Nuffnut had set for her.

"You just blubber, huh," Sulpher teased.

"Shut up Sulpher," Puffnut snapped.

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Another five hours later, we arrived at our destination.

"So this is Screaming Death Island?" Puffnut asked.

"Right, but it's too dark to go exploring now," Sulpher replied, "We'll leave early tomorrow."

"Sweet! I love adventures. Thanks for inviting us, Kaizar," Nuffnut told me, "And no thanks to you Sulpher."

Sulpher rolled her eyes.

"I'm just glad we got Slizer to tolerate Zap and Bash," I stated, "though they still stay far apart."

"Eh, I don't mind. Nuff and I were planning to sleep on the deck anyway," Puffnut told us.

"Well then, I'll be in the hold with Powder if you need me," I stated, "See you tomorrow morning."

Sulpher stayed up to talk with the other Wing Maidens about getting bags we could use to collect scales, and Puffnut and Nuffnut wanted to play a few games of Maces and Talons on the new set that the Wing Maidens had in the cabin.

"What a day!" I told Powder, "I can't believe that Puff and Nuff have dragons too! That's crazy. I wonder if we'll meet up with Zephyr and Nuffink."

Powder sighed and rested his head on the edge of my blanket.

"Let's just hope the War Lords stay far away from us," I mumbled to myself.

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The next morning, all of us woke up a little before sunrise to eat a quick breakfast and strap bags to our dragons as well as slip on some leather backpacks. Sulpher told us all to bring our weapons as well since there were other people that sometimes frequented the island, so I put on my Odin's Storm sheath and shield (that was actually Hiccup's old shield). Then, with the sun just rising above the horizon and Slizer and Sulpher leading the way, we all rode into the heavily forested island.

"Why can't we just fly?" Nuffnut asked us.

"Because I don't want us to be spotted by others that may be here," Sulpher replied.

"Have you ever seen people here?" I asked.

"A few, but they were just scavengers like me. Still, we can't take any chances with these valuable dragons," Sulpher explained.

After a while of silence, except for the tramping of dragon feet, Puffnut decided it was time to ask her question.

"So," Puffnut began, "do you like Sulpher or I more?"

"Hey, what about me?!" Nuffnut yelled from behind us.

I quickly guessed the intent of the questions, but remained silent. After another minute, Puffnut maneuvered Zap next to me and asked again.

"Kaizar, which of us do you like the most?"

"Oh, well, I like all of you," I replied.

"I *know* that, but which of us do you *like* like," Puffnut continued.

"Oh, well, um..." I stuttered. Hearing this conversation going on, Sulpher dropped back and next to me.

"I'm not eavesdropping or anything, and for the record, I didn't bring this conversation up, but I want to hear how it turns out," Sulpher told me.

"So?" Puffnut prodded, "Who do you like the most?"

"Why does this feel so much like an interrogation?" I asked them.

"Because it *is*," Nuffnut agreed, "NOW ANSWER!"

"Well," I said slowly – choosing my words carefully, "I guess if I *had* to choose, I'd pick Sulpher."

"YES!" Sulpher practically yelled – sitting up a bit straighter on Slizer.

"So, it's still close though, right?" Nuffnut asked from behind me.

"Well, define *close*," I told Nuffnut.

"As in 'it's a hard decision, but you have chosen Sulpher over me,'" Nuffnut confirmed.

"Well, then, that's not quite right," I reluctantly said to Nuffnut.

"Explain," Puffnut quickly said from my right.

"Well, you and Nuffnut are as close to Sulpher as I am to being a War Lord goon," I finally admitted. As what I said sank into Nuffnut and Puffnut, I quickly added, "But I didn't want to say that because I didn't want to hurt your feelings."

"Don't sweat it, Kaizar," Puffnut told me, "Nuff and I don't really *like* you either."

"Wait, so why did you even ask that question?" I asked – confused.

"Well, it has to do with why I am three gold coins richer."

"Huh?" I replied – even more confused than ever.

"Let's just say, someone paid me to ask that question," Puffnut told me.

"It was Sulpher!" Nuffnut blurted out, "I tried to convince her to pay me and let me ask the question, but she wouldn't hear of it."

I turned to Sulpher who was now no more than a foot away from me on my left.

"Why would you-?" I began, but Sulpher just smiled and quickly spurred Slizer into a fast jaunt so she could return to her position at the front of us.

"Oooh," Nuffnut said, "Looks like we got two lovebirds on our hands."

I wasn't quite sure what to say, but everyone else did, and I think my face turned red. Puffnut stuck her tongue out at us, and Sulpher continued to smile like she had won a million gold coins.

"Well," I announced as Nuffnut snickered, "Now that *that* is over, let's talk about how we are going to get all these scales back efficiently."

"We need to cover as much ground as possible, so how about we split up," Sulpher suggested.

"Is there really that many tunnels?" Puffnut asked, "I mean how many Whispering Deaths lived here?"

"Good question, Puff," Sulpher replied, "You're just about to see once we get over this small rise."

With eager expectation, Puffnut and Nuffnut yelled to Zap and Bash to surge ahead and over the small hill. With a few screams, I heard what sounded like falling rocks and two large thuds in rapid succession.

"Oops, did I forget to tell them that there's a large hole right on the other side of this hill?" Sulpher told me.

"Nah, that wasn't important," I agreed.

Sure enough, when we crested the hill, I could see a large, slightly forested patch of flat land with massive holes everywhere. Directly in front of me and a little below us was one of the holes in which Puffnut and Nuffnut and their dragons had fallen into.

"*Guys!*" Nuffnut yelled up to us, "This place is like a *massive* maze! Check out all these different passages!"

"Now you know what I was talking about!" Sulpher yelled down to them. She and Slizer jumped down into the hole gracefully, but landed a little heavy due to them only have Slizer's legs as shock absorbers. Meanwhile, Powder and I aced the landing – barely making a sound.

"Showoff," Puffnut muttered.

The hole that Powder and I had dropped through was very large and there were at least a dozen tunnels branching away from the hole. Puffnut and Nuffnut were both holding a lit torch, and Sulpher was just lighting hers. I followed suit with my torch.

“Hey look! I found a scale!” Nuffnut excitedly exclaimed, picking a medium-sized, flat object off the floor.

“Oh, oh, and I found one two!” Puffnut added.

“You realize that’s going to get really boring really fast if you say that for *every* one, right?”

Sulpher said while rolling her eyes.

Whatever the case, Puffnut and Nuffnut didn’t hear her, because they were already long gone down one side tunnel – yelling an exclamation whenever they found one.

“Well, looks like we’re splitting up like you originally told us,” I commented to Sulpher.

“Some people don’t realize how right I normally am,” Sulpher replied as she took a tunnel to the right, “I think I took the tunnel directly to the left last time, so let’s try this one.”

As we walked along, we found various Whispering Death scales, but they were all pretty small and beat up.

“Don’t worry about those,” Sulpher told me, “There’s bound to be better ones coming up.”

The tunnels were pretty dark, and I think they made Slizer and Powder uncomfortable because they growled every now and then and were constantly looking around.

“They must know this was some other dragon’s territory,” I commented to Sulpher.

“I never thought about that, but you’re probably right. I’ve never been down here with a dragon.”

After a few minutes and some twists and turns later, we arrived at a dead end that had a fairly large pile of shed scales. Now, we had to start shoving them into our bags. We filled Slizer and Powder’s bags first; then worked on ours.

“So, what do you do on an average day on Wing Maiden Island?” I told her while stuffing scales in my big backpack.

“Honestly, it’s kinda’ boring. If there was a storm the night before, I’ll go shell collecting.

Otherwise, I’ll work on my shell blankets or on a new suit of clothes out of these scales.

Normally, I just burn my time by re-exploring every part of the island – that’s pretty much all I can do. Sometimes Dad will play Maces and Talons with me but that’s no more than once a week at most,” Sulpher explained, “What do you do on Berserker Island?”

“I’ve pretty much just been helping put together houses and simply machinery. The other days of the week, I work on plowing land with Slizer and Powder. Any time that I get off, I train with Powder on that main path around Bewilderbeast Mountain. He has the potential to be almost as fast as Slizer on his feet, but he just isn’t strong or old enough.”

“I would love it if I could hang out with you or work alongside you, but our islands are just too far apart to make frequent trips,” Sulpher lamented.

“Yeah, it’ll be interesting to see what the village elders say about possibly temporarily moving to your island,” I replied.

“I know that it could be tough for you to move, but that’d mean I could spend so much *more* time with my best friend!” Sulpher told me.

“Ha, well I’d enjoy going exploring with you too. I was promoted to leader of the ‘Dragon’ section of the Berserker Guard which is supposed to involve a lot of exploration, but I haven’t been doing *any* of that!” I told Sulpher.

By this time, my backpack flap could barely close and I had to really tug on the string to get it to close somewhat. I slung it over my front (we still called them backpacks, but when you have a

weapon on your back, the pack goes in front); then went over to help Sulpher fill hers. Sulpher stood up and looked at me,

"And our sunsets are beautiful too!" Sulpher reminded me.

"So are you!" I added, leaning in slightly.

"Funny, I was going to say something to that affect about you," Sulpher chuckled, getting even closer to me, "but don't count on me having too much free time! I'm very busy."

"With what?!" I exclaimed, a little hastily.

"With *you* of course!" Sulpher laughed – our eyes locked, and she reached her head towards mine... - but it never came.

"BOO!" The sudden shout scared Sulpher and I so badly that we lost our balance, and the added weight of our backpacks caused us to tip over. Slizer caught Sulpher by the back of her parka, but Powder wasn't that trained yet so I just hit the ground.

"Ha, ha!" Puffnut roared with delight - completely oblivious to what she interrupted, "got you on *that* one!"

I groaned and Sulpher snarled, but we stood up and left with Puffnut and Nuffnut to our ship to empty our bags.

On the second trip, we all stayed together, but went down a tunnel that Sulpher said she had never gone down before. It turned out to be very long and had very few other tunnels branching off it.

"I'm getting tired," Puffnut whined, "This is taking *forever!*"

"We could be underneath the beach by now!" Nuffnut added.

I turned around to face them and said, "Look guys, this tunnel has to lead *somewhere*, so stop complaining and start walk – oof!"

I had run into something behind me because I wasn't looking forward anymore. The problem was that the something I ran into moved and toppled beneath me. When I landed on it, it certainly wasn't rock – but neither was it terribly fuzzy/scratchy like a boar. I leaped off of it and whirled around to see what it was.

It was a human!

"Whoa, dude, careful where you – oh my!" he exclaimed. Puffnut, Nuffnut, and Sulpher came forward with their torches to see who we were talking to. He was an older-middle aged man with a long, metal stick on his back, and he was carrying several bags stuffed with Screaming Death scales.

"Who are *you*?!" Puffnut wanted to know.

The guy looked seriously confused by everyone and couldn't take his eyes off our dragons. Zap, being more curious than the others, came up and sniffed him – while practically squishing me alongside the cave wall.

"Are these dragons?" the man asked.

"Yep!" Puffnut asserted, "This here is Zap."

"What is he?"

"A Skrilnapper – a Skril and Boneknapper hybrid."

Before they could go on, Sulpher cut in, "What did you say your name is?"

"Oh, sorry, my name is Ogard," He said, extending his hand towards her. Sulpher didn't take it. She still seemed suspicious of him.

"Where did you get all those Screaming Death scales," Sulpher asked him.

"Well, now, that's kind of a –," he began. Sulpher leaped forward and pointed her massive metal hammer at his head.

"*Where* did you get those?" Sulpher questioned.

I kindly pushed her aside and stuck out my hand, "My name is Kaizar Ingerman. Good to meet you Ogard."

Ogard gratefully shook my hand and pointed at Slizer, "That's just a normal speed stinger, right?"

"Yep!" I replied, "The last one I know of still on this earth."

"It's really too bad that they all had to leave. They left when I was pretty young, so it's hard to remember exactly what they all looked like," Ogard commented.

Suddenly, Slizer cocked his head and growled a low, menacing growl. He backed up a little and crouched down – looking like he was about ready to attack.

"Uh, do you have anyone with you?" I asked Ogard.

"Ooh, yeah, just one; but uh, you need to restrain your Speed Stinger before I can show you," he told me.

"Sulpher, could you hold Slizer?" I asked her. Sulpher obeyed, while still glaring at Ogard. It was almost like Sulpher suspected something in Ogard that the rest of us couldn't see. I had no reason not to be nice to him, though.

With Sulpher scratching Slizer's neck and talking to him in a soothing voice, Ogard blew a quick, low whistle. Instantly, there was a trample of heavy feet and a rumbling of rocks. Then, a dragon trotted around the corner and into our tunnel space.

"What is *that*?" Nuffnut asked, "It's literally the single most ugly dragon that I have ever seen or read about."

"Nuffnut!" I told her.

"That's okay," Ogard laughed, I actually agree, "This is a Gronckle and Monstrous Nightmare hybrid: A Monstrous Gronckle."

"What's its name?" Nuffnut asked again.

"Mongro."

"Can I touch him?"

"Sure, they're pretty friendly," Ogard replied.

"Where in the world did you get him? I thought that we were the only ones with hybrid dragons," I commented.

"Some friends and I found a whole bunch of nests of these a while ago right after all the dragons left," Ogard answered, "And these are what they turned out to be!"

"There's a whole bunch of these dragons and riders?"

"Yep! We call ourselves the Fierce Dragon Flyers or 'FDF' for short," Ogard replied.

"Well, enough with the introductions," Ogard said, "You seem like nice guys, so I'll show you where a lot of the Screaming Death scales are."

With Ogard leading, and Sulpher and I in the back, we continued down our tunnel.

"Doesn't he give you a weird feeling?" Sulpher whispered to me, "I mean, first he says that he can't show us where the Screaming Death scales are; then he says that he can."

"I know, but I don't get a weird feeling, and he seems nice enough," I replied.

"Well, at least promise me that you'll be careful around him," Sulpher commanded me.

"Sure. I'm also watching how he interacts with our dragons. It seems weird that he has a hybrid dragon himself."

"Kaizar!" Nuffnut yelled back to me, "What's the name of our dragon club!"

"Club?"

"Yeah, what are we called?"

"Uh, we don't have a name. I don't even know if we're really a *club*," I said.

"Sweet, I'll name it then," Nuffnut replied.

"No! I want to name it," Puffnut argued, "It should be the 'Sweet Mace People'."

"Nah, that's terrible," Nuffnut said, "It should be 'Orange Mango Group'."

"Yeah, but that means our initials are 'OMG'," Sulpher stated.

"I think it should be a bit more *intense*," I replied, starting to warm up to a group name.

"How about 'Grim Death Slicers'," Nuffnut suggested, "Everyone would be like, 'Oh, no! The GDS are coming for us!'."

"Yeah, no. That's a little *too* intense," I said.

"What about Mutant Dragon Riders?" Ogard interrupted, "That was my suggested name for our group, but I was outvoted."

"Hey, I actually like that," Sulpher spoke up, "The 'MDR'."

"Works with us," Puffnut agreed as Nuffnut nodded her head.

"Then, it's official," I stated.

"And, just like that, we're here!" Ogard declared, "Look!"

Sure enough there were huge Screaming Death scales everywhere, and in almost mint condition.

"I don't mind helping you guys, but I have to collect some for myself as well," Ogard told us.

"What tribe are you from?" Nuffnut asked, while stuffing Bash's saddle bags with Screaming Death scales.

"I'm from the Tribe of the Whispering Trees because that was my mother's tribe, although my father wasn't part of any tribe," Ogard commented, "Are you guys from the same tribe?"

"Nah," Puffnut said, "Nuff and I are part of the Outcast clan. Kaizar is a Berserker, and Sulphur is a Wing Maiden."

"Okay! I've heard of your tribes before. Wasn't there a big war on your island just recently, Kaizar?" Ogard replied.

"Yes, but I'd rather not talk about it if it's all the same to you," I told him.

"No problem," Ogard said, "I understand. Why, my father was inadvertently killed by a younger fellow who wanted my father's power!"

"That's actually too bad," Sulpher chimed in.

"Yeah. My group and I have been trying to track him and his tribe down for years, but they seem to have disappeared off the map."

"Typical stealth mode," Nuffnut agreed.

It didn't take long to load our bags with scales. Then, we all flew back to our ship to drop them off.

"Well, it's not even noon; so I'm up to doing a few more runs, if you'll help drop my scales off at my ship as well," Ogard told us.

“Deal!” I told him.

The entire rest of the day, except for a few short breaks (mostly on Puff and Nuff’s part), we spent toting bags and bags of scales from the tunnels to our ships.

“And you say that your tribe can use all of these?” Ogard asked Sulpher.

“Yep! We ran out of Razorwhip scales, so now we need something else to reinforce our clothes with. Otherwise, we’re just going to have to wear wool clothes,” Sulpher replied.

“Actually, wool clothes aren’t too bad. I use them, but I personally prefer iron plated armor over the top – like what I’m wearing now,” Ogard told us while emptying his bag of scales into the Wing Maiden’s ship’s hold.

“Well, that’s more than enough,” Tia told us as she closed the trap door, “We’re now a whole day ahead of schedule! We can leave for Wing Maiden Island tonight.”

“Cool, well you guys have fun,” Ogard said to us, “Kaizar, could you help me carry this last load of mine to my boat?”

Of course I agreed to go with Ogard, what with him sharing his secret stash he found and helping us in turn. Ogard’s ship was on the completely opposite side of the island, and was significantly smaller than ours, as well as a bit more run-down.

As Powder and I lifted the last gunnysack of scales aboard his ship, Ogard thanked me again.

“No problem, Ogard... Ogard... What was your last name again?” I asked, embarrassed I couldn’t remember what he said his last name as.

“Bludvist. My last name is Bludvist,” Ogard said.

Something about that last name bothered me, but I couldn’t quite place where I had heard it before, so I kept quiet about it.

“Alright Ogard Bludvist, what are your plans for tomorrow?” I asked him.

“Well, Mongro and I need to drop off these scales for our tribe’s big celebration in a week, so we’ll be leaving tomorrow morning,” Ogard told me.

“Cool! Well, maybe I’ll see you around.”

“Undoubtedly you will,” Ogard laughed, “It was nice meeting you all. By the way, if you ever have any information regarding where the tribe called ‘The Berkians’ are or a guy named ‘Hiccup’ is, I’d really appreciate it.”



## Chapter 3

That night at dinner, I was not the same, and everyone could tell it.

"What's wrong, Kaizar? You look like you lost your best friend!" Nuffnut commented.

"Of course he didn't," Sulpher snorted, "Because *I'm* his best friend, and I'm certainly not lost!"

"Oh yeah, like knowing him for no more than a year makes you his best friend!" Nuffnut retorted, "If anything, Slizer is his best friend. Kaizar has known Slizer for *years*."

"But Slizer isn't lost either," Puffnut reminded Nuffnut, "which means your statement is *still* false!"

"I said *like*. He looks *like* he lost his best friend; not that he *actually* lost his best friend," Nuffnut explained.

"It's okay. Nothing's terribly wrong, I just have a lot to think about," I told them all.

"Give him some time. He'll tell us when he needs to," Sulpher said while looking Puffnut and Nuffnut straight in the eyes.

Ogard's request for information leading to Hiccup scared me a little, and I wasn't sure what to do.

Puffnut continued on to talk about her experience fighting boars in the outback, but, since it was undoubtedly a tall-tale, I tuned her out. The last few days had been crazy! First, there was the main issue of winter coming up very soon, and what my tribe was going to do in order to prepare for it. Unlike past years, our supplies and buildings were probably not up to the size and quality that we needed them to be. Then, the Wing Maidens visited with an offer that might temporarily reposition my whole tribes' population to Wing Maiden Island, which would mean leaving the island that I know and love. Added onto that, is how Sulpher and I's relationship had exploded over the last two or so days. On one hand, I felt like Sulpher was really pushing it along, but then again, I wasn't refusing it. However, I'd probably be the same if I was in her shoes (on an island for nineteen years with a tribe's population of 90% female and the only males being middle-aged or super young). Next, there was the problem of Ogard, and how long I could stay out of his way and prevent him from finding Hiccup. Ogard seemed really nice, but he was obviously fed/believed lies about his Dad. Any Berserker/Berkian/Outcast/Wing Maiden could tell you how Drago Bludvist nearly caused the death of every Berkian and killed Hiccup's father just so he could be more powerful. I wanted to tell my friends about Ogard, but I wasn't sure if spreading the news would only make things worse. Then, on top of all of that; there was the impending problem of getting Slizer safely to the Hidden World now that Powder was old enough to take care of himself. I wasn't even sure if Slizer *would* want to go there, because he didn't last time. Then, there was –

"Kaizar?" a voice beside me said. I now realized that my thoughts had drifted far away from the dinner conversation.

"Kaizar? Are you in there? Sulpher calling Kaizar."

"Wh-what? Huh?" I asked, looking around. Apparently dinner was over, because all the Wing Maidens had left. I could hear the tell-tale signs of Powder and Slizer having one of their typical after-dinner wrestling matches, and Puffnut and Nuffnut were playing a game of Maces and Talons over in the corner.

"You've *definitely* got something on the mind," Sulpher said as she meticulously wiped down some Screaming Death scales.

"Not something, somethings," I replied.

"You know you can tell us?" Sulpher calmly told me, "You can trust us all – even if Puff and Nuff are kinda' crazy."

I expected Puffnut or Nuffnut to say something at this comment, but they were too absorbed in their game.

"Alright, well, you know Ogard?" I finally said.

"Uh, yeah! We just met him not more than a few hours ago," Sulpher replied, confused.

"Well, you know how he said he was hunting someone that killed his father?" I continued.

"Yeah."

"Well, I found out from him that he's looking for Hiccup."

"Oh," Sulpher mumbled, setting down her cleaning cloth, "That's a problem."

"I mean, he seems so nice, and I don't want him as an enemy, but how can we prevent him from hearing of where Hiccup or Berk is?" I questioned.

"Yeah, that's difficult," Sulpher agreed, "But New Berk is so sequestered, I doubt he's going to find them soon. Plus, they are strong warriors too."

"Wait, Ogard wants to kill Hiccup?" Puffnut interrupted from the other side of the room, "How come there's no one seeking my life?"

"There is," I replied, "Lemmirg would love to have your head."

"Well, he can't have it," Puffnut declared.

"Big surprise," Sulpher stated, rolling her eyes.

"Well the good news is that he's leaving for his tribe in the morning, so he's long gone," I informed them.

"Well, now that you've told us your mind, would you play a round of Maces and Talons? We could team up again Puff and Nuff," Sulpher pleaded.

"I guess," I replied, "But you're going down!"

Puffnut and Nuffnut laughed at my threat.

"Not if you go down first!" Nuffnut challenged.

Needless to say, Sulpher and I beat them easily – they're Outcasts after all...

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By the late afternoon of the next day, we were almost at Wing Maiden Island.

"Your parents are going to be thrilled," Sulpher was telling me, "We're making great time!"

"I know, and it probably won't take long to drop off this cargo either," I added.

"Well, then, that'll leave me some time to show you a few cool places on our island!" Sulpher exclaimed excitedly.

"Cool! We'll come along too!" Nuffnut said, coming up behind Sulpher and I.

"Oh, great..." Sulpher mumbled.

"What's stopping us from flying to the island now and getting a head start?" Nuffnut added.

"Actually that's a pretty good idea," I told Sulpher, "We could get an extra hour or two in before the boat reaches the island."

"Who would've thought you can have good ideas?" Sulpher told Nuffnut.

"I know right?" Nuffnut answered – completely oblivious to the insult.

With Powder leading the way, we rocketed off the ship and towards Wing Maiden Island. Sulpher had to ride Slizer on the water, so I was carrying her hammer, which weighed a ton, but I managed. Despite the strong winds, the Wing Maiden boat quickly fell behind us, and after a half hour of riding, I picked out the island in the distance.

"Land ahead!" I yelled over to Nuffnut who was flying nearby. Whether Nuffnut heard or not, I couldn't tell, because she was lying full-length on Bash – soaking up the sun's rays like this was a vacation.

"Come on, Powder, let's go check on Slizer and Sulpher," I told him. We swooped downwards and flew as close as we could to Slizer and Sulpher who were still going at a nice clip across the water.

"Holding on there?" I asked her.

"Duh, of course! Slizer could go all day!" Sulpher told me, "He's hardly even breathing heavy."

"Looks like all that training was good for him," I commented.

"Yeah, and - , " Sulpher's last words were cut off as Puffnut (who was previously in the lead) fell in beside Sulpher and I.

"Hey, Sulpher, did your tribe recently capture a whole lot of War Lord goons ships?" Puffnut asked.

"No?" Sulpher replied, confused at the question.

"Look," Puffnut said to Sulpher while handing her a mini telescope.

"Oh dear," Sulpher mumbled.

"What?!" I exclaimed.

"My island's under attack!" Sulpher yelled, urging Slizer to run faster.

"Seriously?" I said, grabbing Sulpher's telescope.

Sure enough, there were about a dozen War Lord battleships all anchored alongside Wing Maiden Island's main beach.

"How did the War Lord goons know that the Wing Maidens' leaders were gone?" I asked aloud.

"How should I know the way of idiots?" Puffnut quoted.

"What's the plan Sulpher?" I asked as we quickly closed in on the island.

"Puffnut, you and Nuffnut go take out as many ships as you can. Kaizar and I will go help those fighting in the village," Sulpher told us.

"Consider it done!" Puffnut announced. She climbed up to Nuffnut and relayed the instructions.

"Kaizar, let's enter the village on foot. I know a quick, hidden shortcut," Sulpher told me.

I nodded my head and fell in line behind her. In a matter of minutes, we reached the War Lord ships, but, oddly enough, they were mostly vacated. The goons that were on board ran to get their weapons, but Puff and Nuff were already on it.

"Krzhow! BOOM!!!" two massive lightning bolts flashed through the sky and blasted a huge hole in the side of the nearest battleship – sinking it almost immediately.

"Holy yak! I didn't think they were telling the truth when they said their dragons could shoot lightning – they're not even near a storm!" Sulpher yelled to me as we dodged a few arrows that were being shot at us.

"Their bone-laden bodies must allow the storage of electricity for later use," I guessed.

"That is so cool," Sulpher said again as two more lightning bolts flashed through the sky and took out another warship.

With Nuffnut and Puffnut in control of the situation on the beach, Sulpher and I took a barely perceptible path through some thick underbrush and through an underground tunnel that had literally appeared out of nowhere.

“Our ancestors made this many years ago as a quick mode of escape,” Sulpher told me as we ran along on Slizer and Powder. Shortly after reaching the beach, Powder and I had stopped flying and were trying to keep up with Slizer who was running extremely fast.

“When we get to the village, I want you and Powder and Slizer to stay hidden among the bushes,” Sulpher commanded me, “I’ll run into the street and cause a distraction. Then, with hopefully a horde of goons following me, I’ll lead them straight to you and your dragons, okay?”

“Works with me!” I replied nervously. Although I was used to fighting in kill-or-get-killed battles, it certainly wasn’t something I preferred doing. Soon, we emerged from the cramped tunnel into a thick patch of bushes that was right next to the Wing Maiden hall. Sulpher and I dismounted and crept along the ground to the right by the street. I slowly raised my head above the nearest holly bush and looked around. There were many goons, and most of the Wing Maidens (and men) were all tied up with ropes and being forced to lie on the ground. There was still a bit of battling I could hear happening farther away somewhere, but it looked like the goons definitely had the upper hand.

“That’s infuriating!” Sulpher whispered angrily to me, “How *dare* they do that to *my* people!” Then, with a war cry that would have put fear in the heart of my uncle, Sulpher leapt out of the bushes and charged the closest goons. The look on their faces was classic – they certainly were not expecting a very angry girl to jump out of the bushes, and they were even less expecting to see a massive metal hammer swinging through the air towards their heads. Sulpher dealt all four of the closest goons nasty concussions; then ran towards a few that were guarding some Wing Maidens.

“Get ready!” I whispered to Powder and Slizer who were huddled next to me.

“GET that girl!” screamed a War Lord general who was just coming up the street. A dozen or so goons immediately dropped what they were doing and converged on Sulpher who slipped out of their hands and ran directly back towards me. It was actually kind of surprising how fast those goons could run. By the time Sulpher leapt into the bushes next to me, there were at least twenty goons all running up. On that note, I sprang from the bushes and said, “Hiya boyos! Have you met me before?”

All the goons skidded to a halt and stared at me.

“Did you just turn into a boy?” one of them asked me.

“No, but I can turn into a dragon!” I told them. I immediately ducked out of sight and shoved Powder forward.

“What the-?! How did she do that!” another War Lord goon said (still thinking that Sulpher was shape-shifting).

“Don’t be silly,” the general yelled to them as he ran up, “There’s just several people there in the bush-...” He didn’t finish his sentence, because Powder sprayed them down. Powder wasn’t a very friendly dragon normally, and being surrounded by a bunch of goons with weapons put him over the edge. As I knew, Powder’s mist was incredibly powerful and quick acting. All twenty goons seized up and keeled over in a matter of seconds – including the general.

“Let’s go guys!” I yelled to Slizer and Sulpher. We all jumped out of the bushes and rushed in two different directions. Sulpher and Slizer rushed over to release the Wing Maiden prisoners, while Powder and I ran down the street towards the sound of battle. Sure enough, there were a few Wing Maidens desperately trying to defend themselves against a whole horde of goons armed with crossbows and battle axes. Without even taking some time to think, I bore down upon them and shoved myself into the closest few with my shield. Then, I followed that up with a swing to the head of some goons on my right. Completely distracted now, the majority of the goons turned towards me and Powder, but we were going too fast. I chucked one goon into another with another strong shield swing; then took down another goon with an arc swing. Powder followed up with several mist blasts that froze up even more goons. A small group of goons managed to get a decent attack on me, but I launched a long pair of bolas from my shield and cinched them up super tight – then bashed my Odin’s Storm on their helmets like they were a set of drums. Another goon swiped at me with his axe, but I parried it with ease and kicked him hard in the stomach – while goring another goon with the horns on my helmet. The last goon tried to shoot Powder down with an arrow, but I knocked him over by launching my shield’s grappling hook at him.

“Thanks guys!” the Wing Maiden’s said, coming towards me, “Who are you?”

“I’m Sulpher’s friend, and this is Powder,” I told them, “Where is everyone else?”

“I’m not sure. There’s fighting taking place literally everywhere. Just listen for the sound of yelling,” the taller Wing Maiden said.

“Cool! See you later!” Powder and I took off again down a left fork in the road and randomly chose the right street where we found a troop of goons marching some more Wing Maiden prisoners towards the beach.

I immediately swerved towards the goons, but Powder beat me to them - turns out that Powder had a knack for fighting – just like Slizer. With lightning speed, Powder reached them and blasted *just* the goons with his powerful mist; all before any of them really realized that Powder was there. Powder moved on to attack the goons leading the train, but I chopped the rope off the Wing Maidens’ hands when I caught up. Then, I backed up Powder. I noticed that a few of the goons were taking shots at Slizer with their crossbows, so I attacked them first. I clocked one in the stomach with the back of my Odin’s Storm; then chopped at the other with a Berserker slice. The rest of the archers turned on me, but I ducked behind my shield and performed a back-hand swing to crunch them at their helmets.

“Woosh!” Suddenly, the last of the archers keeled over as Slizer, with Sulpher riding, flashed by – following a cross street.

“Hi, Kaizar!” Sulpher yelled to me.

“Bye!” she yelled again as they whipped by me and disappeared down another short alley. Although the Wing Maidens hadn’t appeared to be a large village, they certainly had a lot of houses and streets!”

“Hey! You guys!” yelled a voice nearby. I turned around to see a Wing Maiden man with a wounded arm approaching me.

“Sulpher and that dragon rescued us a block down,” he told me, “The rest of the goons are making a run for the beach.”

“Wait, so how many goons landed here?” I asked.

"Only about three hundred, but they hit us before we really realized it, and we had absolutely no coordination," he explained.

"Alright, the rest of you should try to round up the last of the goons here in the village, and Powder and I will head to the beach," I replied, "Oh, and get someone to look at that arm!" I mounted Powder, and we both took the main path out of the village and towards the beach. We met goons all along the path who were retreating, but Powder and I easily took them out. By the time we got to the beach, there were only a few that had made it there before us. Unfortunately for them, there were no ships to escape too - they were all going up in flames. "Wump!"

I winced as Nuffnut on Bash dove out of the sky and walloped several goon with Bash's massive, spiky tail. Puffnut landed next to me.

"Well, I think we did good, what do you say?" Puffnut wanted to know.

"I guess," I replied sarcastically, "You managed to take down a dozen or so, heavily armed warships. That's pretty good for two amateurs."

"Oh, YEAH!" Nuffnut said as she and Bash came over, "Not one goon I saw made it out okay."

"Really? Then what's that goon doing?" I asked Nuffnut. I pointed to one more War Lord goon that was just running back into the forest and was carrying some sort of roll of paper.

"Mneh, he's your job now," Nuffnut replied. I sighed, but nudged Powder into a quick flight across the sand and after the goon.

"What have you got there?" I asked him as Powder landed right in front of him. The goon gasped and pointed his axe at us

"Don't move, or I'll run you through!" he said.

"Really?" I said, "Powder, would you do the honors?"

Powder nodded and blasted him.

"Don't move yourself!" I commanded the goon while chuckling, "Oh, wait. You can't!"

"Now, what have you got here," I said. In the goon's hand was a rolled up bit of parchment, so I carefully slid it out of his frozen hand and unrolled it.

"Looks like a treasure map of sorts," I said to myself. There were all sorts of squiggles, lines, and words written on it and several numbers.

"Hmm, it looks like it's in Wing Maiden handwriting though. I'll have to ask Sulpher about this," I said aloud.

Then, I ran back to Nuffnut and Puffnut.

"Hey guys! I'm going to fly around the island with Powder and make sure we rounded up all the War Lord goons. One of you should go to the village and make sure that the situation there is under control. The other should stay here and make sure no one escapes," I told them.

"I claim the village duty," Puffnut yelled, "It's a whole lot better than sitting out here in the burning sun!"

"Uh, yeah, I'd gladly stand here. I can work on my tan," Nuffnut commented - lying back on Bash.

"Sounds goods," I told them, ignoring their antics, "We'll meet back up soon."

Powder and I flew barely above the treeline and circled the island at least two times, but didn't see anyone. I guess the War Lord goons had just wanted to take the village. While we were at it, I checked on the various, tall watchtowers spread across the island, but they were all empty.

"Well, time to go back and check on Sulpher," I told Powder. We soared back to the village and found Sulpher talking with a Wing Maiden under a patch of trees near the hall.

"So I don't understand. How did they sneak up?" Sulpher asked Sirena (one of the more experienced Wing Maidens), as I joined them while they ate a light dinner.

"None of us are quite sure. We were just having our breakfast in the hall over there, when the doors burst open and tons of goons poured in. We didn't have time to grab our weapons, so we were easily beaten," she replied, "Turned out that our scouts in our various watch towers had been killed. The goons must have sent a few small row boats to our island first to escape detection and just taken out our watchtowers."

"I get that, but how did they know you were going to be having lunch around this time and where all the towers are?" Sulpher questioned, "Only a Wing Maiden would know that."

"Maybe there's a spy amongst us?" Sirena suggested.

"Was," I corrected, "Laurel was the spy and surely knows all that information. She could have easily given that information to the goons."

"Yeah, but she wouldn't know that our leaders wouldn't be here," Sulpher argued.

"True, but maybe she thought that they'd be taken by surprise as well," I added.

"How many are dead?" Sulpher asked.

"As of right now, only twenty including the watch tower maidens," Sirena told us, "A few of us collected all the dead and are preparing a worthy funeral."

"That makes me so mad!" Sulpher said angrily, "Why would they be after us?!"

"Revenge?" Sirena thought aloud.

"Or maybe they're up to something more sinister!" I proposed.

"Oh no!" Sulpher exclaimed, "Our parents!" Suddenly, I realized the goons' plans. Draw key defenders away from Berserker Island; then, swoop in and capture us. Except, my dragons and I weren't there to capture.

"Our parents could be in trouble," I grimly replied, "Where is our Wing Maiden boat?"

"Oh, they just got here a few minutes ago, and some of us are helping unload the scales," Sirena informed me.

"Get as many boats as you can ready to go and send them to Berserker Island as fast as you can. We'll fly back to Berserker Island early tomorrow," I told Sirena.

"We should go now!" Sulpher told me.

"Yeah, but our dragons are tired, and we are tired. Even if we made it back to Berserker Island by midnight, we'd be so tired that we'd be useless fighting," I reasoned.

"Fine," Sulpher conceded, "But I'm going to bed *right now* so that I can get up early!"

"Works with me," I replied as I got up, but a crinkling sound coming from my pocket reminded me of the treasure-like map I had taken from that goon earlier.

"Wait, Sulpher," I called out to her, "Do you know what this is?" I waved the piece of paper at her, and she came back.

"Oh yeah, I've seen this. It's an old Wing Maiden treasure map that some of our earliest ancestors made for us. The problem is that none of us have even been able to solve the first clue, let alone the next. We gave up on it a long time ago," Sulpher informed me.

"What is the first clue?" I quickly asked, "It's hard to read that font!" Sulpher smiled at me.

“Feeling like a treasure hunter are you? Well, it’s going to have to wait, but I’ll tell you the first clue – I’ve memorized them all. Though good luck figuring it out,” Sulpher replied, “It says, ‘The first clue is that of Diplomacy: To get that which belongs to another. For Tar traps, Metal hits, Cold bites, and Wood talks, but what does a tribe do?’”

While Sulpher went off to sleep, Sirinea took off to get more Wing Maiden ships ready, and Slizer and Powder slept soundly next to me, I laid back and thought about the clue. I loved word puzzles and strange stories, and this one iced the lamb pie. *It had to do something with an animate object performing an action and how that related to a tribe. But what tribe had a connection with inanimate objects doing stuff? Hmmm... Trapping tar....Biting Cold...Talking Wood... Hitting Metal...Does wood really ever talk? That seems a bit more far-fetched than the others.*

“Kaizar!” a voice whispered to me.

“Kaizar, you have to get up – it’s getting late,” the voice said again.

*A soft voice – talking wood...A whispering voice – talking wood... whispering wood...*

“KAIZAR! GET UP!!!” the voice jolted me awake, and for the first few seconds I thought I saw a tree talking to me. Then, I noticed it was just Sirena, and that it was almost completely dark outside.

“Sorry to bother you, but you fell asleep, and I thought you’d be better off in one of our guest shacks,” Sirena offered.

“Whispering tree,” I mumbled to myself – still with part of my brain trying to piece together the puzzle, “Talking wood is the same as whispering trees.”

“Huh?” Sirena said, very confused, “are you okay?”

“The Tribe of the Whispering Trees!” I yelled, jumping to my feet and waking Powder and Slizer.

“That’s it! The Tribe of the Whispering Trees has their name pertaining to an inanimate object – trees/wood that is talking/whispering. *And* we have to use diplomacy to get something from them!” I said to no one in particular.

“Wait, are you talking about that old Wing Maiden Map that leads to different pieces of the golden Wing Maiden sword?” Sirena asked.

“Wait, each clue leads to a different piece of a sword?”

“Yeah, it was the first Wing Maiden’s sword and was really beautiful. When she died, the other Wing Maidens cut her sword into pieces and placed them around the archipelago and left us with nothing but the clue map as to how to get them back,” Sirena explained.

“Do you think the first clue could coincide with the Tribe of the Whispering Trees?” I asked her.

“Possibly. Seems rational enough, but I’m not spending any time on that. We have bigger things to worry about... which leads me to the current suggestion of you getting some rest.”

“Oh, yeah. Thanks for offering,” I told her as she led me to a guesthouse.



## Chapter 4

“Grrrowl.” The peculiar, quiet growling of Powder woke me up in the middle of the night. At least it *felt* like the middle of the night, but there weren’t any windows in the shack, so I couldn’t tell very well. Powder was lying crouched at the base of my bed and growling for all he was worth at the door.

“What’s wrong?” I sleepily mumbled to Powder. Powder jumped up and stood right in front of the door.

“Alright, alright. I’m coming,” I told him. Both Slizer and Powder had a unique habit of communicating what they wanted, and I recognized this as the “please-follow-me” sort of growl. I threw on my Screaming-Death outfit as fast as I could and followed him outside. I was immediately hit with a blast of freezing-cold air, so I was glad that I had put on a full set of clothes. As soon as the door opened, Powder stuck his head outside, cocked it, and quickly started trotting down the street to the right.

“Oh, bother,” I said to myself, “What’s gotten into him now?!” The good news is that it didn’t take me very long to see what Powder was after. A lone figure was running down the street and keeping in the shadows, away from the myriad of torches lighting the streets that the Wing Maidens kept fueled – but not bothering to mask his loud footsteps.

“Oh? Somebody you don’t like?” I asked Powder, picking up my pace. The mysterious person chose the quickest route out of the town and towards a collection of bushes near the main hall. I quickly went on full alert when they jumped into the bushes and disappeared from sight.

“They know about the tunnel!” I said to myself, “Could it just be a Wing Maiden?” Powder and I ran up to the bushes and peered into them, but the mysterious figure had already disappeared through the barely visible entrance to the tunnel. As I debated if I should follow the person, another person swished right by me and practically dove into the hole. However, Powder didn’t growl at that person. I was desperately trying to piece together what was going on when Powder suddenly stood up and whined. I recognized that whine as well – it was his way of communicating with Slizer. Not more than a few seconds later, Slizer (with Sulpher on top) raced up to me.

“What are *you* doing here?!” Sulpher asked me, quite surprised.

“I could ask you the same thing!” I told her.

“Slizer picked up on something outside and wanted to follow it,” Slizer informed me, “We chased the person and almost caught up with him or her, when he or she disappeared into that tunnel.

“Interesting,” I whispered, “Powder picked up on a different person that we followed here and who also went into the tunnel. Not more than a half minute later, your person dove into there as well.”

“Then what are we waiting for?” Sulpher exclaimed excitedly, “Let’s go!”

Before I could say “Stop!” Sulpher and Slizer had already disappeared into the tunnel. Thus, I had to follow.

“Are the streets monitored at night?” I asked Sulpher when I caught up with her.

“Not normally, but sometimes. The person we were following was most certainly not a Wing Maiden guard, though,” Sulpher replied.

It was completely dark in the tunnel, but Sulpher knew it perfectly, so I just crouched low in Powder's saddle and listened for her voice. After a few minutes of fast running, we emerged at the beach entrance. Sulpher immediately came to a rapid stop right in front of me, and I almost pitched into her if it wasn't for Powder's quick movement.

"Look!" She whispered hoarsely, "A fire!"

Sure enough, a small camp fire was burning not more than a hundred meters away on the beach, and around it were the two mysterious persons. Slizer and Powder immediately started growling again.

"Come on over when you want, Sulpher and Kaizar," one of the figures said.

"Lemmig," I spat.

"Wait, are you sure?" Sulpher whispered to me.

"Absolutely, and I'll bet that's Laurel with him," I replied, "You stay here with the dragons. I'll go talk to them myself."

"Uh, is this some trap?" Sulpher questioned.

"Maybe," I conceded, "But knowing him it's probably a gloat or an intimidation conversation. I'll signal you if I need help."

I walked confidently out towards them and carefully sat around the campfire with them - making sure to maintain the correct sitting posture which would allow me to stand up the quickest.

"Sulpher decided not to join us?" Laurel said to me once I had sat down.

"Oh, no. She's just joining us from a distance. Can't be too careful with you two backstabbers," I told them.

Lemmig laughed, "You're always one to hand out a nice insult, aren't you Kaizar?"

"What are you doing here, Lemmig?" I asked him.

"What does it look like?"

"Causing a distraction so that you can attack Berserker Island and capture me."

"What? No," Lemmig replied, looking genuinely confused for the first time, "This has nothing to do with Berserker Island."

Lemmig looked so genuine in that moment, that I got momentarily confused as well, "Wait, so you didn't attack Berserker Island?"

"No," Lemmig replied again, "Why do you think that?"

"Well, why else would you attack this island?" I asked him.

"To show we mean business," Laurel interrupted.

"Well, how about I save you the trouble and tell you that I already know you mean business," I told them.

"Ha! That's not good enough. You know what we want," Lemmig responded.

"Yeah, well you're not getting my shield," I replied, "I kind of like it." I slipped it off my back and reflected some light from the fire into Lemmig's eyes.

"As lousy as that shield is," Lemmig told me, "That's not what we want. You *know* what we want."

"Does it run in your family to get so fixated on something?" I asked Lemmig.

"Actually yes," Laurel cut in.

"Call it whatever you like, but I want your dragons!" Lemmig said, raising his voice.

"How come you don't want FDF's dragons too?" I asked.

"Huh, who are they?"

"They ride Gronckle and Monstrous Nightmare hybrid dragons," I told him, "I've only met their leader, but supposedly there are at least a dozen of them."

"Hm, I'll have to check into that. Meanwhile, I still want your Speedstinger and freak what-do-you-call-it."

"You know what I want?" I responded, "You're mouths to be permanently shut."

"Feisty!" Lemmirg replied coolly, "But we aren't going to do that."

"What's stopping me?" I told Lemmirg, "I could beat you *both* in a hand-to-hand combat fight."

"Maybe one at a time, but not both of us at the same time," Lemmirg challenged me.

"Try me," I spat back.

Laurel slipped her sword off her back in a quick movement and chopped at me. Obviously, I saw *that* coming, so I dodged it, and hit her full on with my shield that I still had on my lap. My shield swing knocked her off her log, which gave me time to pull out my Odin's Storm. Lemmirg yanked out his crossbow, but I kicked super hard at his chest, and he buckled over. Laurel came back at me with her sword, but I parried her initial swing and followed that up with a fake slice at her neck. Laurel foresaw the fake, but missed my follow up which was launching bolas out of my shield at her (boy was I glad that I had reloaded my shield before I went to bed!). Laurel was cinched up like a tuft of wheat and fell backward into the sand. Meanwhile, Lemmirg scrambled to pick up his crossbow, but I back flipped over him and chopped it in half with my weapon in mid-flight.

"Still think you both can beat me?" I taunted Lemmirg. Lemmirg glared angrily at me, but put his fingers in his mouth and blew a low, but loud, whistle. I looked up in surprise and saw two large, black shadows swoop down out of the sky against the very early morning sunrise – Deathgrippers. Both of them came at me and attempted to crush me, but I rolled out of the way and ducked behind my shield. No sooner had the Deathgrippers landed, than Sulpher, Slizer, and Powder stampeded out of the forest and attacked. The Deathgrippers sprayed a thick stream of green acid at them, which forced them to scatter in different directions. Sulpher ran by Laurel to get at one of the Deathgrippers, but he dodged her hammer smash and sliced through Laurel's restraining ropes with his long white horns. Meanwhile, Powder ran up to me, and I quickly mounted him. Then, we dodged the other Deathgripper's acid and swerved in from the right. However, Lemmirg mounted *that* Deathgripper, and they took to the sky just as we flew right underneath them.

"Let's get them!" I told Powder as he pumped his wings and fell in behind Lemmirg. Powder sprayed mist at them, but Lemmirg dove out of the way and took a tight curve to get behind *us*. As our aerial battle ensued, Slizer and Sulpher managed to attack the second Deathgripper, but he barely avoided getting hit by taking to the sky as well – after picking up Laurel with his claws. At the last minute, Slizer sprang into the air and plunged his tail spike into the Deathgripper's thick scales. The Deathgripper faltered, but held his altitude. They quickly disappeared behind a thick shroud of trees as Powder swerved to avoid Lemmirg's third blast of acid.

"Backward loop!" I commanded Powder – patting him on the neck. Powder immediately pumped his wings and threw his body upside down in a backward motion. This maneuver caught Lemmirg by surprise and allowed us to take back our valuable position behind him.

“Fsshht, Fshht, Fshht!” Powder sprayed cloud after cloud of mist at the Deathgripper and Lemmirg, but they managed to dodge each time.

“They’re heading towards the village!” I told Powder. Powder nodded his head and dodged a stream of thick acid that the Deathgripper had shot back at us. Lemmirg changed his course slightly and headed directly for the village. With us on his tail, Lemmirg dove down almost to ground level and sped through the streets of the village. Luckily, most of the Wing Maidens hadn’t woken up yet, but there were a few that saw the aerial battle and quickly set about waking their fellow warriors.

“Goosh!” Lemmirg swung around a tall house and came right back at us. Powder dove out of the way and the stream of acid hit a nearby tree and completely incinerated part of its foliage.

“How long do you think they can keep this up?” I asked Powder as we followed them through a slalom course of trees and rocks. Eventually, Powder and I started to gain on them, as we weaved through a particularly flat piece of pastureland; so Lemmirg started climbing back into the sky.

“Krzhow!” – “BOOOM!!!” A lightning bolt streaked through the sky and narrowly missed the Deathgripper – destroying a large boulder a few feet away.

“Puff!” I yelled. Sure enough Puffnut and Zap flashed up from the village and fell in line with Powder and I as we followed Lemmirg into the sky.

“Thought you could use a little help!” Puffnut told me, “Sulpher came into the village and sounded the alarm, but Nuff’s still sleeping!”

“They’re heading towards that thick cloud,” I told Puffnut, “Let’s make sure they go into there; then we can go back. I still want to check on my island.”

“Sounds good!” Puffnut told me. Zap unleashed another barrage of lightning bolts at the Deathgripper as Powder followed up from the left with more streams of the intense mist. Lemmirg finally disappeared into the dense early-morning fog and left Puffnut and I outside.

“Let’s head back and grab a breakfast,” I told Powder, “I don’t know about you, but I’ve already gone through half of my day!”

Puffnut and I flew back to the village and found Sulpher and Sirena who were talking about the morning events and our trip to Berserker Island.

“So, yeah. I don’t think he was lying that time. For safety’s sake though, I’d still send a majority of your boats,” Sulpher told Sirena that morning.

“I still can’t believe their nerve,” Sulpher continued as we entered the hall and sat down for breakfast, “They must have come here with the rest of the goons, but just hidden themselves and seen us. I don’t know what the purpose of their ‘meeting’ was.”

“I don’t think I’ll ever understand those two,” I told Sulpher, “I thought I understood Lemmirg a year ago, but now I realize he’s on a completely different platform from me!”

“Well, Puff and Nuff are ready, so I’d say we leave as soon as possible,” Sulpher suggested.

“You’re good?” I asked Sirena again as I stood up from the table and polished off my blueberry, breakfast cake.

“Yep! Shouldn’t take us more than two days to get there,” Sirena confirmed, “But you guys stay safe, okay?”

“Sure,” Sulpher replied, hustling out the hall’s wide, double doors. Outside, Puffnut and Nuffnut were bickering about who could stay awake the longest, but stopped when Sulpher told them to shut up.

“You can argue on the way, but let’s at least get over the ocean first!” Sulpher told them. Two hours later, I was back on Powder and my legs were starting to hurt with all the riding I was doing, I couldn’t image that Powder was enjoying it either, because he was going somewhat slower than usual. Even the Skrillnappers’ tails were drooping.

“How much longer?” Nuffnut groaned, “My thighs are killing me!”

“It’s at least going to take us until noon,” Puffnut said matter-of-factly.

“Ugh, I think we should change our name from the Mutant Dragon Riders to the Poor Hurt Dragon Riders,” Nuffnut replied.

“Oh, yeah. Like that’s really fierce,” I mumbled.

“Hey! Why don’t we play this new game I just thought of!” Puffnut told us excitedly.

“Anything you just came up with is dangerous,” I reminded her.

“Sure, but this is different. The game is called ‘What’s more dangerous than...’,” Puffnut continued, “Basically you just list things that are more dangerous than something else. For instance, ‘What’s more dangerous than giving Lemmrig a Deathgripper?’.”

“Oh, oh! ‘What’s more dangerous than giving Lemmrig a Deathgripper is letting Mom and Tuffnut loose in a boar pit!’,” Nuffnut spouted out.

“Well,” I cut in, “What’s more dangerous than letting Ruffnut and Tuffnut loose in a boar pit, is giving Viggo Grimborn a Shellfire.”

“Oooh, that’s bad,” Puffnut agreed, “But what’s more dangerous than *that* is putting Kaizar and Sulpher together.”

“Hey!” I said.

Puffnut and Nuffnut laughed so hard that Nuffnut almost fell off her dragon. Luckily, Sulpher was too far down below to hear that.

“What’s more dangerous than putting Kaizar and Sulpher together, is giving Snotlout a bunch of Monstrous Nightmare Gel!” Nuffnut continued finally. We had all heard the stories of the many things Snotlout had blown up with Monstrous Nightmare gel.

“Well, what’s worse than that is...,” I replied.

Sulpher was right. At about noon, we made it to Berserker Island. Also, Lemmrig was right. There were no War Lord goon boats around.

“Berserkers beware!” Puffnut shouted, “For we are coming for you!”

“You realize that most Berserkers aren’t berserk, right?” I told Puffnut.

“Ha, ha - very funny, Kaizar – that’s the most ludicrous thing you’ve ever said,” Nuffnut chimed in, completely disbelieving me.

“Just you wait and see!” I told them.

With Sulpher and Slizer a little ways behind, the rest of us landed in perfect but unplanned formation right in the burnt center of the Berserker town square.

“Welcome home, Kaizar!” Dad called out to me, as I stumbled off Powder who collapsed on the ground, “You’re home a little earlier than planned, right?”

“Yep. And we picked up a few riders along the way,” I told Dad – showing him Puffnut and Nuffnut’s dragons.

"They're Skrillnappers," Nuffnut informed Dad, "Half Skrill and half Boneknapper."

"Oh," Dad said, clearly disgusted with how ugly the dragons were.

"They look sort of like you," I told Puffnut and Nuffnut.

"Save the smart comments for later," Puffnut snapped at me.

"Hey, I just say it as I call it," I replied.

"Raugh!" Nuffnut jumped me and pinioned me to the ground, but I easily threw her off, and she collided with Dagur who was just coming out of the kitchen shack.

"Who are *you*?" Dagur asked Nuffnut.

"Pfft, I could ask you the same question, and I am!" Nuffnut said, offended by Dagur.

"I'm the chief of the entire Berserker Island," Dagur said grandly.

"Yeah, and I'm Thor's wife," Nuffnut replied sarcastically, clearly not believing Dagur.

"Why you-!" Dagur declared, getting angry.

"Calm down, Uncle," I told him, "These are just my friends, Puffnut and Nuffnut who are Tuffnut and Ruffnut's kids."

"Oh," Dagur replied.

"Oh, so he actually is the chief?" Nuffnut asked me. When I nodded my head, Nuffnut paled slightly.

"Sorry, man. You didn't look like a chief so I-," Nuffnut began – before realizing how bad that sounded as well.

"Moving on," Dad said, "How was your trip to Whispering Death Island?"

"Sweet!" Puffnut said, "We even met this dude named Ogard who's hunting down Hiccup!"

"WHAT?!" Dad replied.

"Yeah. He's Drago's son, and he blames Hiccup for his father's death," I added.

"Pfft. He's not going to find Hiccup. I don't even know where he is!" Dagur said nonchalantly.

"Whoa! The whole gang's here!" Snotlout declared as he and a bunch of Berserker Elders exited from the nearby meeting hall.

"It's kind of a long story, but, uh, more than half of the Wing Maiden ships are also coming," I told Snotlout.

"Why?!" Snotlout asked.

"Well, because I thought that the War Lords had attacked this island," I replied, a little nervous.

"Why would you think that?" Snotlout questioned.

"Because they attacked us first!" Sulpher said, coming up behind me with Slizer, "They literally attacked our island with Laurel's help and killed twenty of us - before MDR arrived and fought them off single-handedly."

"WHAT?!?!" Snotlout roared, "HOW DARE THEY! They will PAY!" As Snotlout's face turned a nasty shade of red, Dad asked, "Whose MDR?"

"Oh, that's the name of our team - the Mutant Dragon Riders," Puffnut answered, "Sulpher on Slizer, Kaizar on Powder, Me on Zap, and Nuffnut on Bash."

"Ha, your group's name wasn't half as good," Heather told Dad, "You were just 'The Dragon Riders'."

"Teenagers," Dad mumbled.

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That night, as we all sat around a large bonfire eating yak sticks, Mala divulged what their meetings had all been about.

"As you know," Mala told everyone, "Berserker Island has been through a lot lately due to the Battle to End All Battles (as it was known), and our ability to survive our infamous cold winter is unknown. Also, the Wing Maidens have been looking for a more balanced population. Thus, we have spent that last few days talking about the feasibility of us all moving to Wing Maiden Island temporarily while our island recovers."

Mala's first few sentences confirmed my fear – we may not stay here on Berserker Island.

"So," Mala continued, "after much deliberation and consideration, the elders of the Berserkers, Defenders of the Wing, and Wing Maidens have all met and decided to go ahead with the plan to, for the time being, move all Berserkers and Defenders of the Wing tribesmen to Wing Maiden Island until further notice."

The roar of disapproval, agreement, or plain shock burst of control quickly.

"QUIET!!!" Dagur yelled over the commotion, "We have indeed thought through every option and firmly believe that we must look after our people more than our island. Thus, if it means moving ourselves to a friendly ally, that's what we must do."

"And!" Snotlout quickly added, "We have *tons* of extra houses and accommodations on our island!"

"Alright then," one Berserker challenged, "Do ya' have a combat dome?"

"Actually," Snotlout answered while winking at all of us, "We have two!"

The entire crowd fell silent, and I leaned over to Sulpher, "Is that true?"

"Yep," she whispered back, "Though we normally use the second for weight and agility training."

"Say I'm onboard with this plan," a Defender of the Wing woman spoke up next, "How am I going to get all my stuff there."

"Easy," Snotlout answered again, "You probably don't have much, but even if you do, we have more than two dozen, full-size warships on their way right now to pick you up!"

"Wait, that wasn't for *that* purpose," I told Sulpher.

"I know, but he makes it seem like he was super prepared," Sulpher whispered back, "He's an expert at that."

"Well," Mala finally spoke up, "If there aren't any more pressing matters, I'd say we should start packing up."

Everyone quickly scattered, some more excited than others, but everyone interested in how this was going to work out. Meanwhile, Puffnut and Nuffnut came over and sat down next to us.

"You're right," Nuffnut told me, "These people aren't really that Berserk."

"Such a let down," Puffnut added, "I was at least home for slight craziness."

"They're no more crazy than the Berkians," Nuffnut complained, "What's 'Nut' got to do to get some action!"

"Travel to the Tribe of the Whispering Trees in search of a legendary treasure," I told them.

"Really?" Sulpher asked, "That's what we have to do?"

"Yep, if we want to get that sword's pieces," I told them.

"Okayyy, but isn't that where Ogard is?" Sulpher answered.

"Yeah, so we're going to need to be stealthy," I said in a whisper.

"Like, how stealthy?" Nuffnut replied in an equally hushed voice.

“Like, so sneaky that no one sees us coming or going,” I answered.  
Sulpher rolled her eyes.



## Chapter 5

“Hurry up, Kaizar!” Dagur yelled at me as we struggled under the weight of a very large crate full of miscellaneous axes.

“I’m *trying*,” I grunted, “But this thing weighs a ton, and Slizer isn’t here to help.”

“When I was a boy,” Dagur continued as I stumbled along, trying to hold the other end of the crate up, “I could have lifted this thing by myself! But I’m getting older, and you should be able to do this now.”

“Yeah, but I don’t lift weights every day,” I puffed.

“Well, you should!” Dagur insisted.

I rolled my eyes and put my back into it. We were right in the middle of transferring all of our supplies to the small legion of Wing Maiden vessels in preparation for the mass migration to Wing Maiden Island. I’d been so busy the last two days, that I simply hadn’t time to process the realization that I was leaving my home island for a while. Powder, Slizer, Zap, and Bash were busy dragging and lifting heavy machinery onto the boats’ decks, so it was back to man power in getting objects to the ships.

When Dagur and I finally got the crate to the East beach, we had to go back for more.

As I was leaving, Snotlout fell in step with me.

“You’ve been pretty quiet recently,” Snotlout observed.

“Yeah, I just came off the adrenaline high of the adventure at your island. Then, I come back and find out we’re moving,” I replied, still breathing heavy.

“Did your father ever tell you about when all of Berk had to leave their island in search of a new place?” Snotlout asked.

“Maybe once a while ago,” I answered.

“Well, it all started when Hiccup found out that Grimmel the Grisly was after Toothless,” Snotlout began, “Hiccup decided that we had to leave and find a place where we could be safe, so we all packed up our core belongings on our dragons and left. Needless to say, I wasn’t too happy; mostly because Hiccup was bossing me around, but also because the Jorgensens had always lived in Old Berk - it was our legacy. I thought, ‘How could any other island possibly live up to my home?’ But I was wrong, New Berk was a great place, and Wing Maiden Island turned out to be even better.”

“So what’s the moral of the story?” I asked

“The moral is that change is a good thing, but it may just be disguised in something that is downright unpleasant,” Snotlout replied, “It wasn’t easy for the Wing Maidens to let males live permanently on their island, but they had to in order to preserve their lineage. Turns out that guys can be pretty cool!”

“That’s literally the most helpful thing you’ve ever said to me,” I told Snotlout.

Snotlout laughed loudly and slapped me on the back.

“I’m not all strength and good looks,” he chuckled, “Well, since we’ve got another mile before we reach the village, let’s talk about something else. How about my daughter?”

As I narrowly avoided getting run over by a yak cart that Gartley was driving in the opposite direction, I thought about what Snotlout said while completely missing the last part.

“Yeah, but I still don’t know if we *have* to leave,” I replied.

“Wait, you broke up with her?” Snotlout asked, confused.

“Huh? Broke up with who?” I replied.

“You said you don’t know if you have to leave Sulpher,” Snotlout reminded me.

“I didn’t say I had to leave Sulpher, I said I didn’t know if we Berserkers and Defenders of the Wing had to leave this island,” I corrected.

“Oh, okay. So you’ve done the usual stuff – evening walks, romantic trips to the beach, et cetera,” Snotlout listed.

“Uh, no, but I’m still thinking of-,” I began.

“Yeah, you’re right. Those things don’t really matter. Why Minden and I bonded right in the middle of a crisis when Krogan’s Singetails were attacking Wing Maiden Island,” Snotlout told me, “And you and Sulpher bonded over being stuck in a ship’s hold for a few days.”

“Well, yeah, but-,” I answered.

“Keep it up boy,” Snotlout said while slapping me on the back again, “You’ll be a great son-in-law.”

“Well, I wouldn’t go-,” I tried again.

“She’s a beauty isn’t she?” Snotlout interrupted for the third time, “Why I remember when I laid my eyes on Minden for the second time. It was...”

Snotlout was obviously caught up with a different topic than I was. It was so hard adjusting to what may be a new normal. All of us knew that it takes several years before completely decimated growth can start growing again, which means that it could be a while before we ever got back. That meant losing all my favorite trails and expeditions as well as my annual journeys through Bewilderbeast Mountain with my parents.

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“Kaizar just isn’t the same,” Mom was saying to Mala that night at dinner as we all ate outside.

“I’ve noticed. He looks like he’s partially in shock,” Mala answered.

“I tried talking to him,” Snotlout added as he wolfed down a yak stick, “But he was so quiet that I was practically doing all the talking.”

“I’m still here you know!” I spoke up.

“Well, I know just what you need!” Mom said winking at Snotlout, “You need a nice long date with-.”

“Great idea!” Puffnut added as she jogged by holding a canister of some green slime mixture,

“He and I can go over to the Tribe of the Whispering Trees and find that part of the treasure sword that he was talking about two days ago.”

“The what?” Mom asked.

“You found that old map?” Snotlout groaned, “Hundreds of Wing Maidens have tried to find that thing, but none of us have even found the first piece – it’s impossible!”

“It can’t be!” I told Snotlout, “They wouldn’t have made it if it was *that* hard.”

“It’ll take you forever though!” Snotlout stated.

“Well maybe that’s just what he needs,” Mala suggested.

“Except with me – not Puffnut,” Sulpher said, coming up to us, “And Puffnut, I saw you putting that slime on my sleeping mat.”

“How did you-?!” Puffnut exclaimed – trying to stuff her bucket of slime behind her back.

“One word – stealth,” Sulpher replied.

“The whole MDR could go,” I exclaimed, getting more excited now, “And we could make great time on our dragons!”

“How bad could it be?” Mom shrugged, “The Tribe of the Whispering Trees are the friendliest people you’ll ever meet.”

“Yeah! And they have all sorts of contests throughout the year too,” Snotlout added, “I normally go to their weight-lifting competition later in the year. One year I won a solid silver, miniature sculpture of myself.”

“If you promise to stop by every week so we know you’re alive,” Mom told me, “We can get the rest of the island packed up and sent to Wing Maiden Island by ourselves.”

“Yeah, it’d be nice to have a break from Puff and Nuff too,” Mala said wearily.

“Sweet!” I said, standing up, “Adventure here we come!”

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The next day I was back in my element – doing corkscrews in the air with Powder.

“Alright Powder!” I yelled, “Let’s do that again.”

Powder growled with delight and shot downward in a perfectly scary dive – pulling up just in time to not hit the water and get enough speed to corkscrew a half dozen times.

“You guys are having way too much fun,” Sulpher noted as she ran by on Slizer.

“There’s nothing like a good flight. I don’t know how I had half this fun when I didn’t have any dragons,” I stated.

“Well, Nuffnut and Puffnut also look like they’re having fun,” Sulpher observed.

Sure enough, Nuffnut was taking a nap on Bash who was simply following Zap. Puffnut, in turn, was hanging upside down from Zap’s neck and doing pull-ups.

“Check this out!” Sulpher said to me, standing on top of Slizer and balancing perfectly.

“Ha, you look like you’re surfing – except on a dragon!” I commented, “How close are we anyway?”

Sulpher sat back down and pulled a small map out of her backpack.

“Looks like we have another hour or so – roughly.”

“How do you guys have so many maps?” I quizzed Sulpher.

“Wing Maidens love exploration,” Sulpher reminded me.

“So we’ll have to drop our dragons off at a secluded part of the island with one of us, while the rest of us walk to the village and ask around about this sword piece,” I planned.

“Works with me,” Sulpher agreed, “But if someone knew about that sword piece, wouldn’t they have already claimed it for their own?”

“Probably, but the clue said we had to use diplomacy to get it – whatever *that* means.”

“Hey guys!” Puffnut yelled down to Sulpher and I, “Are those flying sharks? I can’t see because I’m upside down and my vision is clouded in sweat.”

“Too much information!” Sulpher yelled back while I scanned the horizon.

“Uh oh,” I commented, “We’ve got more dragons coming this way.”

“But look at their formation!” Sulpher exclaimed, “Check out that awesome x-shape they made.”

“You’re right,” I told Sulpher, “They don’t even seem to have seen us yet – they’re just going through different maneuvers. Keep on going; I’ll talk to Puff and Nuff.”

“Hey guys!” I told Puffnut and Nuffnut once Powder and I had climbed into the sky a little, “There’s some dragon riders coming up ahead.”

“Huh, wh-what?” Nuffnut said, just waking up.

“He said GET UP!” Puffnut yelled at Nuffnut.

“I’m up, I’m up – geeze,” Nuffnut replied.

“Alright, they’ve seen us now,” I relayed to them, “So let’s hold our tight formation and see who they are – they could be Ogard’s dragon group.”

“The bounty hunters,” Puffnut said under her breath as she flew into line alongside Nuffnut and me.

“Actually,” Nuffnut mentioned, “Bounty hunters are those who hunt down something in return for money. Ogard is after Hlccup for personal reasons.”

“Thanks for that, Dictionary,” I addressed Nuffnut.

“Well if it isn’t MDR!” Ogard yelled over to me as we approached, “Introducing FDF!”

Behind him was more than two dozen riders all sitting on Monstrous Gronckles.

“That’s crazy!” I told Ogard, “Where did you get all of these dragons and riders!”

“Me and a few of these guys and gals found them on top of a random mountain peak on our island. The parents were already long gone to wherever all the dragons went, but they left a ton of eggs. So, we hatched them and “Bam!” – we all get awesome pets,” Ogard explained.

“Hey, uh, don’t get too close to Slizer down there, because he still doesn’t like hybrid dragons that much,” I reminded Ogard.

“Ooh, thanks,” Ogard answered, “Hey guys! Back off from that Speedstinger. He doesn’t like freaks like us!”

The rest of FDF obeyed, but only after one of them still got too close, and his Monstrous Gronckle got stung in the tail.

“So, is your tribe okay with you guys having dragons?” I asked Ogard.

“Oh, yeah, we’re all pretty chill. Feel free to bring them into town,” Ogard answered, “We’re having our last fall festival tomorrow – that’s why we’re all practicing our flying maneuvers – for the opening ceremony.”

I watched as Puffnut and Nuffnut showed off their Skrilnappers to a few of the FDF members; then remembered my purpose for even being here.

“Hey, you wouldn’t happen to know of a special piece of a sword that may be golden or something, would you?” I asked Ogard.

Ogard thought for a moment; then shook his head.

“I can’t say that I have, but I’ll ask the rest of them,” Ogard replied. He relayed to the rest of his group my question, but only one thought he knew something of it.

“Isn’t that kind of like the prize they’re giving for the Towora Challenge?” the particular FDF member said to Ogard.

“Oh, yeah!” Ogard exclaimed, “That does sort of look like a piece of a golden sword.”

“So, where is it?” I prodded Ogard.

“Oh, well our tribe has had this piece of a golden sword in a cave in our wilderness for quite a few generations, and we’ve all forgotten why we had to keep it there,” Ogard explained, “So, for this festival, our elders decided to make it the prize for one of our contests. They embedded it in a wire mesh that has a thick, bronze rope around it so you can wear it as a medal.”

"Can I see it?" I asked Ogard.

"Sure, why are you so interested in it?"

"Well, it may be part of a special sword that the Wing Maidens used to own," I responded.

"Oh, well that makes sense, because there was this inscribed rock in the cave with that sword piece that said something about protecting it and only giving it to a worthy ally," Ogard explained.

"Oh," I replied, "So if I wanted to get it, what would I have to do."

"That's easier said than done," Ogard laughed, "All you have to do is win the Towora Challenge. Problem is, is that the Towora Challenge is our area's biggest hand-to-hand combat tournament, and the winner of every one of the last seven tournaments is attending."

"That's not looking good for me," I sighed, "Who's the tournament champion?"

"Uh, that'd be me," Ogard smirked.

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"So let me get this straight," I said to Ogard as we flew back with FDF to the Tribe of the Whispering Trees' island, "The only way I can get that piece of the sword is by winning the Towora Challenge."

"Yep," Ogard confirmed.

"And the only way I can win the challenge is by beating you."

"Yep," Ogard confirmed again, "Unless someone bests me."

"Ha, like *that's* likely," a FDF nearby guffawed, "Ogard is the best fighter on the island. He even beat this skilled War Lord General crossbow-man this summer."

"And there's no chance I'll be able to purchase it off you?" I asked again.

"Nah. If I win, I'm keeping it," Ogard replied, "But don't sweat it. If you just can't beat me, you'll still get an awesome ribbon."

"That's only if you enter, though," Ogard added.

"Eh, we'll see," I replied, "Meanwhile, I'd love to check out your island. I've never been this far east."

"Yeah. I'll even give you a tour," Ogard added, "Say, I still feel kinda bad about not letting you have that sword piece – especially since it's not for yourself. I'd love to make it up to you by helping you find the rest of the pieces!"

"I might just take you up on the offer," I replied.

We (MDR and FDF) approached the Tribe of the Whispering Trees' island pretty quickly, and I discovered that it was a very large island – at least three times the size of Berserker Island.

"We even have our own Dragon stables!" Ogard told me, "It's right over there – just follow us."

Ogard and the rest of his crew swooped down to a large, open plaza that was located on a massive overhanging part of rock that jutted out over the island's sizable village. Connected to the plaza were several troughs and a myriad of individual little shacks. During the conversation with Ogard, I had lost track of Sulpher, Puffnut, and Nuffnut, but now I singled out Puffnut and Nuffnut as Powder and I flew onto the plaza.

"There's a nice, easy trail up here, so you're Speed Stinger should be fine," Ogard added – almost reading my mind.

“For safety’s sake I’d stay with your dragon, but I’m going to drop off ol’ Mongro here,” Ogard told me when we had landed – leading Mongro to a spacious stable filled with new hay and a pile of fish.

“Aren’t these guys the coolest!” Nuffnut told me when she and Puffnut ran up, “It’s like a whole new world!”

Ogard chuckled, “Not *that* cool, but thanks for the compliment. I had to push hard to get this built.”

Ogard led us outside of the Dragon stables and started down a nicely-kept trail towards the village below. Halfway down, we ran into Sulpher and Slizer racing up.

“Kaizar! We almost lost you!” Sulpher yelled to me, “This island is insane!”

“Yeah! Sorry about the amount of people down in the village – we’re setting up for the festival,” Ogard told Sulpher.

Sulpher nodded and dismounted Slizer.

“What other things do they do during this festival?” Puffnut questioned Ogard.

“Well,…” Ogard began as they moved on in front.

“Doesn’t FDF freak you out a little?” Sulpher told me.

“Not really, why?” I responded, a bit surprised.

“It’s like they’re *too* friendly. I mean they made friends with us super quick!” Sulpher explained.

“Possibly, but I noticed their dragons are *very* well cared for. At least I know they’ll treat our dragons well,” I told Sulpher.

“Maybe,” Sulpher responded, “We’ll see.”

“By the way, Ogard filled me in on this upcoming festival and how to get that piece of the Wing Maiden sword,” I informed Sulpher.

“Where is it?” Sulpher quickly asked.

“It’s a prize for a hand-to-hand combat tournament, so one of us will have to enter and win it,” I told Sulpher.

“No problem, I bet I could do it,” Sulpher figured.

“Yeah, but guess who you’re going to have to beat and who is the seven time champion?”

“Who?”

“Ogard.”

“I think I’ll let you compete,” Sulpher quickly conceded.

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“RAURGH!” my opponent roared as he ran towards me.

“And here we have ‘Fjorn’ competing against ‘Kaizar’,” the announcer yelled through his large bullhorn.

If it wasn’t for the fact that I was committed to getting *all* of the pieces of the sword together, I’d probably not be doing this. However, as it was, I was committed, so I was doing this.

My opponent happened to be wielding a type-ten, iron broadsword that I recognized from the armory back on Berserker Island. I had found out a long time ago that as long as you stay to the side of that particular make of broadsword, you were set. Fjorn bore down about me and brought his broadsword down on my head like he was going to split me in two, but all he did was chip the concrete floor of the fighting arena. Fjorn roared again with anger at being

outsmarted and sliced at me with his backswing, but I caught it with my Odin's Storm and flung it away easily. Fjorn jumped back in surprise as his sword was just ripped from his hand.

"How did you-?" Fjorn asked – completely bewildered.

"Tricks of the trade," I replied, disgusted with his complete ineptness with a sword. Even one of my fellow graduating class members could have taken Fjorn down with ease.

"And that's a win for Kaizar Ingerman. Next we have Yrtree versus Uijmi," the announcer continued on. I left the arena and into the preparation area where Sulpher was waiting for me.

"Where's Powder?"

"Oh, he's up with Puffnut and Nuffnut and the rest of our dragons gorging himself on dried salmon and lying in a pile of hay," Sulpher told me.

"Well, what is Puffnut and Nuffnut doing up there?"

"They're trying to convince Ogard to push for a boar wrestling contest," Sulpher laughed.

"Really?! Ogard would be crazy to do that, because Puff and Nuff would cream all of their opposition," I added.

"I know right?" Sulpher replied, "Well, I'm interested in the sewing and cloth exhibition they have a few streets down, so while you're waiting for your next opponent, wanna come along?"

"Lead the way," I said, linking arms with her. It was the next day, and the first day of the late fall festival for the Tribe of the Whispering Trees. FDF had done a spectacular air show in the morning and given me a few good ideas of things to practice with Slizer. Then, they had a massive all-village breakfast that we participated in. Evidently, the tribe's festivals were fairly popular, and I met several people from different tribes.

As Sulpher looked through a pile of differently colored cloths, I thought about the Towora Tournament. It consisted of a series of knockout rounds, in which each winner went on to compete against the winner of another pair. With as many contestants as there were, the tournament normally took a whole two days to complete. In order to minimize the number of deaths in the tournament, a few rules were put in place including if you drop your weapon – your opponent automatically wins. Tournaments like these were always dangerous, but I was used to them, so I didn't care that much. Plus, I knew when to surrender to someone who was too much better than me.

"Kaizar! Look at this lovely red!" Sulpher said, pulling out a yard's worth of fabric from underneath a pile of cloth.

"Uh, that's nice?" I replied.

"How much is this?" Sulpher asked the booth seller.

"That's ten gold coins," the seller answered, "and of the finest quality you can find!"

"Oh, that's too much," Sulpher replied, dejected. I was about to offer her some of my money, but the seller – anxious to make a sell – quickly made a counter offer.

"I've got another fabric that is close to that red tint," he told Sulpher graciously, "I have it right underneath the table."

The seller put on a pair of leather gloves and reached under the table. He pulled out a thick bolt of red fabric.

"Look at that interesting scale pattern on it," I commented.

"Yep, an intricate work," the seller agreed.

"Is this even fabric?" Sulpher asked after studying it.

“Well, er, I found it in the woods here, and some say it might have come from a venomous snake that lives here,” the seller replied nervously, “BUT there is no snake I’ve ever seen that could shed this much!”

“There *are* no snakes on this island,” Sulpher replied skeptically, “but if you tell me where you *really* got it, I might be willing to buy some – I do like the red tint.”

The seller sighed and spouted out the truth, “I found it on another island a ways away that is heavily forested. I found a whole pile of irregularly shaped bolts of this fabric-thing in a clearing there. I don’t know where it came from, but here it is!”

“Is that why you’re wearing gloves?” I noted.

“Uh huh, could be poisonous,” he added sheepishly, “but highly unlikely!”

Sulpher suddenly got a funny expression on her face; then her eyes got wide.

“How much of this do you have?” she asked the seller.

“Um, four bolts,” the seller said, “and I’ll give you all of them for only six gold coins.”

“Can I see the other three?”

“Sure, they’re in the back – I’ll be right back,” the seller replied. He quickly disappeared into his small store behind the table.

“Kaizar, do you realize what this probably is?” Sulpher asked me.

“Uh, a fantastic scam?”

“No! It’s probably Changewing skin!” Sulpher exclaimed. She rubbed her hands together for a moment; then touched the fabric. Instantly, it disappeared from sight – making Sulpher’s hand look like it was floating in air.

“The heat from a Changewing’s body could activate the skin. You can reproduce this using your own body heat,” Sulpher informed me, “Dad told me all about this stuff. It’s impossible to find. Luckily for us, very few people realize what they’re missing out on.”

Eventually, the seller returned lugging three more bolts of the fabric. He plopped it on the table and restated his offer.

“Deal!” Sulpher told him, “But Kaizar here needs to get back to his tournament; so could you help me carry them to my living area?”

“Absolutely!” The seller agreed, pocketing his six gold coins. While the seller rejoiced over his “impossible” sale, Sulpher’s eyes gleamed with the many possibilities that Changewing skin had.

“Be safe!” Sulpher told me, giving me a quick hug, “I’ll see you soon.”

I ran back to the combat arena and arrived a few minutes early for my match.

“Next up is Kaizar and Turei!” the announcer droned on.

I entered the arena and sized up my opponent on the opposite side of the arena. She was a younger lady with a medium-sized mace, but I could tell she had more experience than my last two opponents.

“Ready...set...fight!” the announcer yelled.

I slowly circled forward, keeping an eye on her mace while Turei did the same. Slowly, slowly I crept closer to her. Then, I attacked. Turei met my initial attack gracefully and countered with smash, but I blocked it and pressed her backward. This simple movement caused her to have to reposition her legs, which gave me an opportunity to trip her. I swiftly stuck out my right leg and let her hit the ground; then I chopped at her. Turei managed to catch my swing and scramble



back up, but that time cost her because I was able to time a skilled bash. With a sickening crunch, I swung my Odin's Storm broadside at her and knocked her head into the wall with a powerful stroke. While she collapsed unconscious to the ground, the crowd roared their approval.

"Alright, Kaizar. If you would like to compete immediately against another opponent and manage to beat that opponent, you'll automatically be promoted to the semi-finals," the announcer yelled through his horn.

"Sign me up!" I yelled back up. The crowd excitedly cheered and waited for my next opponent to enter as soon as Turei was carried out, while I trotted back to my position on one side of the arena. I waited for a minute as the crowd calmed down, but nobody else entered the arena and the announcer was in a deep conversation with one of the dedicated "referees." After a while, the referee entered the arena and walked over to me.

"So sorry to bother you, Ingerman, but the next contestant uses a crossbow – which kind of gives him an advantage. If we let you use your shield, do you want to continue?" the referee asked.

"I can use my entire shield – this one?" I confirmed, pulling my shield off my back and showing it to him.

"Yes, that's an acceptable one," the referee allowed.

"Alright, then - I'm good," I told him.

"Nice." The referee disappeared, and soon the announcer started talking again.

"From way up North and last summer's runner-up, please welcome Lemmirg the Wrathful!"

As my mouth slowly slid open in shock, Lemmirg confidently strode into the arena and waved to the crowd.

"And he is battling our surprise warrior – Kaizar the Sneak!" the announcer finished. No sooner had the announcer said my name, than Lemmirg caught sight of me and *his* mouth dropped open.

"On your marks...get set...duel!"

Lemmirg and I quickly shrugged off our shock and started circling each other. After pulling out his crossbow, Lemmirg deftly loaded it and leveled it at my head. Meanwhile, I pulled up my shield to my eye level and quickly considered what I knew about Lemmirg's fighting technique. He had good aim, but was slow to move – and he'd probably kill me if he could.

"Zing!" Lemmirg let his arrow fly, but I raised my shield and the arrow harmlessly bounced off it. No sooner had Lemmirg shot at me, then I raced towards him. The crowd roared with pleasure as I bore down upon and brought down my Odin's Storm in a mighty swing. Unfortunately, Lemmirg dodged and launched another arrow at me. I barely caught it with my shield and chopped at him now that he was a scant meter from me, but he caught me by surprise by jamming his crossbow at me. I stumbled backward a little, and Lemmirg kicked me so hard in the right arm that I fell over backwards and my weapon flew out of my grasp and skittered across the floor.

"And we have a winner – Lemmirg!" the announcer boomed.

But Lemmirg didn't stop, he reloaded his crossbow and jumped on top of me.

"You don't just lose, Kaizar," Lemmirg said shoving his crossbow in my face, "You die!"

“Excuse me, please stop all battling,” the announcer said again – getting slightly worried. I saw the referee moving toward us, but it wouldn’t be soon enough. The world went into slow motion as Lemmrig pulled his trigger, and that’s when I remembered my words, “I can use my entire shield?”

“Floop!”

An object was launched – but it wasn’t an arrow, and it wasn’t by Lemmrig. Lemmrig was instantly entangled by the pair of bolas and his arrow shot harmlessly off the wall to my right. He stumbled around trying to disentangle himself, but I jumped up in a quick motion and clocked him in the head with a roundhouse punch. Lemmrig spun around like a top and smashed into the wall – knocking out. This turn of events shocked the crowd, and they fell silent.

“Well, uh, that was *interesting*,” the announcer finally said as the referee inspected Lemmrig, “I guess we’ll have to review that for who exactly wins.”

“Nope!” the referee shouted to the announcer, “The rules state that you must stop dueling as soon as your opponent loses his weapon. Lemmrig did not stop, thus Kaizar is not responsible for taking Lemmrig out and thus wins the match.”

At this, the crowd burst into applause again.

“Well, that means Kaizar is moving on to the semi-finals which begin at noon tomorrow,” the announcer explained, “Come back then to see more incredible fights. Until then, we’ll continue these pre-duels.”

I shook hands with the referee; then exited the arena and headed back up the trail to the stables.

“Hey, Kaizar! Wait up!” Puffnut shouted from behind me. I turned around to see Nuffnut and Puffnut weaving through the crowd of shoppers and spectators towards me.

“That was an awesome move you pulled there at the end!” Puffnut told me, “Lemmrig didn’t even see it coming!”

It was news to me that Puffnut and Nuffnut had been watching me, but I was glad that they were there to support me (or at least that’s what I chose to think they were there for)

“Why was he even here?” I asked her.

“How should I know! He was probably just here to win – but didn’t expect you’d be here too!” Puffnut concluded.

“Which means that he now knows where I am and can come after me,” I countered, “And I doubt he’s going to be very happy about me taking him down this evening.”

“Ah, we’ll be fine,” Nuffnut stated, “With FDF, we should be just fine.”

I shrugged my shoulders and continued up the trail, “So is Sulpher with our dragons?”

“Yeah,” Nuffnut confirmed, “She came up with like four bolts of red fabric and said that you were dueling it out down there, so Puff and I were like, ‘Dude we’ve got to see this!’.”

“Well, you certainly got an eyeful,” I laughed.

“OWE!” Puffnut whined, “Something hit me!”

“You can’t trick me,” Nuffnut chuckled, “I’m not buying – OUCH! It pinched me on the arm!”

At first, I was confused, but then I saw the bushes on the side of the path near Nuffnut and Puffnut suddenly rustle, and I knew what was going on.

“Ooh,” I teased, “An invisible monster is attacking you!”

“Don’t laugh,” Nuffnut countered, “Something *did* get me.”

"OWE!" Puffnut whined, "It did it again, and on my knee!"

"WoooooOOO!" a voice sounding remarkably like Sulpher suddenly said from close by, "I'm the ghost of Sulpher!"

"Wh-what?" Nuffnut asked, looking around desperately.

"You left Sulpher alone, and she was killed by a rogue FDF rider! Ooooooh!"

"But how were we supposed to know?" Puffnut argued, completely accepting ghost Sulpher.

"You weren't!" Sulpher declared throwing off her Changewing skin, "And I was just fine."

"How did you-?" Nuffnut asked – completely thrown off.

Sulpher smirked, "I'll explain over dinner. Right now, we need to go check on our dragons."

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"Ten gold coins," Puffnut bargained the next morning at breakfast, "That's more than you paid for all four, and I just want one!"

Sulpher shook her head, "Sorry, Puff, I already told you that they're not for sale."

"Awe, come on Sulpher. I'm your friend!" Puffnut whined.

"Sure, sure," Sulpher replied, "Now you are!"

"Alright, alright guys," I cut in, "What are your plans for today?"

"I'm going to participate in a Maces and Talons tournament," Nuffnut informed me as she leaned back in her wooden chair.

"And a really nice FDF member is teaching me how to do one of those windmill tricks on Zap," Puffnut added.

"I was actually thinking of heading back to Wing Maiden Island and checking on how our parents are doing," Sulpher explained, "Plus I've got this great idea for this fabric."

"I don't think Slizer could support all that weight. Plus, it isn't safe for you to go alone since I have to stay here for the Towora Competition - especially since Lemmirg is out there somewhere," I commented.

"What if I went with Puffnut and a few FDF?" Sulpher thought, "They could teach Puffnut some tricks on the way."

"I thought you said that FDF were creepy?" I asked Sulpher.

"Yeah, they still are, but they're also super accommodating," Sulpher added.

"Well, you're your own person, so that decision's up to you. As for me, Powder and I need to head to the training arena and practice a little for our duel with Ogard," I finished.

"Hey! I just thought of something!" Nuffnut exclaimed excitedly.

"What?" Sulpher and I asked.

"What if I dressed up Bjorn Boar to look like a turkey?" Nuffnut suggested.

I groaned and made a hasty exit, and Sulpher quickly split ways as well.

I was making my way over to Powder's stable when I passed Ogard

"Well, you feel up to our duel today?" Ogard asked me as I walked by Mongro's pen.

"You bet!" I said confidently, "If I could take out Lemmirg yesterday, I can give you a run for your money today!"

"Don't count on it, but I admire your courage," Ogard laughed, "See you soon!"

I found Powder sprawled out on the bottom of his stable snoozing away, so I felt pretty bad waking him up, but I preferred having him around for backup in case Lemmirg showed up.

“Come on boy!” I told him, tossing him a fat salmon, “Let’s go practice.” Sure enough, Powder wasn’t happy, but the fish enticed him to follow.

They were still finishing up the last pre-finals at the combat arena. Then, at roughly noon, they’d start the quarter-finals, so I’d have to beat three others if I wanted to battle Ogard.

The marketplace was even more busy than yesterday so I found it hard to make it to the practice arena where several of the contestants were warming up for their matches. Powder and I found an empty place along the wall, and I began my warm-up sequence.

“Hey it’s that surprise winner from yesterday!” one of the other warriors shouted to me.

“What’s up?” I asked him.

“That trick you played with your shield was awesome!” he replied, “Can I see it again?”

“Sure,” I told him. Instead, though, I launched the grappling hook out of my shield, and it flew through the air and hooked on the chain-link structure atop the dome. I swung through the air, did a triple somersault, and aced the landing a scant two meters from the warrior.

As the rope retracted into my shield, I watched the warrior’s jaw slowly return to its original position. A few others nearby also stared open-mouthed.

“That...is...the...coolest shield EVER!” he exclaimed, “Where did you get it?”

“It was actually a sort of gift,” I told him, “The only one of its kind.”

“Rats, well, good luck out there!” he told me.

“Sounds good, good luck to you too!” I replied.

I did some more stretches and a few quick sprints; then got bored so I decided to look around in the marketplace. There were several interesting looking objects I found, but nothing worth spending much money on. After a while I got bored of shopping too, so I decided to check on Nuffnut in the Maces and Talons tournament. That particular competition was taking place in a massive wooden building near the left part of town. It was so huge that it had several support beams in the middle of the building and was entirely open inside. When Powder and I walked in, I noticed at least three dozen tables placed strategically throughout the building where several pairs of people were thinking over tables of Maces and Talons.

“Welcome sir!” an older Viking man said to me when I walked by the playing area, “Are you here to play or to watch.

“Well, that depends,” I told him, “How long does the competition last?”

“Actually, it should be finished a little before noon,” he told me, “We had a drop in competitors since last year, and right now we only have five people left – the rest are just playing for fun.”

“Sure,” I said, “I’ll join.”

“Great!” the man replied enthusiastically, “You didn’t start with everyone else, but I’m the arbiter so I’ll allow you to play that fifth person as the sixth person. Right this way, sir.”

Powder followed me, but remained quiet. I knew that I wasn’t the best Maces and Talons player, but I played it frequently with my parents and relatives so I wasn’t too bad either. It was doubtful that I could win this, but I was bored so I was up for it anyway.

“Excuse me, ma’am,” the arbiter said, “This boy, here, is going to play you for this round.”

I looked at my opponent and found it to be Nuffnut.

“You made it this far?!” I asked Nuffnut.

“Yeah, I’m *that* good,” Nuffnut replied confidently. I was suspicious about this, but kept my mouth shut.

“Well, I guess you know each other, so good luck,” the arbiter said. Once he had paired the four other players up, he banged a large drum at the front of the building, and we began.

Nuffnut went for a typical frontal attack with a long ship, but I decided on a longer-game tactic by building up strong defenses and sending out my spy first. At first, it looked like Nuffnut’s boat might break through my fortress of catapults, but eventually her dice worked against her, and she had to retreat. Then, using an extra turn from my spy, I moved my catapults around the ocean and converged them on Nuffnut’s small castle. It took longer than I thought, but I eventually demolished her forces and won the game.

“Ah, what bad luck,” Nuffnut whined, “Being paired up with you.”

“I couldn’t let you win the whole tournament!” I told Nuffnut.

After the other games ended, the arbiter came over and talked with Nuffnut and I.

“Ma’am? We now have three winners, but we need four players. Would you like to play another player and stay in?” he asked her.

“Would I?!” Nuffnut exclaimed excitedly, “Of course!”

“Great!” the arbiter said.

I was next paired up to an older lady who was remarkably smart. She countered all of my attacks and threw down a few devastating ones of her own. Eventually, her forces started to overwhelm mine, and I lost some production power, so I gambled and sent two generals on a small boat across the ocean. My opponent, thinking this an impossible idea, continued her attack. When my generals reached the other side of the board, I brought them around and attacked the chieftain’s armor bearer. The armor bearer dealt my generals massive blows and killed one off one while almost crippling the other. Meanwhile, my castle managed to hold strong against her other attacks.

When it was my turn again, I maneuvered my general around the armor bearer and used my traitor to give me an extra turn. Then, I killed her king. My opponent groaned.

“I’ve never seen anyone win with that tactic,” she sighed, “You got really lucky!”

“I know, right? The armor bearer is so strong, you could have easily killed me, but you just couldn’t quite take down both of my generals,” I replied.

The other game ended with Nuffnut losing again, so I was paired up against her opponent for the final round, and Nuffnut and my opponent were paired up for the third place prize.

“I can’t believe it!” the arbiter noted, “You came in to play the hardest players, and you’re still winning!”

It was getting close to noon, but I figured that I had enough time for another round.

My opponent this round was a younger boy with long hair who chose an incredibly powerful tactic. He spent all his resources on buying several longboats and just launched them at me all at once.

My uncle loved this maneuver, and it was hard to really combat it. However, I had found an idea that appeared to work about fifty percent of the time. It basically consisted of just producing a massive number of catapults in hopes of sinking some of the ships as they moved towards my half of the board. As his boats and my catapults dealt each other blows, I realized that he had made the same mistake as the lady before him. He had left his king defended by only the armor bearer. Thus, while my catapults were being taken out – one by one – I sent another small canoe, with three generals this time, towards *his* side of the board. I just reached his side of the

board, when the last of my catapults were taken out, and his only surviving long boat offloaded its warriors onto my shore. Then, he used his traitor to get an extra turn and completely swarmed my castle walls and armor bearer. My opponent chuckled, knowing I was in deep trouble. However, I still had a turn left, so I ran two of my generals up to the armor bearer and the other I ran alongside the castle wall. When his armor bearer came out to kill the two generals, my third general ran into the castle and took out the king.

"NO!" the boy groaned, "How could you win just one move ahead of me! All I can say is that you're one good Maces and Talons player!"

We shook hands just as Nuffnut somehow managed to win her game.

"And we have OUR WINNERS!" the excited arbiter cried out to the playing hall. All of those milling around made their way over, and the arbiter made us players stand up.

"Our third place winner is Nuffnut daughter of Eret!" the arbiter announced loudly, handing Nuffnut an exquisite jade playing piece depicting the king in Maces and Talons. Nuffnut pumped her fists in the air and waved to the crowd who clapped for her.

"Second place goes to our local – Harte Garret!" the arbiter continued, handing a miniature, but solid silver Maces and Talons set to Harte. The prizes were only getting more and more costly, and I couldn't imagine what I was going to get!

"And first place goes to Berserker Kaizar the Sneak!" the arbiter finished. The crowd went fairly wild for me (as crazy as Maces and Talons fans get...) as the arbiter fished around in his pocket and pulled out a perfectly-cut ruby. It was about the size of half of my hand and was the most beautiful color of red I had ever seen.

"Ooh," the crowd said, looking at the ruby.

"Thank you all for playing, and I'll see you again next year!" the arbiter stated. Now that the tournament was over, it was almost time for my matchup in the Towora Challenge. As Powder and I hurriedly left the playing area, Nuffnut ran up alongside us.

"You'll be able to sell that for a fortune!" Nuffnut told me.

"Maybe, but I'm not selling it," I told Nuffnut.

"What are you doing with it then?" she asked me.

"That's for you to find out!" I replied mysteriously, "but could you take care of it until I'm done with my tournament? I don't trust Powder to hold it for me."

Nuffnut agreed and disappeared with Powder into the stands to watch me duel. I, on the other hand, ran to the competitor-only entrance and lined up with a few other warriors for our turn.

No sooner had I arrived than I was called out. My next two competitors were both really good, but not as good as Lemmirg; so I knocked the weapon out of their hands in about five minutes each. The third competitor was so extremely good with parrying my cuts and slices, that I had to resort to a chop and kick routine to finally take him out.

"And that's Kaizar's next win which takes him to the final round!" the announcer cried out.

The crowd cheered its approval, and Nuffnut hooted for me as she propped her legs up on Powder's sleeping form.

"We'll have our second-to-last match here between Ogard and Wirmst. Then, we'll have an hour break before our final match!" the announcer continued. I exited the arena and moved over to the practice arena where I sat down on a bench and rested.

"Excuse me sir?" a small girl said to me.

I turned around to find her standing sheepishly beside me with a small piece of paper in her left hand. I'm sorry to bother you, but are you "Kaizar?"

"Yes," I replied kindly.

"Well, uh, this other guy gave me this note that I'm supposed to give you," she replied.

"What did he look like?" I asked, concerned.

"He said I wasn't supposed to tell you, but that'd you know him," the girl explained, "and he said that he'd pay me, but then he just ran off, but I figured that I should still deliver the message."

"Thanks!" I told her, reaching into my pocket and handing her two gold coins, "I appreciate it!"

"Wow, thank you sir. You're much better than the other guy," the girl exclaimed, beaming from ear to ear at the two gold coins in her hands.

"In fact," the girl said, looking cautiously around, "I'll tell you what he looked like anyway."

She bent in really close and whispered in my ear, "He was a little taller than you and had a big white bandage thing wrapped around his head. He looked really upset about *something*, and had this ornate crossbow on his back."

"Ah, okay, I know that guy," I told the girl, "Thanks!"

I pasted on a cheery smile for her sake and watched her run off.

"Okay, Lemmirg. Let's see what you have to say," I mumbled to myself. I opened up the small sheet of crinkled paper and was surprised to find only two words.

It said, "Something's wrong!"

I wasn't exactly sure what to make of it, but I crammed it into my pocket for further studying.

At almost that exact moment, there was a massive cheer from the crowd across the way, and Ogard strode into the practice arena with a big grin.

"Well, I guess we're both competing anyway!" Ogard told me.

"Alright! You're on," I replied to Ogard.

Ogard plopped down on the bench next to me and closed his eyes.

"Let me know when we're up," he said, promptly falling asleep.

It was such great weather that I felt like taking a quick nap too; plus, I was really nervous. So I just closed my eyes for a minute...

"WHERE HAVE YOU GUYS BEEN?!" the referee yelled at Ogard and me, "We've been waiting for you for FIVE mintues!"

Ogard and I woke up with a start and tried to adjust our eyes to the sunlight.

"Sorry, man," Ogard replied, "We're on it!"

Ogard and I raced for the arena and burst into it as fast as we could. The crowd yelled a few insults at us for being late, but finally calmed down as Ogard jogged to the other side of the arena.

"Welcome, Vikings and ladies, to the final showdown of the Towora Tournament!" the announcer boomed through his horn, "You're right now going to witness the best duel in the history of this tribe. Expect a fast attack by Ogard, but a swift defense and counter strike by Kaizar. I'd also be wary of a few surprises these contestants will pull on each other. Are you ready?"

"YES!" the crowd yelled.

"I can't hear you! The announcer yelled back.

"YYYEEEESSS!" the crowd screamed.

"Alright, let it begin," the announcer began, "On your marks...get set... BATTLE!"

I readied for Ogard's swift attack like the announcer had expected, but instead, Ogard just folded his hands together and slowly circled around towards me. I had seen this approach before in a few Berserkers, and it was always when the opponent had lightning-fast reflexes. Although I was quick, I wasn't that fast – so I came up with *my* tactic. I figured it would be out of his plan to attack me first, so I decided to do exactly what he was doing. I folded my hands and walked around the arena the other way – matching his walking pace.

"Oh, come on, Kaizar!" Ogard yelled across to me while chuckling, "You're copying me?"

"Hey, I learn from the best!" I yelled back.

"Looks like these two competitors know each other," the announcer noted.

Eventually, Ogard and I made our way towards each other in a gradual motion. When I was just about close enough, I swung my Odin's Storm off my back and jumped him – just as he pulled his metal stick off his back and jumped me. We met in the very center of the arena and clashed with our weapons.

"Fast reflexes," I complimented him as I performed a back-hand slice at his neck.

"Careful there, boy," Ogard teased, "I still want to keep my head!"

Ogard jabbed his stick at me, but I dodged and kicked back with a power stroke. Ogard met it with the other end of his stick and back flipped over me to get a better position. However, this gave me time to vault backward into him with an inverted technique I learned from my mother.

"Oh man! You'll have to teach me *that* one," Ogard replied as I faked a left swing at his chest.

"And you'll have to teach me how to twirl around a stick that fast!" I added as Ogard swung his stick over his head and jabbed it at me in quick succession multiple times. Dancing out of the way, I bent low and lunged for his legs. I felt him hit my torso with his stick, but I managed to knock out his legs from under him. As Ogard collapsed to the floor, he used his stick as a pole vault and sprung back up, just as I ached a jump cut at him. Our weapons met in midair as we put our full strength into them. With a massive tug, both of our weapons were literally ripped from our hands and collided with the floor a few feet away at roughly the same time. I remembered the referee saying something about if both contestants lose their weapons at the same time, you must continue until one is disabled or they both get their weapons back and one of them loses it like normal. My weapon was a good several meters away, so I just faked a punch at Ogard's jaw and followed it immediately up with a sharp kick. Ogard dove away from my kick and rammed his head into my stomach. I felt my breath be squeezed out of my lungs and saw some black stars, but at the last possible moment I squirmed out of the way, and Ogard flew past me – right into the wall. Needless to say, we both collapsed to the floor and stopped moving. The crowd fell silent and watched anxiously as the referee ran out to check on us. I was gasping for breath, but managed to raise my arm to signal I was okay. Ogard did the same, but didn't move anything else. Another minute went by, and I was just starting to be able to breathe normally again, when Powder burst into the arena – closely followed by Mongro – and started licking my face.

"Ewe! Get off me, Powder!" I shouted, jumping to my feet. The crowd laughed as this happened, and Mongro lifted Ogard to his feet as well. I unsteadily stumbled towards Ogard and shook his hand.

"Good fight, buster," I told him.

"You too, man," Ogard agreed.



“Well, that’s a tie for our two contestants, and since they are unable to compete for at least another day, we’ll just have to record a tie in the record books!” the announcer explained to the disappointed crowd.

“Wait!” Ogard yelled back, “Just a minute!”

Ogard waved the referee over and smirked at me.

“Kaizar, I’ve got a deal for you. If you let me claim my eighth straight win, I’ll let you have the prize,” Ogard bargained.

Before the referee could say whether this was even acceptable, I said, “Deal!”

“And we have our eighth straight winner!” I shouted up to the crowd – pointing to Ogard.

The crowd, confused, stared back down at us.

“They’ve agreed that Ogard gets the title,” the referee confirmed, “but Kaizar gets the prize!”

The crowd roared with agreement, and the announcer came down to place the medal on my shoulders. I excitedly fingered the beautiful piece of the sword that was carefully embedded in the center of it..

“Finally!” I exclaimed to Ogard, “I got what I came here for.”

“And you definitely deserve it,” Ogard told me, “Now, if you don’t mind, I need to go find somewhere I can sit down – I’m seeing stars again.”

“Well, I feel this nasty pain in my stomach,” I chuckled, “Can’t imagine why that is!”

## Chapter 6

"I *still* can't believe that he let you participate," Nuffnut was saying that night as we relaxed in our small shack that Ogard had loaned to us for our stay, "You didn't even participate in the earlier games."

"Yeah, but I proved myself," I reminded Nuffnut, "And you still came third – which is pretty good."

"I *guess*," Nuffnut answered, "Hey, what are you making?"

"I'm trying to pry out this piece of the golden sword," I replied, "But it's proving harder than I thought."

"Let me try!" Nuffnut said, grabbing it from me.

"Slam!" Puffnut wobbled into the room and collapsed in a chair in the corner after slamming the door shut.

"I don't think I'll be able to walk for a week!" Puffnut whined, "My legs are so shot!"

"I can imagine!" I replied, "What with you flying to Wing Maiden Island and back in a day!"

"Tell me about it!" Puffnut groaned, rubbing her legs, "But the rest of your tribes were already on the island, and Heather told me that they had about three quarters of the stuff moved over."

"Oh, well, I guess that's good," I said.

"Yeah, and – OWE!" Puffnut began. She was interrupted as a very sharp piece of a golden sword flew through the air and nicked her in the face.

"Sorry!" Nuffnut apologized, "It slipped out before I could grab it!"

"I quit!" Puffnut said, trying to rub her legs and face at the same time, "I need to hit the hay!"

Once Puffnut left, I carefully stashed the sword piece in one of my pockets and pulled out the ruby gemstone.

"Say, what *are* you going to do with that?" Nuffnut pestered.

"I'm going to place it back where the sword piece used to be," I explained to Nuffnut, "I'll just have to bend a few of these wires around."

"Ooh! Now that'll look neat!" Nuffnut, "Though it'll look more like a medallion."

"Eh, that's okay with me," I replied.

"I wonder how you'll look in it," Nuffnut continued.

"Well, I don't know, but it's not for me, so I won't be wearing it," I replied.

"Huh?" Nuffnut said, "OOOHHH! It's for a very special *other* person."

"Maybe," I said smugly.

"It wouldn't happen to be for someone whose name starts and ends with 'n' would it?" Nuffnut questioned.

"Yes - I mean no!" I replied, getting slightly confused, "But there we go!" I finished snapping the gemstone carefully in place and held it up to admire my job.

"Gimme that!" Nuffnut said, grabbing it from my hands and hanging it around her neck.

"Hey!" I said, "Be careful with that! It's for someone whose name starts with an 's' and ends with an 'r' – not an 'n'."

"Yeah, you're right. It's not my color," Nuffnut agreed, handing it back to me, "But it was nice of you to let me try it on."

"I didn't!"

"You meant to," Nuffnut teased me.

"Oh great," I replied.

"Welp, I've got to get my beauty sleep," Nuffnut announced, flipping her unruly hair over her shoulder, "So I'll be going now."

"And I'll be here working on this second clue," I answered.

"Ooh," Nuffnut answered, completely forgetting about going to bed, "What is it?"

"Well, it says," I said while pulling the paper out of my side pouch, "On the edge of adventure lies an island owned by a Thorsnut. To get your treasure, you've got to dig under their claim."

"Nice one, Kaizar," Nuffnut laughed, "What's the real one?"

"That was," I replied – annoyed.

"Yeah, but that's way too easy!" Nuffnut laughed again.

"All right then," I answered, clearly not understanding the riddle, "What does it mean?"

"Well, as you know, my Mom's lineage used to own the island called 'Dragon's Edge'," Nuffnut explained.

"Oh, yeah. That's the one they gave to the rest of the Dragon Riders when it almost caught on fire because of those Fireworms!"

"Yeah, so, anyway, there used to be a claim stone there. So all we have to do is dig under where it used to be to find the next piece," Nuffnut finished.

"Oh! So 'Thorsnut' is another name for 'Thorston'," I figured out.

"Yep, because all of the Thorstons have a name ending in 'nut'," Nuffnut agreed.

"That actually makes some sense," I said aloud.

"Of course it does," Nuffnut guffawed, "Let me guess. We're going to have to go there tomorrow."

"You guessed it!" I said excitedly, "We're already way ahead of the Wing Maidens in finding this treasure!"

"I can't wait to see Puffnut's expression tomorrow when you tell her we've got another trip to take," Nuffnut laughed.

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"I *can't* believe you got me to do this!" Puffnut whined, "I'm going to be crippled for the rest of my life!"

"Look on the bright side," I replied, "At least you'll get lots of practice on Zap!"

"Yeah, he probably hates me by now," Puffnut surmised.

"He still looks like he likes you," I said.

"Just shut up," Puffnut told me, "Talk to FDF if you're bored."

"Okay then," I shrugged.

"Have you been to Dragon's Edge before?" I shouted to Ogard. Ogard maneuvered Mongro over to me and nodded his head, "Yeah, but only like once or twice a *long* time ago."

"Okay. I've never been there before," I told Ogard.

"Yep, it's nothing spectacular, but I *love* the house designs. Sure they're a bit dilapidated now, but you can still see what they used to look like!" Ogard answered, "How do you guys know about Dragon's Edge?"

“Oh, uh, my parents told me about it. I guess they knew a friend who knew a friend who knew the Dragon riders,” I replied – trying to come up with a truth that didn’t reveal my connection to Hiccup.

“Cool, well, three of my riders came home yesterday from dropping Sulphur off at Wing Maiden Island and they were so sore that they refused to come today. Puffnut must be real tough,” Ogard noted.

“Uh, sort of?”

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Six hours later, FDF and MDR approached Dragon’s Edge.

“Check it out!” Ogard said, waving his hand grandly at the island, “Complete with waterfront houses!”

“Is it normally that smoky?” I asked pointing to the numerous fires everywhere.

“Uh, no. That’s weird,” Ogard admitted, “Let’s land over there and see what’s causing that commotion.”

We banked to the right and landed in a large strip of land that was surrounded by heavy bushes.

“Let’s get a closer look at this,” Ogard said. He pulled two telescopes out of his backpack and handed me one of them. My first glance told me that someone was living there. The houses were not at all dilapidated as Ogard said they were many years ago, and there were several bags of wheat piled up in one corner.

“*What* is that?!” Ogard exclaimed, “Kaizar, look to your left!”

I quickly moved my telescope to the left and looked around for something abnormal.

“Oh my! Is that *another* hybrid dragon?” I asked Ogard.

“Yep looks like a Death Song – Singetail hybrid,” he replied, “So there’s more of us.”

“Two dragon riders coming in from the West!” one of Ogard’s companions yelled, “And they’re riding some new black and white hybrid thing.”

“Ack! Too much happening at once!” Ogard exclaimed.

“I quickly looked up into the sky and saw the two dragons soaring through the sky.

“Wait a minute,” I mumbled.

“Be prepared to blast them down!” Ogard yelled to his group.

“Wait! Don’t!” I yelled as well, “Those are my friends!”

“Huh?” Ogard said, “You know these dragon riders?”

“I know *those* ones,” I replied, “Not the Singesong riders.”

“Oh,” Ogard replied, “Stand down guys.”

Presently, Nuffink and Zephyr noticed us and swooped down for a closer look.

“Nuffink!” I yelled as loudly as I could, “It’s me!”

“Wh-what are you doing here?” Nuffink yelled as he and Pouncer landed next to me, “I just saw you. Who are all these people?”

“These are the Fierce Dragon Riders,” I told him, “And this is Powder – the Dreadstrider that hatched from that egg.”

“Oh, wow! Cool!” Nuffink exclaimed.

Zephyr and Dart came over next.

“I’ve seen way too many freaky dragons today,” Zephyr announced.

“Huh?” I replied.

“Dad, Mom, Nuffink, and I all flew over here because Dad wanted to show us his old Dragon outpost here, but we all got jumped on by these riders with these strange dragons, and only Nuffink and I got away. Mom, Dad, Toothless, and Stormfly are still caught down there,” Zephyr announced as I tried to motion for her to stop talking.

“Oh, so your Dad is Hiccup is he?” Ogard questioned.

“Yeah, what’s that to you?” Zephyr answered.

“Oh no,” I mumbled.

“You knew. Didn’t you, Kaizar?” Ogard turned to me, “I thought we were friends!”

I couldn’t believe this was happening – this was just how Lemming and I’s friendship went south and here was another one going down.

“I’m friends with Hiccup, too! I can’t just ditch him for another friend – I try to make friends with everyone!” I defended myself.

“We’ll see about that,” Ogard said angrily. He raised his arm in the air and snapped his fingers.

“Bring me the group of dragon riders down there,” he said to one of his group members, “They’ll be glad to see our friends here.”

“You wouldn’t dare!” I threatened Ogard.

“Really?” Ogard replied, “You won’t beat me this time!”

“Oh, great,” I mumbled again.

“Defensive circle!” Zephyr yelled to Puffnut and Nuffnut.

We might have been an eclectic bunch of riders, but we all knew what a defensive circle was. I jumped on Powder and slowly backed up as Nuffnut and Puffnut formed the other half of the ring. All around, Ogard’s group circled us and crouched – ready to fire.

“I didn’t want our friendship to end this way, Kaizar,” Ogard yelled to me, “But you leave me no choice.”

“You’re going to try to kill me just because I didn’t tell you something?” I asked, incredulous.

“That about sums it up. No one gets away with treachery when I’m around,” Ogard insisted. Suddenly, the air was filled with Singesongs.

“Well, well, well. Who do we have here? A bunch more dragons?” A middle aged lady on a pinkish Singesong shouted down to us. She landed expertly and surveyed FDF as well as MDR.

“So, you’re offering those five dragons and their riders for free?” the lady asked Ogard.

“That’s about right. They double-crossed me, so I’m doing the same to them,” Ogard replied.

“A little harsh, maybe, but I like it,” the lady replied, dismounting her dragon and walking over to Ogard, “I’m Krogette. And you are?”

“Ogard Bludvist,” Ogard replied, “and glad to know you.”

“So, uh, you’re not going to tell me how you got stuck with *him*?” Zephyr whispered to me from my left.

“Maybe later,” I replied, “Right now we have to get ready to make a break for it.”

“Wait a minute,” Krogette exclaimed, quickly standing back, “Your dad was Drago, right?”

“Yeah,” Ogard answered, “Killed by Hiccup, who you have.”

“Well, little mister Ogard, I’m the daughter of a man named Krogan, and it just so happens that your dad killed mine!” Krogette explained angrily, hopping back onto her Singesong.

“Oh,” Ogard answered, realization suddenly dawning upon him.

“Fire!” Ogard and Krogette yelled at the same time, pointing to each other. No sooner did they say that then I yelled, “RUN!”

In a matter of milliseconds, the air was filled with fireballs and flying dragons. Powder and I swung through the air, trying to get away from the deadly fight and make it to the buildings where Nuffink said his dad was being held captive.

“Gah!” Puffnut yelled to me, “This is insane!”

“Yeah!” Nuffnut added, “I love it!”

“This way!” Zephyr said, zipping past on Dart and banking over to a larger building with wooden, sliding doors.

We beat it to the building and landed on the deck in sync.

“Puff and Nuff, guard the door; Nuffink keep an eye on the battle; Kaizar, come with me,” Zephyr told us all. I quickly dismounted Powder and ran after her into the building.

“I just realized why our dragons are okay with the nightlights,” I told Zephyr, “It’s because your dragons are also technically hybrids.”

“Yeah, but Toothless and Stormfly are *not* happy about hybrids,” Zephyr informed me, “So get ready to hold your dragon back.”

We raced through the building and over to a few cages in the back.

“Zephyr!” Astrid called to her daughter, “You’re safe!”

“Kaizar?” Hiccup yelled to me, “What are *you* doing here?”

“Long story,” I yelled back, “But hold onto Toothless because my Dreadstrider is a doozy of a hybrid.”

Zephyr quickly plucked a ring of keys off the wall and unlocked her parents’ cells.

“Let’s go!” Astrid said, jumping on Stormfly and urging her forward. The problem is that Stormfly didn’t go. She just stayed put and growled at Powder.

“Put a cloth over her eyes,” Hiccup yelled to Astrid, “That’s what I do for Toothless.”

Thanks to the cloths, Stormfly was able to fly out of the building, and we all followed at a rapid pace.

“Nuffink – update on the battle,” Zephyr called to Nuffink.

“It’s getting pretty deadly, but it also appears that no one has noticed us so far,” Nuffink responded.

“We only had to take out one guard,” Nuffnut added.

“Let’s head south for a little and work our way around the island,” Hiccup told us.

“Hey, uh, this may be a bad time, but on the way could we stop by the place where Ruffnut and Tuffnut’s claim stone used to stand?” I asked Hiccup.

“What for?” Hiccup asked.

“Another long story,” I explained, “But you’d make the Wing Maidens’ day.”

“Fine,” he groaned, veering to the left.

We landed on the edge of a high, grassy cliff surrounded by trees.

“Here we are,” Hiccup said, “As best as I remember, it was right about here.”

“Cool, does anyone’s dragon dig?” I asked the rest of the group.

“Mine does – a little,” Astrid answered, “Should I dig right where the stone was?”

“Yep! But be careful, I have to watch the dirt that is pulled up,” I answered.

Stormfly immediately began to dig into the ground with her long claws and pulled up huge chunks of dirt. Presently, she uncovered a large chest.

"Treasure?" Nuffink asked.

"Not exactly," I replied, running over to it and unlocking the latches on the sound. The chest creaked open, and revealed a small cloth on the bottom. Inside the cloth was the second piece of the sword, which I showed to the others.

"Well, that's cool, but I'm not exactly sure of its significance," Hiccup replied.

"I'll explain on the way," I told him.

"Hey, why don't you all come with us to Wing Maiden Island?" Puffnut suggested, "They're in the southward direction, so you won't have to circle by the battle, and you can meet up with the Berserkers, Wing Maidens, and the Defenders of the Wing."

"Why are they all there?" Astrid asked as Stormfly shook the dirt off her claws.

"Another, even longer, story," I sighed.

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"Interesting," Hiccup finally said after an hour of explanations, "You've been very busy!"

"I agree with you there!" I told him, "I'm just sad that I lost my good standing with Ogard. We were starting to get along!"

"I understand," Hiccup replied, "When your mother betrayed us those few times, I was really upset."

"My mother betrayed you guys?" I asked, completely shocked.

"Sadly yes, but she had decent reasons," Hiccup explained, "By the way, did you hear any strange roars while you were rescuing me?"

"No," I replied.

"I did!" Nuffnut interrupted, "It sounded like 'Ruarugh!'"

"That may be what I heard?" Hiccup replied excitedly, "But it's certainly not what the Singesongs sounded like."

"Maybe they're holding a dragon captive," Astrid observed.

"Possibly, but I'm not going back to find out," Hiccup wisely decided.

## Chapter 7

“And we have arrived!” Puffnut said grandly, as she flew Zap upside down over Hiccup and Toothless, “The jewel of some part of the archipelago.”

“*And* they have terrific desserts!” Nuffnut added, as if that was all that mattered.

Despite Puffnut’s complaining, we had finally arrived at Wing Maiden Island, and Hiccup appeared excited to see his old friends.

“Wait till you get a load of my uncle and aunt,” I told Nuffink, “I doubt you’ll see *them* coming.”

“They are not like you?” Nuffink asked.

“Sorta. Some of their character traits are similar to mine, but they look and act *completely* different,” I explained.

“Wait, is Sulpher here?” Zephyr asked as we flew towards the village.

“Yeah, I guess she had something to work on, so she wasn’t with us when we flew over to Dragon’s edge,” I replied. I think Zephyr mumbled something like “Good riddance,” but I pretended not to hear. Zephyr and Sulpher were similar in a lot of ways and often clashed.

“See if you can beat this, Toothless!” I yelled out, “Powder, dive!”

Powder dove like a stunt-Viking and nearly caused me to fall off it was so steep, but we reached the ground in record-time. Toothless tried, but his dive was certainly more elegant than it was sharp.

As it happened, there were only a few Wing Maidens standing around, but when they saw all of us, they quickly scattered to get the others.

“Brings back some memories,” Astrid stated, sniffing the air, “It’s certainly been a while.”

“Well if it isn’t ol’ boss!” Snotlout yelled out as he came running up, “And lil’ miss almost-rip-my-arm off!”

“Hi there Snotlout,” Hiccup replied, rather unenthusiastically.

“And here comes the rest of the party,” Puffnut told us, pointing to a steady stream of people heading our way.

The next hour was incredibly hectic as everyone took turns meeting the Haddocks, shaking hands, and recalling memories as well as generally embarrassing Zephyr and Nuffink.

Puffnut, Nuffnut, and I stood off to the side with our dragons, because they still really bothered Stormfly and Toothless.

“EeeeeoRR!” Slizer raced towards us and jumped on Pouncer, excited to see his old friend.

Toothless also stood up and roared with excitement; they were all excited to see Slizer.

Coincidentally, I knew Sulpher wasn’t very far behind.

“Kaizar!” Sure enough, Sulpher was running up the street lugging a particularly large brown-paper wrapped box.

“How come she always calls out to you first?” Nuffnut observed.

“It’s really quite simple dear cousin,” Puffnut began, “It comes down to him being – you know – a *boy*.”

I was going to make a snarky comeback, but Sulpher had already arrived and shoved the box into my hands.

“*What* are you wearing?!” Puffnut said, poking Sulpher’s red, scaly outfit.



"The same thing she gave me," I replied, pulling out a rather cool-looking outfit out of the box. It was definitely made of the Changewing skin and was a fully-body suit.

"I really like this helmet," I told Sulpher, "The flip up feature of it is quite ingenious."

"I modeled it off Snotlout's old flight suit," Sulpher told me, "I'm going to need help making the wings, but the suit was fairly easy with Mom's help."

"So, it just looks cool?" Nuffnut commented, "You'd think it would have some special advantage, considering it's made of Changewing skin."

"It does!" Sulpher replied, "Check this out!" Sulpher flipped down her helmet's visor and instantly she disappeared from sight.

"Oh man!" Puffnut cried out, "I *have* to have one!"

"Ack!" I laughed, "Something's got me!" Sure enough, two strong arms had wrapped themselves around my torso and gave me a hug. However, it looked like I was being squeezed by an invisible snake of some sort. Nuffnut was laughing so hard she toppled over.

"Oh, Kaizar!" Puffnut said when Sulpher finally let go, and I could breathe again, "Are you going to show Sulpher you-know-what?"

"Not *that*," I added quickly as Sulpher reappeared in front of us.

"What?" Sulpher said, her eyes narrowing.

I gave Puffnut a death-stare that said, "Keep quiet!" Then, I pulled out the two pieces of the golden sword and showed them to Sulpher.

"These!" I quickly said.

"Woah! Are those the two parts of the sword blade?" Sulpher asked.

"Yes," Atali said, coming up to us, "I'd recognize a Wing Maiden sword anywhere."

"Atali!" I said, surprised, "Here you go."

"No, no, Kaizar. I don't want them until the whole sword is complete," Atali insisted, "You still must find the sword's handle."

"Oh, okay," I answered, carefully placing the sword pieces back into my pocket.

As Atali walked off to talk with Mala, I told Sulpher, "I've got to try on this flight suit! Give me a minute. Wait, is my guest house still vacant?"

"Yep!" Sulpher told me, "I saved it just for you."

"Sweet!" I yelled back to her as I took off toward the guest shack with Powder following closely. As I put it on, I figured out how it worked. Under the Changewing skin, was a thin layer of wool and leather that prevented my warm skin from touching the Changewing skin. Each part of the outfit was separate (the shirt, the pants, the boots, the helmet), but they interlocked via the more genius part of the suit – I guessed that it was a copy of Hiccup's team's flight suits. The only part that touched my skin was a section of Changewing skin that wrapped around the lower part of my face, but was invisible due to it always touching my face. Normally, a person could see me because the Changewing skin was not touching my body, but when the front section of my helmet was flipped down, it touched the Changewing skin that was touching my face. Thus, the heat from my face transferred to the outward Changewing scales, and I became invisible, much to Powder's dismay. The whole thing was pretty ingenious – I had to admit, and it fit perfectly which meant that Sulpher must have found some of my clothes that my parents had brought from Berserker Island. I jumped back on Powder, and we raced back to the crowd of people, but they weren't there. Only Sulpher was standing there – chatting with a Wing Maiden.

"Where did everyone go?" I asked her.

"Oh, it's getting close to evening, so they all moved to the hall," Sulpher replied, "Oh, and this is Lidia. She'll be helping guard the street at night."

"Glad to meet you, Lidia," I told her, shaking her hand.

"You too," Lidia replied, "I'll be seeing you!" Lidia walked off, and Sulpher turned to me.

"Do you feel up to another evening flight?" Sulpher suggested, "Because I've got another thing to show you."

"Sure, why not?" I accepted, "But you'll have to ride with me and Powder, because I don't know where Slizer is."

"Oh, he's off having fun with Pouncer and Dart," Sulpher informed me, "I'll sit in the back and direct you where to fly."

We took off from the village, and Sulpher directed me to fly closer to the dormant volcano in the middle of the island.

"Okay, bank here and follow that tree line," Sulpher said holding onto me from behind, "Watch out for that overhanging rock there."

"Okay."

"Alright, follow that faint trail there and land over by that large oak tree," Sulpher finished.

I dismounted Powder and followed Sulpher up to the huge oak tree.

"See what's up there?" Sulpher said, pointing into the branches.

"Is that a tree house?"

"Yep, I made it myself several summers ago, and I've upgraded the camouflage since then," Sulpher said, proudly.

"I wouldn't have noticed it if I wasn't looking for it," I commented, impressed.

"Come on up!" Sulpher told me, grabbing an inconspicuous rope ladder from behind some bushes and climbing up it. I followed her into a very empty, one-room treehouse that only had two crude, wooden chairs.

"I made these chairs just last summer when I was bored. They're pretty bad, but at least they work!" Sulpher told me.

"Cool!" I said sitting on one of them, "It's not too uncom-aaah!" No sooner had I sat back in the chair, than it tipped over and spilled me on the ground.

"Oh, I'm so sorry! I should have warned you that they work as long as you don't lean backward too much," Sulpher apologized, helping me off the ground.

"Alright, then," I told Sulpher, "Guess these chairs don't like me quite as much as I like you."

Sulpher blushed and waved it off, "Oh you're just saying that."

I smiled, "Oh really? Well I have something for you too."

"Really?" Sulpher said, surprised, "More than the Wing Maiden sword pieces?"

"Yeah, those aren't really for you anyway. I guess Atali gets them eventually when we put the sword together," I replied.

"Yeah, I've already got a cool weapon anyway," Sulpher said, "I'd pull it out and swing it around for affect, but these flight suits don't have weapon slings, so I can't."

"But they do have one pocket, and that's all I need," I told Sulpher, reaching into the pocket and pulling out the medallion I had made.

"This is for you – a combination of the prizes I won at the Tribe of the Whispering Trees," I continued.

"You won multiple prizes? Oh wait, and that means you won the Towora Tournament!" Sulpher said excitedly – as I realized I hadn't told her yet how the tournament had gone.

"Not exactly," I replied, "But I'll explain in a minute."

"It's beautiful!" Sulpher said looking at it, "Put it on me!" She pulled back her brown hair, and I slipped it over her head. As I was doing this, Sulpher laid her hands on my shoulders and locked eyes with me.

"Thanks Kaizar," she said softly, reaching her head towards mine. I finished placing it around her neck; then moved my head in too – almost touching my forehead on hers.

"It's beautiful," Sulpher whispered.

"Just like you," I added, shyly.

Sulpher smiled and closed the distance.

But... it never came - again.

"FREEZE!" someone shouted at us, popping up through the tree house's entrance in the floor. Sulpher and I froze; then quickly realized how awkward it now was – especially since our lips were like a maximum of two millimeters apart.

Laurel quickly realized what she had just interrupted and cringed.

"Oh gross, Sulpher," Laurel quickly replied, "Don't freeze in *that* position."

Sulpher and I quickly separated and faced Laurel.

"What do you want," Sulpher replied dryly.

"You know what I want," Laurel demanded.

"Where's *your* boyfriend?" I asked Laurel.

"You mean Lemmirg? He's off doing business somewhere else," Laurel replied.

"Uh, huh," I replied, obviously not believing her.

Laurel shrugged and called up to someone down below. Immediately, several War Lord goons climbed up into the tree house as well.

"I hope this house is strong," I commented to Sulpher.

"Trust me, it is," Sulpher replied.

"I need you to bring me your dragons in a subdued state," Laurel insisted again – leveling her wickedly sharp sword at Sulpher and I. I would have just taken her out, but, as I had said before, our new flight suits didn't have any weapon slings, and I hadn't brought my shield either.

"I can't," I told her, "All of my dragons are in the hall with a lot of the others."

"Well, I don't care *how* you do it. Just do it," Laurel demanded.

"Okay," Sulpher said, "Let's go."

"Yeah, that's not happening," Laurel said again, "Just whistle for them."

"They won't hear me," I told Laurel, "Plus, my whistle is awful."

"Then, I'll just kill you and be on my way," Laurel threatened.

"No need to get violent," I told Laurel, putting my hands in the air, "I'll whistle."

"Second thought, I'll just kill you anyway. You've caused enough trouble already," Laurel decided.

"Fine, have it your way," Sulpher replied, "I'll be going in that case."

"It'll be so tragically sad," Laurel continued, "Your parents will find you dead – but together - up here in a week or so."

"Yeah, *that's* not happening," I commented.

"Sayonara sucker!" Sulpher called out happily, flipping down her helmet's front-guard. Instantly, she was invisible. I quickly followed suit – in my suit.

"Uh, boss," one of the goons said, standing back, "Where'd they go."

"Those tricksters," Laurel mumbled, "They've always got something up their sleeves! Drives me crazy!"

I carefully tiptoed across the room and reached for one of the wooden chairs. Across the room, Laurel and about five goons spread out – waving their various weapons out in front of them. With a quick motion, I swiped the chair and brought it down hard on the nearest goon. He cried out in pain and collapsed to the floor. With my backswing I chucked the chair at another goon. Laurel spun around and sliced at the seemingly flying chair – cutting it clean in two. With the back support, I impaled a third goon and kicked him straight into the thick, wooden wall.

"He's there, roughly," Laurel yelled to the other two goons, "I'll take the- oof!" Laurel's head suddenly snapped back and she was shoved to the floor by an invisible force. Laurel tried to stand up, but her head was immediately shoved back into the floor. With Sulpher in control of Laurel, I swiped a spiky mace off the floor and played my favorite Berserker song on the other two goons' helmets. I knocked the first out, but the second swung wildly in the air – trying to cut me. On his third swing, the goon's axe met my mace, but the mace held. The axe was ripped out of his hand, and it bounced harmlessly to the floor.

"Uh oh," the goon mumbled before I creamed him. From across the room, Sulpher's form finally reappeared.

"Well, Laurel's out for a while," Sulpher confirmed as I flipped up my visor as well.

"Laurel, Gurio?" a voice from down below called up, "What's going on?"

Another goon popped his head up into the treehouse and was immediately bashed by Sulpher carrying a different, yet just as lethal, spiky mace. The goon immediately lost his grip and tumbled downwards - landing with an ugly thud. While Sulpher played a very realistic version of "wack-a-boar" on more goons that tried to get into the treehouse, I whistled to Powder who quickly appeared above the tree line and soared over to the two open windows.

"Good job keeping out of sight," I praised Powder.

"Sulpher! Get on Powder and get help. I'll hold them off," I told her

"Sure thing, have fun!" Sulpher told me, slapping me on the back as she vaulted out the window and onto Powder who took off at full speed.

Sulpher had bashed the last goon climbing up the rope ladder, so I flipped my front guard back down and swung through the floor entrance. I landed a few seconds later on the ground next to a pile of knocked out goons. All around me were at least another dozen goons holding crossbows and trying to judge where I'd exactly be.

"He really is invisible, right?" one of them asked.

"Must be some sort of sorcery," another agreed.

"Wrong!" I told them, picking a spare axe off the ground and chopping their crossbows in half. Instantly, the rest of the goons launched their arrows at the flying axe, but I threw it away and flattened myself on the ground just in time. As they reloaded, I picked a mace off the ground

and bashed another two goons while kicking a third in the stomach. Not wanting to accidentally shoot their friends, the rest of the goons just stood off to the side. This meant I just had to drop the mace when I was done with my current goons and move onto the next few.

“Kong!” “Bloof!” “Ouch!” “Grong!”

War Lord goons went down like practice dummies. Not being able to see me put them at the greatest disadvantage possible. It was like trying to fight a Snow Wraith in the middle of a blizzard – it could see you, but you couldn’t see it. I had just finished an improvised spin-hold on the last goon when everyone else finally showed up.

“Classically late!” I yelled to them, flipping my visor up.

“You always do that!” Snotlout commented – jumping off the back of Toothless that Hiccup was riding. Nuffnut and Mala had arrived on Bash, Puffnut and Dagur had arrived on Zap, Astrid and Minden were on Stormfly, Hiccup and Snotlout were on Toothless, and a myriad of other Berserkers and Wing Maidens rode with Zephyr, Nuffink, Sulpher, and Slizer.

“They all said you’d be in trouble without your Odin’s Storm, but I knew better,” Dagur bragged, “You’re always so terribly resourceful. That’s your problem, you know?”

“Where are they?!” Snotlout wanted to know.

“Laurel’s up there,” I replied, pointing to the treehouse, “But I’ve no idea where Lemmrig is. He never even showed up.”

“Figures,” Snotlout mumbled, “Well, I’ll be glad to get Laurel behind bars. Without her, the War Lords lose their inside knowledge of our island.” As Snotlout and several of the others began tying up the goons, Mom came over to me.

“You get into more trouble than anyone I know,” she told me.

“Seems like you did too, though,” Sulpher reminded Mom, “When you were younger that is.”

“She’s right,” Astrid added, “Probably more, actually.”

Mom sighed, “Alright, but be careful!”

“Hey is that new?” Mala asked Sulpher, pointing to her ruby medallion.

“Yeah! Kaizar gave it to me. Do you like it?”

“Certainly, it looks fabulous on you!” Mala replied.

“Is it just me, or is there a lot I don’t know about?” Mom said.

“I think there are a lot of explanations in order,” I answered, “And I want to know how the move is going. Why don’t we get these guys to their cells, and we can discuss later?”

Eventually, most of the goons started waking up, and we immediately escorted them down the mountain and to the large “jail” the Wing Maidens had on the island. Although it was quite large for an island that rarely saw any action, it was still too small for the number of guys Sulpher and I had beaten, so many of them were shoved into one cell together. After that, we went back into the hall, and I sat down at a table with my parents and quite a few others as we ate a late dinner.

“Alright, let’s hear it,” Dad said, “Start from when you and Sulpher left our island last week.”

“Well, we were just cruising along when one of us spotted a dark cloud on the horizon. It turned out to be...” I began.

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Two hours later, I finally finished retelling the many adventures that MDR had been through recently, and, with the help of Puffnut and Nuffnut, I covered most of the different perspectives of various members.

"That's crazy!" Dad said first, "So where is the Wing Maidens' sword hilt?"

"I don't know," I replied, "I haven't had time to work out the next clue."

"So exactly how much does Krogette's group and FDF know about you all?" Dad said.

"I'm pretty sure that Ogard has put together all of our connections by now," Sulpher answered from next to me, "But he still doesn't know where New Berk is. As for Krogette's group, I don't think that know anything about us unless Ogard tells them."

"They know we have access to dragons, though," Astrid added, "And that New Berk is in the general vicinity."

"And they have something mysterious in captive there," Hiccup cut in, "I'm sure it's a dragon, but it may be a new hybrid since I didn't recognize its roar."

"Then, there's Lemmirg. What is he up to and what did he mean by that note?" Mala wanted to know."

"I'm not sure," I replied, "We seem to keep meeting up in the oddest of places, and he appears to be going places by himself more."

"I wonder if he's looking for something?" Dagur said, "Maybe he has a suspicion about something?"

"Possibly, and he can get around quickly with his Deathgrippers," Zephyr reminded us, "Those things are *scary*."

"Well, what's your plans?" Snotlout asked Hiccup, "How long can you stay?"

"I told my tribe we'll probably be gone for a week, so I'd say we could afford another two days," Hiccup responded.

"Sweet! MDR is back together and kickin'," Puffnut cheered.

"What's with all these abbreviations?" Minden wondered.

"It stands for Mutant Dragon Riders, and Nuffink and Zephyr are part of our makeshift group," I explained.

"They are, are they?" Astrid responded, "I didn't hear about this."

"It never was official, Mom," Zephyr explained.

"It just sort of evolved," Nuffink added.

"Perhaps if we could solve this next clue, we could go on a quick adventure together before you have to leave?" I suggested.

"Let's hear it," Hiccup exclaimed, excited about the prospect of a mystery.

I pulled the paper out of my pocket and read it aloud, "To get the last piece, you must bargain well. For only a dealer could extricate the prized sword hilt from a place with masters who take advantage."

"Is it referring to some sort of trader maybe?" Minden guessed, "That's as far as I got."

"I think you're close," Hiccup replied slowly, "Store owners are known for taking advantage of others. So what place has a lot of them?"

"Well, I guess the obvious answer would be Auction Island," Mom answered.

"That's what I think," Hiccup answered, "But if that's true, they leave the quest of actually finding the thing up to the treasure hunter."

"What exactly is Auction Island," Nuffink asked his Dad.

"It's literally the hub of all trading," Hiccup replied, "In the last few times I went there, they got increasingly sketchy and dangerous."

"Yeah, but they're not that way anymore," Snotlout informed us, "I go there every now and then, and they're the friendliest, richest people you'll ever meet!"

"No kidding!" Mom replied, surprised, "Really?"

"Yep! Most of the archipelago's traders buy and sell their wares there," Snotlout explained.

"So, I guess we're heading off to Auction Island tomorrow," I said.

"Oh come on!" Puffnut said, "This is getting crazy!"

"It's our only chance to go with Zephyr and Nuffink," I reminded her, "Plus you probably should get home soon, too!"

"Oh, that's right!" Nuffnut exclaimed, "We're having a special feast in a few days!"

"What for?" Nuffink asked.

"Celebrating Mom's and Uncle's birthday," Nuffnut explained, "It consists of four courses served each day."

"Sounds good!" Nuffink agreed.

"Welp, I've got to get to bed, so good night everyone and stay safe," Snotlout told everyone, standing up, "Have a good night!" With that he walked out with Minden.

"See you tomorrow, too!" Sulphur told me, giving me a quick side hug before following her parents out. On that note, several other Wing Maidens and Berserkers left to get ready for night. Due to the temporary 100% increase in population, housing had suddenly become scarce, so many people were put together under one roof while others were planning to spend the night in the hall.

"You'll be glad to know that I've set up a massive chain of night guards with Dagur and Mala," Atali told Hiccup and Astrid, "You should be perfectly fine. And you can have Kaizar's shack because he'll be staying with his parents."

"Oh, Atali," I told her as I got up from the table with Mom and Dad, "I know you said that you don't want the Wing Maiden sword pieces, but is there a safe place I could put them temporarily?"

"Alright," Atali said, "I'll go put them in our safe place."

I handed Atali the two sword pieces and quickly left to take my stuff out of my shack now that the Haddock's needed it. It was news to me that I was staying with my parents, but I didn't really mind. Powder, who had been eating from a bowl of stew with Zap and Bash, followed me closely. Now that I thought about it, I hadn't seen Slizer a lot lately. I realized he was probably ready to go to the Hidden World, and it was a good thing he was making friends with Toothless and Stormfly.

"Come on, Powder," I told him, "Help me carry all this stuff!"

After loading Powder down with a few of my articles, we ran back to the hall and caught Mom and Dad as they were leaving.

"It's kinda small," Mom told me about our guest cabin, "But at least it's well built!" That turned out to be true – it was really small – just two rooms, but it was also very warm inside due to the circulation of the rooms and the big fireplace. Powder, feeling right at home, trotted up to the fireplace and curled up to take a nap.

"I'm just going to get my shield and be right back," I yelled to Dad as I ran back out the door. I jogged over to the shack and met Zephyr standing outside.

"It's *really* small in there," Zephyr said when she saw me.

"Uh, yeah! It was crowded when it was just Slizer and I," I told her, "Hey is my shield in there?"

"Oh, yeah. I'll get it," Zephyr told me. She leaned her head into the shack and yelled, "Hey, Mom! Can I have Dad's old shield? Kaizar's right here at the door!"

There was a muffled answer, and Astrid came to the door with my shield.

"Here you go. Enjoy!" Astrid told me, going back inside.

"Well, I'll see you tomorrow," I told Zephyr, waving goodbye.

"Kaizar," Zephyr said again.

"Yeah?" I said, turning back around.

"Do you see that thin column of smoke?" Zephyr asked me, pointing to the East.

"Uh, yeah, it's pretty small," I agreed.

"Is there anyone supposed to be out there?"

"Uh, not that I know of, but Atali told me she has a lot of people out there keeping an eye on things, so maybe it's just a patrol keeping warm," I reasoned.

"I'm checking on it," Zephyr said, taking off in the direction of the smoke.

"Where are you going!" I yelled to her, trying to catch up, "You're certain someone bad is over there?"

"Just a hunch," Zephyr breathed ahead of me.

"Are you normally like this?" I asked again.

"Not really."

I groaned, but was secretly intrigued as well so I followed. A mile later, Zephyr and I crested a small rise in the ground and saw the little bonfire down below.

"There's no one there," Zephyr observed.

"Hmmm, let's check it out," I announced, creeping towards it, but keeping low to the ground. I pulled out my shield and held it close while Zephyr followed from behind. When I was only a few meters from the fire, I ducked behind a bush.

"Are there any tracks?" Zephyr whispered to me.

"Not that I can see," I replied.

"Okay, this is just weird," Zephyr replied, "Is this a normal occurrence here?"

"Not that I know, but I've only been here a few times. As far as I know, this place always has weird occurrences."

"Hello."

The booming voice scared Zephyr and I felt so bad we jumped a foot.

"Glad to see you made the meeting," the deep voice boomed. A figure – dressed completely in black – stepped out from behind a stand of trees on the other side of the fire and stepped forward. I slowly stood up and walked towards him as well.

"Do I know you?" I asked.

"Probably not," he replied, "But I know you. Oh, and Zephyr too. Nice to meet a relative of the esteemed Hiccup Haddock."

"So, uh, what are you doing here?" I asked him.

"I've been watching you," he told me, "And I think I may need your expertise."



"Mine? What do I have?" I asked, completely confused. Meanwhile, Zephyr walked up as well and stood beside me, carefully observing the strange guest.

"You have certain *skills* that I need," he told me, "And of course I'd be willing to reimburse you for your help."

"I'm lost, who are you again?"

"My name is not your concern," he told me, "I just want an answer."

"Well, then, no," I told him, "I can't just sign up for anything you want on the spur of the moment." Then, as an added protection, I snapped down my front guard.

The man started a bit, but since I couldn't hide my shield, he appeared to calm back down.

"See! That's why I need you. Invisibility? That's a new one," the man told me.

"You need me?" Zephyr quietly asked.

"Not at the moment, but I may call on you should things get out of control," the man told her.

"Out of control?" Zephyr questioned, "What do you mean by that."

"Let's just say," the man continued coming closer to us, "If I'm not careful, things could go wrong really fast."

I noticed the man was wearing some sort of dark armor and had a full helmet on so I couldn't tell what his face looked like.

"Can I tell my dad?" Zephyr asked again.

"You choose," he told us, "I'm not here to threaten you. I just need some secrecy and help – that's all. Have a good night."

"Wait, you're leaving already?"

"I wouldn't, but I hear footsteps nearby, so I have to go." With that, he performed a double backflip and disappeared back into the forest – but not before I shot a pair of bolas at him. The man, without even looking back, ducked under them and kept on going.

"Nice try, Kaizar. But I'm too smart for that – we'll meet again. Don't worry," he called out as he disappeared.

"Okay," Zephyr said aloud, "That is really creepy. I'm glad I'm not staying here."

"That's so weird," I admitted, "He's not like Krogette, Ogard, or Lemming who all want my dragons – he wants *me*."

Just then, Sulpher burst through the underbrush – ready for action. Seeing just me and Zephyr she got suspicious.

"What are you two doing here?" she interrogated us.

"Zephyr spotted this small column of smoke, and we traced it to here," I began.

"Uh huh," Sulpher replied, "You expect me to believe a Wing Maiden did this?"

"No," Zephyr replied quickly, "There was some weird guy dressed in black who wanted to talk with Kaizar. What are *you* doing here?"

"I saw the smoke as well and decided to check it out. You don't think it was Ogard or Lemming?" Sulpher replied.

"No," I replied confidently, "He sounded a lot older, but I definitely don't know him."

"I'm not buying that," Sulpher finally decided, "What were you really doing here?"

"Geez, Sulpher," Zephyr said, "We're telling the truth. If you don't want to believe us that's your fault. I'm going back to my family." With that, Zephyr kicked some dirt onto the fire to put it out and jogged back towards the village.

I watched Zephyr leave; then I turned to Sulpher and said, "Honest, we were just here – oh." Sulpher turned to me and her face did *not* look happy.

"Kaizar, Zephyr just *shows* up with her family and immediately you and she are just creeping around at night by yourselves. What should I believe?"

"Oh," I said suddenly realizing Sulpher's problem, "I don't like her or anything. It just happened that she pointed out the fire to me."

"You were standing awfully close to her," Sulpher argued.

"Yeah, because I was the only one with a shield, and we didn't know what the guy might do," I responded.

"Uh huh *or* you were doing something else!" Sulpher said.

"Come on, Sulpher," I argued, "Be reasonable, we were literally just investigating this together and it happened to be her - end of story."

"I *am* being reasonable," Sulpher practically yelled at me, "And I think you're just playing me. Have your medallion thing." Sulpher ripped it off her neck and tossed it to me.

I barely caught it, still surprised.

"Go with Zephyr if that's what you want. See if I care!" Sulpher yelled back to me as she took off into the night.

"Sulpher, no, that's not it," I yelled to her – trying to keep up with her, "I like *you*." I tried to say more, but Sulpher quickly disappeared among the dense shrubbery, and I was forced to walk back to the village myself. I let myself into my house and collapsed near the fire and Powder. From the other room, I could hear Dad snoring softly.

"What am I going to do?" I mumbled to myself. Everything was falling apart now.

## Chapter 8

I woke up the next morning to Mom stumbling around. I groaned and rolled over...right on Powder's tail. Instantly, Powder woke up and jumped to his feet.

"Sorry, Powder," I groaned, "I didn't realize your tail was there."

"I'm going for a morning run," Mom told me, "You want to come along?"

"Sure – now that I'm awake," I replied. I threw on a casual pair of clothes and followed her outside into the frigid, morning air. Powder, not wanting to be left alone with Dad, followed me outside as well.

"What's going on with you?" Mom asked me as we jogged out of the village and along a random path, "I mean, I know what you're up to, but how are you coping with all the changes and such?"

"I don't know," I sighed, "It's hard on me, but I'm starting to get used to it, I guess. I'm worried right now because Sulpher hates me, and I'm going to have to let Slizer go to the Hidden World."

"Wow! That's a mouthful," Mom breathed, "First – what's wrong with you and Sulpher? You were getting along splendid yesterday evening."

"I know!" I replied, "It was all going good until Zephyr noticed a column of smoke rising into the air when I went over to get my shield."

"What's wrong about that?"

"Nothing really. I didn't think anything of it, but Zephyr was suspicious so she ran out to check on it."

"Okay?" Mom said, understanding so far.

"Well, long story, we found this guy by the fire who was all dressed in black and was like, 'I need your help'," I continued, "And I said no, and he said he'd be in contact with me – then he left."

"Oh!" Mom realized, "Then, Sulpher showed up and saw you with Zephyr?"

"Exactly," I answered.

"Oh, that happens every now and then," Mom told me, "I remember that when I first met Hiccup, I put on a really good show and completely got him to trust me – even though I was spying on them. Astrid suspected me on the other hand, and that caused a bad rift in their friendship."

"So how did it resolve?" I replied – shocked at Mom's deception.

"Well, once Hiccup found out that he was wrong, it just sort of got better I guess. I'm not perfectly sure because I left soon after, but that was the feeling I got," Mom finished.

"But I'm right!" I said, "Sulpher will never see that I'm wrong!"

"True," Mom answered, "But maybe she'll see that she's wrong."

"I can't possibly find that guy again," I told Mom.

"True, but maybe he'll show up when you least expect it," Mom told me, "Seems to me all of your *friends* do that!"

I thought on this for a while; then posed another question as we wove through a dense forest trail.

"Why are there so many people after me? There's Krogette, Ogard, Lemmrig, previously Laurel, and this new person. What's everyone's deal?"

Mom sighed, "It has to do with why we sent our dragons to the Hidden World. Whenever someone has dragons – they have power, and others see that. Thus, they want that power and they come after you. Unless you get rid of Powder and Slizer, those people will always be on top of you."

"But I can't get rid of Powder!" I exclaimed, frustrated.

"Then, you'll just have to watch your back," Mom explained, "Don't worry, though, this island is now literally loaded with warriors – you'll be fine."

"I hope," I mumbled. Presently we came to a fork in the trail.

"I think I'll head in the general direction of last night's meeting, maybe I can find some footprints," I told Mom, "You want to come with me?"

"Actually, I would, but I should get back and see if I can help with the breakfast," Mom declined, "But good luck!"

"See ya!" I said to Mom giving her a hug, "And thanks for the conversation!"

As Mom turned around and headed back to the village, I hopped on Powder, and we headed to the campsite. It took a bit of searching, but we finally found the clearing and the campfire.

"Everything is the same as last night," I told Powder, "Except for the two fresh sets of footprints." Powder growled his approval, and we set off following the footprints – Slizer with his nose to the ground like a wolf. We walked through a few trees and weaved around a large sand pit. Then, we came to a stop.

"Rats!" I exclaimed, "All I can tell from this is that maybe a scuffle broke out."

"Hey, uh, Kaizar?" a voice from above me said.

"Ack!" I yelled, jumping in surprise, "Who's there?" Powder also looked around but didn't see anything.

"Uh, it's Sulpher and I'm up here," Sulpher said, clearly sounding embarrassed. I looked up into the branches above me and saw Sulpher suspended upside down in a net trap – swinging gently back and forth.

"How did you-?" I asked.

"Let's just say, I'm wrong – again," Sulpher told me sheepishly, "But would you mind cutting me down first? I don't think there's any blood left in my feet."

"Powder, snip!" I commanded him, gesturing to the rope with my hands and making a cutting motion with my two fingers. Powder immediately jumped into the air and snapped his jaw down on the top of the rope that was connected to a branch. Unfortunately, he did not think about what would happen to Sulpher once her rope trap was not connected to anything. He also did not think about what would happen to me – who just so happened to be right below Sulpher.

"Aaah!" (Sulpher)

"Oof!" (me)

I was instantly squashed beneath a hundred and twenty pounds of female Viking.

"I hate to say this, but I'm still caught," Sulpher said from on top of me.

After groaning and rolling her off me I told her, "Remind me to work with Powder on rescue missions." Once I could breathe again, I sat up and directed Powder to chomp off a section of the rope trap (as I was obviously without a knife or weapon). Sulpher finally managed to extricate herself from the trap and stood up as well.

"Well, I owe you an apology," Sulpher told me, "Your mystery guy is very real!"

"What happened?" I asked, intrigued.

"Well, I couldn't sleep last night – thinking you had betrayed me," Sulpher began, "So, I came back here early this morning to look for footprints, and I found these strange ones that led away from the campfire and to the opposite part of the island from where the village is. So, I followed them. Well, I wasn't looking where I was going, and I stepped right onto a length of rope that immediately pulled me into the air. The noise of the trap must have alerted the mystery guy, because I heard him run up behind me. Then, without saying anything, he came in front of me and looked me over. It was hard enough to tell what exactly he looked like, and he had a mask over his face - just like you said. Anyway, he stood there for a minute – then walked off while wiping his footprints away with a branch. "

"How long have you been here?" I asked Sulpher.

"About an hour," Sulpher replied.

"An HOUR!" I exclaimed, "It's a good thing I found you! I came on a jog with Mom and decided to run by here and look for footprints as well."

"And, like I said, I owe you an apology," Sulpher replied, "You were telling the truth. I guess my emotions got out of control."

"No problem," I said, "You'll take back your medallion?"

Sulpher grinned, "Sure, and I really do like it!"

"That guy is good! He obviously planned for people following him!" I commented, "I still have to wonder what he wanted me for!"

"No idea, but I'm sure glad that was cleared up fast," Sulpher told me, "Let's go get some breakfast – I can tell Powder is hungry!"

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

When Sulpher and I entered the hall together, Mom (sitting over in one part of the room with the Haddock family) smiled at me, but Nuffnut and Puffnut waved us over to their table.

"Okay, how much money do you have?" Nuffnut asked us as soon as we sat down.

I reached for a strawberry muffin, crammed part of it in my mouth, and said, "Why do you want to know?"

"Because we're going to Auction Island, and there's sure to be all sorts of good stuff there!"

Puffnut answered, exasperated.

"So – how much do you get?" Nuffnut persisted.

"Uh, I think I have maybe thirty gold coins," Sulpher replied, "And possibly a few silver ones."

"And you Kaizar?" Nuffnut prodded.

"A whole lot more than you probably want to know," I told Nuffnut, "I've won several tournaments on my island in which the prize was money."

"Sweet!" Puffnut crowed, "Can you loan me some?"

"Depends on if you're going to pay me back?" I said while biting into a big sausage.

"Good point," Puffnut replied, "I probably won't."

"I'll trade you my Maces and Talons jade figurine for twenty gold coins," Nuffnut offered.

"Ten," I responded.

"Eighteen," Nuffnut bargained.

"Just agree on fifteen," Sulpher told us, disgusted with the bargaining, "You know you're going to end there anyway."

"Shush," Puffnut said, "It may not!"

"Prove me wrong!" Sulpher challenged.

"Thirteen," I offered.

"That's way too little," Nuffnut argued, "At least eighteen!"

"How about fourteen. That's way more than enough for a little figurine," I bargained.

"Nah," Nuffnut answered me, "But I'll cut you a deal and give you it for sixteen gold coins."

"Ugh!" I replied, "Are you okay with fifteen?"

"Done!" Nuffnut cried – delighted with her profit.

"I told you," Sulpher mumbled to Puffnut.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Two hours later, the complete MDR was on its way to Auction Island.

"Has anyone been there recently?" Zephyr asked the group.

"I think Sulpher has once a few years ago," I told Zephyr, "But you'll have to ask her."

(Sulpher was almost always by herself because she rode Slizer, who had to stay on top of the water while the rest of us were flying in the sky.)

"I'm going to buy something awesome!" Nuffnut declared, "I have no idea what it's going to be, but it will be AWESOME!"

"Yeah, well, now that you're *rich*," Puffnut replied, "You can afford something completely frivolous."

"Hey!" Nuffnut shot back, "I *only* get useful stuff."

"Uh huh," Puffnut replied slowly, not believing a word, "Than why did you buy our parents' stuffed yak?"

"It's sentimental!" Nuffnut defended herself.

"What is the plan for getting the sword hilt?" Zephyr asked me.

"I literally have no idea. It could be anywhere on the island," I said bluntly.

Having found no substantial information from either of us, the two 'nuts' stared at Nuffink expectantly.

"Don't look at me!" Nuffink said to Puffnut and Nuffnut, "I'm not next person to ask when Kaizar no know something."

"Well, Sulpher isn't up here, so you're next," Nuffnut reminded her.

"Oh great," Zephyr replied, "Maybe we should just go around and ask everyone."

"Well, that might work but what if we...", Puffnut thought aloud as Powder and I dove down to Sulpher.

"Excuse me ma'am," I yelled to Sulpher, "Could I have some help....?"

"Sure," Sulpher said to me, smiling, "What can I do for you sir?"

"I'm supposed to find a sword hilt on Auction Island, but there's probably a lot of land to cover. Do you have any good ideas for finding it?"

"Certainly sir. I've been thinking about this myself," Sulpher replied, "Crazy coincidence, right?"

"No kidding!" I laughed.

"I think we should ask this older trader on the island who seemed to know a little about everything," Sulpher told me, "He and Dad got in a long talk the last time I visited Auction Island seven years ago about Hiccup and the gang. So, maybe he knows about the sword hilt?"

"It's worth a try," I said, shrugging my shoulders, "Hey, would you like to ride Powder for a little? It'd be nice to ride Slizer for a bit."

"Sure," Sulpher said.

Powder and I flew in as close as we could. Then, Sulpher jumped off Slizer and landed onto Powder. Afterwards, I vaulted onto Slizer.

"Good luck figuring out how to fly him!" I warned Sulpher, "Bye!"

With that, I nudged Slizer and took him in a fast swerving motion across the water.

"Woo hoo!" I yelled, standing up in the saddle, "Let's do this!"

"How about the mid-air somersault?" I asked Slizer. Slizer sped up, sprang into the air, somersaulted and landed back in the water with perfect agility.

"Yes!" I yelled.

"Aaaah!" Sulpher screamed as Powder and her flashed by us and almost upturned into the surf. Slizer growled.

"Oh, she'll be fine. It just takes some practice," I told Slizer, "You spoiled Sulpher."

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

"This place is actually pretty small," Nuffink told me, "I thought it would be bigger!"

"I know!" I replied, "Guess you don't need a lot of room to sell stuff."

"It's pretty busy too!" Sulpher told us as we walked up the long path to the island.

"Remind me to say thanks to Puffnut and Zephyr for watching our dragons," I told the others.

"Pfft, I'm not," Nuffnut announced, "I've got *shopping* to do!"

"Go for it," I told Nuffnut, "I'm going to be looking for someone with Sulpher."

"Real specific," Nuffnut yelled to me as she took off to the left.

"Do you remember where that old guy is?" Nuffink asked Sulpher.

"Uh, no – maybe straight ahead?"

We had arrived at a three-way fork in the road, and it appeared like most of the sellers were to the left, but there were some larger buildings in front of us. Sulpher decided to take the center path up to a particularly older-looking building.

"Welcome to Gref's trading post!" a younger man called out to us from behind a long workspace crammed with tools and various articles, "I specialize in any and all modifications. If you want something awesome added to your weapons – I have it!"

Nuffink, intrigued, walked over, "Do you have a small, extendable blade?"

"Why yes!" Gref said, searching through various drawers under the counter, "Round or straight?"

"I need it to fit right in here," Nuffink said to Gref, pulling out his sword and showing a little compartment in the bottom of his sword.

"Very exquisite indeed!" Gref said while inspecting Nuffink's sword, "I've never seen one quite like it. Do you know what this compartment was used for?"

"I think it had a small metal pellet with either Zippleback gas or Nightmare gel inside of it," Nuffink explained, "It could be used to either light the sword blade on fire or create a small explosion."

"Fascinating!" Gref explained while fiddling with the handle of the sword so he could fit his extendable blade into it.

"What's the blade for?" Sulpher asked Nuffink.

"Let me guess!" Gref answered, "Imagine this: you are in lethal combat with a strong enemy, when suddenly he throws you to the ground and locks your sword in a forceful attack. Then, you pop the blade out of your sword's handle and slice him in the face!"

"Er, something like that?" Nuffink answered.

"There you go sir," Gref told Nuffink, handing him back his sword, "Give it a try!"

Nuffink pressed a small, almost imperceptible lever on the side of his sword and the extendable blade shot out of the other end.

"Try to cut this wood piece!" Gref told him, plopping a thick wood block on the counter.

Sulpher and I expected Nuffink to have to work really hard to cut the block in half, but, instead, he cut it with ease.

"Wow! Thanks," Nuffink told Gref, "How much do I owe you?"

"Well, I really enjoyed your sword," Gref announced, "So I'll just charge you for the iron alloy mix that the blade is made of. That'd be three gold coins."

"Fair price," Nuffink said, handing over the coins.

"Anything else folks?" Gref asked Sulpher and I.

"What's that?" I replied - pointing to a cylindrical like object with various arrows loaded in it.

"This?" Gref told me, "I'm glad you asked. It's an early prototype of a special project I'm working on. Let me show you."

Gref pulled out a regular looking crossbow from under his counter and set it down on the table.

"With a few simple modifications," Gref told us, swiping a few tools off a table and gutting some of the launcher mechanism of the crossbow, "I can place this arrow loader into the crossbow – like this!"

Gref carefully fitted the "arrow loader" into the crossbow and put everything back together.

Then, he handed it to me.

"Try this out!" Gref told me.

"Uh, what exactly do I do with it?"

"Just fire it like normal," Gref prodded me.

"Okay?" I said. I pulled back the crossbow string, aimed at a tree nearby, and fired. The first arrow that was in the "loader" flew out and missed the tree by a scant inch or so. No sooner had the arrow left the crossbow than the loader turned and loaded another arrow into place automatically.

"Oh!" I said, understanding the usefulness of the loader.

"Zing!" "Zing!" "Zwerooo" "Zwoop" "Thunk"

"That is the coolest," Sulpher breathed, "I almost want one of those."

"You can!" Gref told us, "But you're going to need to bring me a crossbow you want it fitted into."

The wheels in my head started turning, and I suddenly had an interesting idea.

"Could you put it in here?" I asked Gref, slinging my shield off my back and laying it on his work table.

"A shield?" Gref asked, confused.

"Not just a shield," I told him mysteriously. I picked it back up again and transformed it into a crossbow with a quick flick of one of the levers on the back. Gref was so surprised that he stumbled backward and tripped over a stool.

"How did you do that?!" he asked me.



"I honestly don't know the mechanism, but it's done using these levers," I told Gref, showing him the back of my shield.

"That'd be cool alright," Gref agreed, "But since your shield is made of some sort of metal and is composed with an intricate mechanism, it may be difficult to fit the arrow loader into it. If you leave it with me for an hour or so, I can try if you'd like – but your choice."

"You promise me you'll still be here in an hour?" I questioned Gref.

"Yep! I'm the most honest person here," Gref told me, "But if you don't trust me – that's totally okay."

"No, I trust you – give it a shot," I told Gref.

"Great, I'll do my best," Gref assured me, "Where are you guys going next?"

"We're looking for this older man who knows a lot," Sulpher informed Gref, "We need some help tracking down a special tribal piece of a sword."

"You must mean Vander," Gref told Sulpher while carefully inspecting my shield with a small lens, "You'll find him in the big building to the right."

"Cool! Thanks," Sulpher said to the man.

"I'll be back when I can," I assured Gref.

Nuffink, Sulpher, and I left quickly and jogged over to the building Gref told us about. The door was cracked open, so we cautiously entered and saw several guys lounging about on wooden benches, drinking various brews, and playing card games.

"Welcome to Vander's Tavern," a bored voice next to us said, "What can I do for you?"

"We're looking for Vander, actually," Sulpher told the Viking lady.

"He's over there in his favorite chair," she told us, pointing to a very old man with a long white beard who was just sitting in a big chair looking at everything and drinking from a massive mug.

"Thanks," I told the lady, starting to make my way across the room. The whole place was kind of sketchy and I didn't like the characters sitting around, but for the most part, they just ignored us.

"Vander?" Sulpher said to the man once we had made our way across the room.

"Yep?" he said looking Sulpher, Nuffink, and I up and down.

"I'm looking for a piece of a Wing Maiden sword," Sulpher told the man, "A clue led us here, and I thought you may know something of it."

Vander thought for a moment, took a small sip from his mug, and answered, "Well, there's good news and bad news, kids."

"Good news," Sulpher quickly requested.

"Well, then, I have a Wing Maiden Sword hilt given to me from my father," Vander told Sulpher, pointing to a beautiful, bejeweled sword hilt that was latched far up on the wall.

"I'm pretty sure that's the one we want,!" I said to Vander.

"And that's where there's the bad news," Vander told us, "It will only be given as a prize for completing the Wood Challenge."

"What's the Wood Challenge?" Sulpher asked Vander.

"Look out the window," Vander said, jabbing his bony finger towards a large, dusty window near his chair. Outside was a massive obstacle course that had a myriad of large bludgeons, swinging tree trunks, metal turntables, and ground spikes all connected via an obsessive amount of pulleys and gears.

“Basically, you just have to run through there without any armor, helmet, or weapons,” Vander explained, “If you live and make it through alive – you get that sword hilt.”

“Oh, Sulpher said, looking straight at me.

“That’s suicide!” I told Vander, “No one could do that.”

“That’s why it’s called the Wood Challenge,” Vander told me, “No one has and no one will.”

Vander leaned back in his chair and took another long sip of his black liquid.

“I do it,” Nuffink calmly told Vander.

At this, Vander choked on his drink and spit it out everywhere on the floor.

“WHAT?!” Sulpher, Vander, and I all gasped.

“I said, I do it!” Nuffink announced.

“Hey guys!” Vander yelled out to everyone in his tavern as we wiped his lips on his sleeve, “This here kid is goin’ to do the wood challenge!”

Immediately everyone turned to stare at Nuffink, and silence fell quickly.

“That kid is going to do what?” a fat Viking near the counter said, “I thought you said he was going to do the wood challenge. But that’s crazy, no one in their right mind would do it.”

“Me do it for the prize!” Nuffink said confidently, pointing to the sword hilt on the wall.

“Forget it kid,” another scruffy man nearby said, “You ain’t getting that. No one is.” He laughed a maniacal laugh and put his attention back to his game.

“You not kiddin’?” Vander re-asked Nuffink, “You know ur’ goin’ to need the hardest head imaginable?”

“I can do it,” Nuffink told me, “Let me at it.”

“Alright then,” Vander yelled out, “He’s doing it!”

With that, Vander stumbled out of his chair and wobbled over to a rusty, dilapidated back door. He threw it open with a flourish and swaggered over to a thick lever that was standing near the course. Immediately, the obstacle course came to life - bludgeons, previously hanging by ropes to gears, started swinging around, massive logs swooped down through the air, wooden boards randomly popped up from the ground and slapped down, and various ropes draped everywhere - ready to snag an unsuspecting victim.

Nuffink walked up to the starting line, and I surveyed the half mile long course, as the rest of the tavern’s customers grudgingly got up from their tables and walked outside to watch the fun.

“Who’s going to pick up his pieces,” one of the customers asked the crowd of us who were watching with half-horror and half-interest.

“You think he can do it?!” Sulpher whispered to me.

“I don’t know, but he took a nice hit from you when we were fighting with him last spring, and he didn’t even get a bruise!” I reminded Sulpher.

“I hope his parents won’t get mad at us,” Sulpher mumbled.

“Are you ready?” Vander called out to Nuffink, while a big, toothy smile broke across his dirty mouth.

“Ready!” Nuffink declared.

“Then go if you’re ever ready!” Vander hollered. With that, Nuffink took off. He dodged one tree trunk – than another. The rowdy crowd of tavern customers cheered each time. Then, a wooden board shot out of the ground and Nuffink ran full tilt into it.

“WHAM!!!”

"That was quick," a guy with a metal bucket on his head said, "I'll go get him."

"He's up!" Sulpher shouted, pointing to Nuffink who just shook his head and kept on going.

"What?!" Vander said, getting excited.

"BIF!!!"

Another board, flapped down from the top of an archway and creamed Nuffink in the head again.

"He's down!" Vander yelled to us.

"No, he's back up!" another guy said, "That's three huge hits!"

"Nope, add another," I interrupted, "That's four!"

"He's reached the bludgeon zone!" Vander cried out in delight.

"CRUNCH!" A sharp axe fell from a ledge and sliced some of the wooden boards in half that Nuffink had just passed. Then, a sword flew out of a small crack in a wall and nearly skewered him. Next, a bludgeon fell down and almost hit Nuffink in the head, but Nuffink grabbed the handle with his hands and swung out of the way.

"ANNNDD, he's at the halfway point!" Vander announced next, "This is the worst part - where all the trees are."

Nuffink vaulted over the first swinging tree, slid under the second, and dodged the third. With adept dodging skills, Nuffink managed to evade tree after tree. To everyone's astonishment, he made it to only a few meters from the end without ever being hit. Personally, my jaw dropped almost a foot.

"I could *never* do that," I told Sulpher, "Even with a helmet!"

As Nuffink ran towards the finish line, suddenly a massive tree that was several feet in diameter and with a super pointy tip plunged down from the sky and right into Nuffink's path.

"Dodge it," I whispered. Nuffink dove to the side, but the tree's pointy tip plunged straight into Nuffink's face. Nuffink was thrown into the air like a ragdoll and landed about fifty meters backward in the obstacle course.

"He's dead," Vander lamented, "And he was SO close!"

Sulpher gasped, scared to death as Nuffink didn't move.

"Uh, I don't think that was supposed to happen," I mumbled.

"Wait, look!" the bucket-helmet dude cried out, "His hand moved!"

Sure enough, Nuffink moved his hand – then sat up. His face was bloody, and he already had two huge black eyes, but it wasn't his face's look that scared us - it was his expression of pure determination.

"He's going to have to rerun those fifty meters," Vander informed us all.

Not a person spoke as Nuffink bent low and charged forward again, dodging the trees in front of him. Finally, he made it back to the final thick tree. Instead of trying to dodge it, Nuffink bent his head and charged the tree.

"He can't!" Vander exclaimed.

At the last minute, Nuffink vaulted onto the swing tree, grabbing it with both of his hands and used the tree's momentum to soar over the finish line. He landed perfectly in the grass next to Vander.

"Me no give up!" Nuffink yelled triumphantly, "Me conquer!"

If Vander was surprised before, he was even more so now.

"Um, Vander's eyes are glazing over," Sulpher mentioned out loud.

"Thunk" - Vander fainted.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~  
"What were you thinking when you got creamed by the last tree?" a particularly large fellow said to Nuffink while pumping his hand up and down in a vigorous handshake. We had all gone back into the tavern, and Sulpher was wiping Nuffink's face down with a damp, clean cloth.

"I think, 'This tree no best me!'," Nuffink told the guy, "There is no one with a stronger head than me!"

"I believe you now," Vander said from his chair, "Here, have this."

Vander tossed the sword hilt to me and said "Your friend earned it."

"You still look like you got in a fight with me," a particularly mean looking tavern customer said to Nuffink.

"It's no fun if you don't get a scar out of it!" Nuffink defended himself.

At this, the whole tavern burst out in laughter.

"I've got to go now," Nuffink told everyone, "But have fun!"

With that, Sulpher, Nuffink, and I left the tavern.

"You're free to come back any time!" Vander called out after us, "And any drink you want is on me!"

Nuffink smiled and slapped me on the back, "That's my contribution."

"And a good one it was!" I said, slapping him back, "You have one incredible head."

"Let's see if Gref still has your shield," Sulpher reminded me.

We made our way back over to Gref's shack and found him working on a mini hatchet.

"Did you get my shield done?" I asked him.

"You bet!" Gref announced, obviously pleased with himself, "It took a while to figure out the mechanism and even longer to fit the arrow loader inside, but I did it."

Gref pulled out my shield from under his counter and handed it to me.

"Hey, this doesn't feel any heavier. What's that arrow loader made of?" I asked Gref as I transformed the shield into a crossbow.

"Well, I noticed that your shield is made of Gronckle Iron, so I quickly fashioned a loader out of my own supply of Gronckle Iron," Gref announced.

I pulled back the shield's string and let six arrows fly in rapid succession.

"Works just like I imagined it. This'll definitely give me a leg up in battle," I told Gref, "How much do I owe you?"

"Well," Gref said sheepishly, "Adding the cost of the rare Gronckle Iron, the labor, and the tools needed to make the modifications, the price comes to thirty gold coins."

"Holy yak!" Sulpher exclaimed, "That's highway robbery!"

Gref shrunk back into his shack, but I laughed.

"It's worth it," I told him, pulling out most of the money I had brought along, "You did a great job and kept it safe. That alone is worth the price."

"I really appreciate it," Gref told me, gratefully accepting the money, "You're welcome back anytime!"

"Of course he is," Sulpher mumbled as I shook Gref's hand and left.

"Wait, I forgot to tell you!" Gref yelled after me, "A guy came by claiming to be your friend, and said he needed your shield. I told him, he'd have to bring you personally, but he insisted. I finally ran him off, but he wasn't happy."

"What'd he look like?" I asked Gref.

"Uh, kind of like you – a little?" Gref answered, "I can't really remember that well, but was he your friend?"

"Definitely not, thanks!"

"Alright, then. Enjoy the rest of your day!" Gref called out to us.

"Probably Lemmirg," Sulpher told Nuffink as we walked back down the main path, "He always shows up where Kaizar is."

"We'll keep an eye out for him, but right now we need to find Nuffnut," I told Nuffink and Sulpher. We took the right path and headed for the main marketplace which was in a flurry of excitement as it was near noon.

"What are all these gunny sacks for?" Sulpher asked us, pointing to a massive crate of them.

"Yeah, like someone's going to buy enough stuff to fill one of those!" I laughed.

"Some people are crazy buyers!" Nuffink added.

"Hey you!" someone called out to us at that moment. Sulpher looked to the left where a fat seller wearing a huge golden necklace was relaxing at a stand selling some sort of pastries.

"Have a free sample!" the seller called out to us. He swiped three huge pastries off his counter and tossed them to us.

"What?" I said, "These are huge samples!"

"Don't sweat it, man," the seller told me, "Better you have them than I!"

We all thanked the seller and moved ourselves to a collection of complimentary wood tables that were all standing on the ground. No sooner had we done this, than another food seller came by and set before us three huge bowls of beef and corn stew.

"On the house," he told us, "The best stew you'll ever eat."

Nuffink and I immediately dug in, but Sulpher, being not quite as much of a big eater, thanked the man and tried to strike up a conversation with him.

"Sorry, miss, but I've got to get back to my stand. Enjoy!" he told us.

No sooner had we finished our bowls of stew, than another food seller stopped by and slapped huge yak sticks in front of us.

"Check out these yak sticks!" he told us, "They are unearthly good!"

"What's with all these free samples?" Sulpher asked him.

"Oh!" He laughed, "Everyone here does this. It's a ton of fun for us and our customers."

In order that we could get on to some other sellers, we grabbed our yak sticks and kept on walking down the main path. It turns out that I was used to Berserker marketplaces, where sellers only gave you samples if they thought you'd buy from them, and the samples were super small and insignificant. What I didn't know was that the average income on Auction Island was more than both of my parents made in ten years, and everyone was as generous as a doting grandparent.

The problem was that we got stopped again by another dessert seller who shoved jelly donuts into our hands. Then, no sooner had we finished our jelly pastries, Sulpher was literally loaded

down with jewelry – and good stuff at that. Hence we realized we had reached the jewelry section of the marketplace

“Take this gold necklace!” one seller said to Sulpher – tossing her a beautiful, solid gold necklace.

“Have a bracelet!” another said, tossing her a bejeweled bracelet. Sulpher tried to thank everyone, but the sellers had already moved on to the next people that were streaming by at a massive rate.

“Have one of my beautiful rings!” another lady seller said, standing at a massive table. Before Sulpher could say no, the lady had jammed at least six rings on Sulpher’s fingers.

“Ack!” Sulpher cried out to me, “Help me!”

Dodging a pair of yaks pulling a cart, I went over to help extricate Sulpher from all the jewelry sellers, but I was singled out by a cobbler selling impressive hiking boots.

“Dude! Your boots are awful!” the cobbler said, pulling on me by the arm. I tried to run off, but he was surprisingly strong, “Try these on.”

The cobbler swiped a nice pair of boots off a shelf, shoved me into an ornate wooden chair, and slipped the boots on my feet.

“They’re very nice and comfortable,” I admitted, “But I really don’t need-.”

“Nonsense,” the cobbler interrupted, “Keep them para gratis!” He shoved me back into the street and latched onto another unsuspecting buyer.

As I admired my new shoes, Nuffink zipped by as he was pulled into a shop selling new helmets.

“I really think-,” Nuffink was saying before he disappeared into the shop. I was just about to try to find Sulpher again – amid the massive crowds of buyers and sellers, when something ran into me. It turned out to be a *someone*, but the person was so loaded down with samples and things that I couldn’t even see the face.

“Hi Kaizar,” a muffled voice yelled. It was Nuffnut.

“What happened to you!” I said to her, just as another seller of “bracers” pulled me into his shop and slapped two new, spiky arm protectors on me. The seller tried to do the same do Nuffnut, but couldn’t find her arms. Eventually, he gave up and moved on to another person.

“Could you help carry a few things?” Nuffnut’s muffled voice said again.

I pulled a dozen items off Nuffnut’s head.

“What’s the quickest way out of here?” I asked anxiously.

“Definitely the way you came,” Nuffnut breathed, “DO NOT go the way I just came from. I’m warning you!”

As fast as we could, Nuffnut and I stumbled back through the crowds of people, still being stopped every few minutes so that we could try out this new gadget or enjoy this new piece of jewelry. On the way, I didn’t see Sulpher near the jewelry tables, so I hoped that meant she was leaving as well. After running the gauntlet again, Nuffnut and I finally emerged back onto the main trail so loaded down with various knick knacks that my legs almost buckled out from under me.

“Need a bag?” Sulpher said to Nuffnut and I as we stumbled out of the market area.

“Thanks!” I exclaimed, quickly pulling various articles off all parts of my body and dropping them into the sack, “We’re never going to be able to bring this back to Wind Maiden Island.”

"Tell me about it!" Nuffnut exclaimed, "I was thinking this was something like Outcast Island's sales. Boy was I wrong! I have more money than I started with!"

"Where's Nuffink?" Sulpher asked me.

"See that kid with the massive skull helmet?" I said to Sulpher, pointing to a taller boy shoving his way through the crowd.

"No way!" Sulpher gasped, "He looks like his head is going to implode under the weight!"

"Nah, his head is too strong," I replied.

"I know *that*, but that helmet is huge!" Sulpher exclaimed.

"*And* he's holding another ornate helmet in his hands," Nuffnut added.

"I'm going to be sick," I said, holding my stomach, "I had at least two dozen pastries, five whole chickens, and practically a whole cow worth of hamburger!"

When Nuffink finally arrived, we all helped carry our colossal gunny sacks (yes, more than one!) of items down the trail and towards the beach where Puffnut and Zephyr should be waiting.

"Hey! You're still wearing my medallion," I told Sulpher.

"Yep! Several of the sellers said it was ugly, but I told them it was wonderfully sentimental,"

Sulpher informed me, "Plus, it still is *beautiful*."

"Not compared to the samples they were giving away," I replied honestly, "But you can keep on thinking that!"

Stumbling under the weight of the sacks, we finally made it to the beach. Walking all the way down it and into a secluded, forested area, we found Zephyr and Puffnut lying on the ground enjoying the sunshine.

"Oh my goodness!" Puffnut exclaimed, "Where in the world did you get enough money to buy all that."

Meanwhile, Zephyr's mouth opened so wide that I could have put my fist into it.

"Let's just say, their markets are not the same as the ones we know from home!" I explained.

"And can you explain why Nuffink's face looks like someone slammed a full-size tree trunk into it?" Zephyr questioned.

"Yeah, someone shoved a full-size tree trunk into his face," Sulpher replied.

"*But* me get the sword hilt!" Nuffink exclaimed triumphantly.

"You really should have seen him!" Sulpher added.

"Why do I always miss out on the fun!" Puffnut whined, "You guys look like you had the fun of the century!"

"You wouldn't have any food in there?" Zephyr asked Nuffink, poking around in his gunny sack, "I'm starving!"

"No," Nuffink answered, "But I can get you some!"

"Hey, where'd all the dragons go?" I asked Puffnut.

"Beats me," Puffnut said, pointing to a large, freshly made hole in the ground, "About ten minutes after you left, they all started acting really weird and all hid in that hole there."

I poked my head in the hole and nearly ran into Bash.

"That *is* weird," I said.

"We better get home," Nuffink noted, "It's getting close to evening."

"Right," Sulpher said.

"Can we at least get a little food?" Puffnut pleaded.

"Fine, you get the dragons ready and loaded up while Nuffink and I go endanger ourselves in the market again," I relented.

"Endanger?" Zephyr asked, confused.

"Put ourselves in harm's way," Nuffink added – running off with me.

"I can't believe I'm doing this," I told Nuffink as we ran back up onto the main land, "I'm literally going back to the market."

"This is worse than the head crusher thing at the tavern!" Nuffink compared.

"Almost!" I agreed.

"Wait, what's better than crushing Kaizar's head?" Lemmirg asked – stepping out from behind a set of trees with a dozen War Lord goons.

"Oh, bother," Nuffink said, "It's him."

"Ding, ding, ding!" Lemmirg announced, "You guessed it! And you also guessed what I want!"

"A pastry?" I teased.

"A what?!"

"A pastry – that's what I'm doing right now," I told Lemmirg.

"Wh- no! Stop distracting me," Lemmirg said, completely confused, "Plus, I've finally caught you."

I quickly pulled out my Odin's Storm and shield.

"Maybe not as much as you think," I told Lemmirg, "I've kicked you before, and I'll gladly do it again."

"Sure, say that to the rest of my group," Lemmirg suggested as another fifty or so goons stepped out from the trees to my left, right, and behind me, "I think it's my birthday!"

"Actually, said a cracking voice from behind Lemmirg, "It's *my* birthday, and I don't like having my guests threatened."

Lemmirg turned around to see Vander standing there – almost two thirds Lemmirg's height.

"Ha! What are *you* going to do about it?" Lemmirg spat.

"Well, it really is my birthday, and I'm going to give you something you deserve!" Vander replied – standing back.

"Give it to me!" Lemmirg commanded, "You don't even have a weapon."

"There you're wrong," Vander said, "I run a tavern, and I've got quite a few weapons. I think this situation calls for a tall order."

"A what?!" Lemmirg asked.

"Bomf!" Vander punched Lemmirg straight in the face, and Lemmirg was thrown backward into me. I dodged it, so Lemmirg just kept on going and slammed into a few of his goons.

"Nice one," Lemmirg admitted, rubbing his nose, "But we still have you outnumbered."

"Not really," Vander replied as a stream of his customers emerged farther down the path, "We just had the best entertainment in a long time, and we want him back."

"What?" Lemmirg asked again, perpetually confused.

"What up, Nuffink?" Vander called out to him.

"Nothing much," Nuffink said to Vander, "Just have a not-so-friendly chat with some friends."

"Well, you know what we always say regarding not-so-friendly friends," Vander shouted out loud, "Pound 'em into the ground!"



With a deafening yell, the guest of Vander's Tavern charged the War Lord goons in front of me, while Vander, Nuffink, and I turned around to face the others.

"Check this out, Lemmirg," I told him as Lemmirg pulled out his crossbow.

"Flick" "Ching" My crossbow clicked as I transformed it.

"Zhup" "Zhup" "Zhup" "Zhup" "Zhup" "Zhup"

Six War Lords went down in rapid succession.

"Demonstration is over," I told Lemmirg as I knocked out a few goons nearby.

"Faces!" Vander called out gleefully, "Meet my friends – the fists!"

I wasn't sure Vander was all there, but I gratefully accepted his presence.

I chopped two goons down with a back hand slice; then brought down a swing arc to keep the goons at a distance. I sensed two charge me from behind, but a simple lever pull was all that was needed to entangle them in ropes and metal balls. Nuffink cut down others with his sword and surprised a few others with an extendable blade. Behind me, I could hear War Lord goons cry out in pain as their faces literally met Vander's fists.

"How is that old man BEATING YOU!" Lemmirg cried out, "He's in worse shape than my grandfather!"

"Give it up," I told Lemmirg as the rest of the Tavern's guests hacked their way through Lemmirg's soldiers, "You don't have this one on me either."

"Fine," Lemmirg admitted as I chopped his crossbow in half after deflecting two of his arrows,

"But be warned. Something funny is going on here, and I'm holding you responsible for it!" With that, Lemmirg sprinted off into the forest followed by the rest of his goons.

"Well, this day's goin' down in our history books, right gentlemen?" Vander said, shaking hands with his customers.

"For sure," bucket-helmet man said, "I haven't had this much fun since I rode a wild Nadder bareback!"

"I owe you one," Nuffink told Vander.

"Nah, we owed it to ya'," Vander told Nuffink, "We doubted ya'!"

Nuffink chuckled, "I'll be back someday, so keep that obstacle course ready!"

"You bet!" Vander agreed, "It's great publicity for mi tavern!"

After shaking a few more hands, Nuffink and I went over to the marketplace and were given way too many pastries and meat dishes after explaining to one seller that we needed them for our friends.

"Hey!" Puffnut exclaimed as we flew away from the island, "This is *good*! Why don't they have this sort of stuff on my island?!"

"Because no one wants to cook," Nuffnut reminded Puffnut as we flew away.

## Chapter 9

“Step right up and get your authentic, walrus tusk knife!” Puffnut yelled through a small horn at the massive crowd of Berserkers, Wing Maidens, and Defenders of the Wing passing by, “It’s straight from Auction Island itself!”

“How much of their profits did Puffnut and Nuffnut promise you?” Zephyr asked Sulpher and I as we lounged around in the branches of a big maple tree nearby.

“Fifteen percent,” I answered as I soaked up the rare sunshine.

“Wait,” Nuffink calculated, “If they offered all of us fifteen percent, then they’re each getting twenty percent!”

“Let them at it,” Sulpher replied, “They’re doing all the hard work anyway.”

“Honestly,” Zephyr told Nuffink, “They’re doing us a favor. This way, we don’t have to bring anything back to Berk.”

“And man are those people happy!” I exclaimed as a Wing Maiden skipped underneath the tree with a crystal cup.

“It’s weird how those dragons acted up there at Auction Island,” Sulpher remembered,

“Especially since they’re doing just fine now!”

We looked into the forest where Slizer, Toothless, and Stormfly were chasing each other. A few hundred meters away, Pouncer, Dart, Zap, Bash, and Powder were all playing fetch with a few of the local children.

“Maybe Lemmrig was right about there being something weird going on the island,” I suggested, rolling over on my branch.

“You mean more than the fact that the sellers give away practically everything free?” Zephyr added.

“Possibly,” I shrugged.

It was the next day, and our group was enjoying the last few hours together. The Haddock clan was going to be heading to New Berk in a few hours with a quick stop at Outcast Island. Puffnut and Nuffnut needed to get back as well, so they were trying to liquidate the rest of the many articles we had received at Auction Island.

When we had come back from Auction Island, Hiccup was aghast to find out what Nuffink had done, but I think Astrid was secretly impressed. Also, Mom had informed me that they had successfully moved everything they could from our island. This included a few of the shacks and a lot of boards which were already being used to create more houses. Wing Maiden Island was certainly exploding in size and was expected to continue growing rapidly – mostly because boyfriends and girlfriends were appearing everywhere (what with Berserker and Defender of the Wing tribes being a bit more male heavy).

“Are you going to stop by next year?” I asked Nuffink.

“I hope so!” Nuffink answered, “It mostly depends on Dad and Toothless though. We have to be careful to stay out of the way of the War Lord goons.”

“Yeah, I’m sort of hoping that Slizer will want to go to the Hidden World,” I explained to Nuffink,

“But I also want him to stay because I enjoy his company – so I’m pretty torn.”

"I know how you feel," Zephyr cut in, "It's always so painful saying goodbye to Dart - we make a good team!"

"Going, going, gone to the Berserker with the excessive amount of tattoos," Puffnut cried out happily, "Thanks for coming everyone. Come back next year!"

As the crowd slowly started to disperse, Nuffink asked, "Are we going to Auction Island again next year?"

"News to me," Sulpher answered as she hung upside down on her tree branch.

"I'm pretty sure they're just hoping we're going to do that," Zephyr told her brother.

"Time to come down!" Snotlout yelled up to us all as he jogged up, "Your parents are saying their goodbyes!"

"Ah man," Zephyr complained, "I've had the most fun in the last three days than during the entire rest of the trip!"

I triple back-flipped out of the tree and followed Snotlout to the hall where Hiccup and Astrid were giving their final hugs.

"Stop by any time, Fishlegs," Hiccup was saying to Dad.

"You bet we will," Dad replied, "My son is having way too much fun without me!"

"I don't know," Hiccup thought, "I kind of like the change of pace. The past days were pretty ruthless!"

"True," Dad agreed, "But they were also exciting!"

"Say that to your old self!" Astrid told Dad, "You were pretty scared back then."

"Can it, Astrid," Dad told her.

Astrid and Hiccup laughed; then turned to us.

"You read to go kids?" they asked Nuffink and Zephyr.

"Not really," Nuffink admitted, "And Puffnut and Nuffnut are busy counting their money."

"Well, let's call our dragons over," Hiccup suggested, "I've got to load Toothless up."

Hiccup then proceeded to produce a perfect Night Fury call. Immediately, Toothless ran up with Stormfly and Slizer on his tail.

"I'll miss you guys," I told Nuffink, "But hopefully we can have some more crazy adventures together soon."

"Me agree," Nuffink replied, giving me a strong handshake, "Me need to go back to see Vander!"

I smiled, "Yep. I still can't believe you did that!"

Next, I turned to Zephyr, "Take care."

"Ha! You know me. I'll be fine," Zephyr told me, shaking hands.

"Come on Puff – Nuff!" Astrid called out to them, "We have to go in order to get home before dark!" Astrid and Hiccup then went back into their temporary shack to get their saddles and carrying baskets.

"Awe man," Nuffnut whined, running up, "I wasn't able to properly get everyone's money counted out."

"No problem," Sulpher told her, "I'll just take this."

Sulpher reached into Puffnut's bulging money bag and pulled out a handful of coins, "This'll do."

"Hey!" Puffnut cried, "That's too much!"

"Just keep my share," I replied, trying to calm her down, "I'm good."

"No thanks to *you*," Puffnut sneered at Sulpher. When Puffnut and Nuffnut ran off to get Zap and Bash, the rest of us kids laughed.

"They are so funny," Zephyr commented.

"Can you help with this saddle?" Hiccup called to Nuffink, "It's a little unruly!" While Nuffink helped tie the saddle to Toothless; Pouncer, Dart, Powder, Zap, and Bash all ran up.

"Hey guys!" I told them, "What's up?"

"Sounds like someone is excited to get home," Astrid noted, mounting Stormfly, "Thanks again for your hospitality, Atali!"

Atali, who was standing nearby, smiled and waved her hand.

With Toothless leading the way, everyone slowly rose up into the air.

Last of all were Puffnut and Nuffnut who were going to ride with the Haddocks to Outcast Island.

Then, Toothless stopped and started hovering in the air. He looked back down at Slizer and roared. Instantly, Slizer stood at attention. When Toothless tossed his head and roared again, Slizer looked at me with a torn expression on his fierce dragon face.

"It's okay, Slizer," I told him, tearing up, "You can go if you want."

Slizer looked from Toothless to me, and back to Toothless; then he whined.

Powder came over and nuzzled his father, and I hugged Slizer.

"You better go," I told him, "You've done your job, and I promise that I'll take care of Powder."

Slizer whined again, then slowly left my embrace and ran after his friends.

"Bye Slizer!" I called after him, tears streaming down my face. I didn't realize that saying goodbye to my friend of nine years would be so tough! With one last goodbye roar, Slizer disappeared into the forest – looking behind himself at me.

Sulpher laid her arm around my shoulder, "You did the right thing."

"I know," I sniffled, "But I just don't like permanent goodbyes."

"Well, we need to get these sword pieces to Fwert," Atali reminded me after the Haddocks, Puffnut, and Nuffnut disappeared from view, "It's time to weld them together."

"Oh, yeah," I said, trying to brighten up a bit, "Yeah, let's do that."

Atali, Sulpher, and I left the crowd of onlookers and made our way to the local blacksmith. With the influx of people from my tribe, there were now actually four or five blacksmiths, but the Wing Maiden blacksmith was by far the best.

"Fwert," Atali told him, "Can you weld these pieces together?"

"It would be an honor," Fwert replied, rubbing his black hands on his apron. With skilled hands, Fwert carefully heated up each piece, and, using his hammer and a clamp-like tool, banged them together. I watched in fascination as the sword came together.

"Oh, I have something for you," Atali told me – handing me a very wrinkled and old piece of paper.

"What is it?" I asked Atali.

"It's the final letter from our ancestor," Atali told me, "Only to be opened once all the sword pieces were put back together."

"What does it say?" Sulpher asked, intrigued.

"It says, '

The finder of the Wing Maiden golden sword,

Congratulations, if you're reading this, then you have successfully solved all the clues and completed the sword. I would ask that you please return this to my people – the Wing Maidens. Only members of various clans could solve all the riddles, so you can't possibly be just Wing Maidens. I'm glad that my descendants have decided to allow many into their midst and befriended many tribes. May you never forget the Wing Maiden legacy to protect dragons.

-Lity, Head Wing Maiden.”

“Wow, that's so cool,” Sulpher spoke up, “I guess Lity knew more than we thought she did!”

“Doesn't everyone?” I joked.

“And here you go!” Fwert told us, handing Atali a beautiful sword, “What are you going to do with it?”

“I'm going to hang it in the hall,” Atali declared, “As a reminder of our connections with other tribes.”

“Good idea,” I added. As we started on our way back to the hall, Powder ran up and whined.

“I know,” I told him, “All your friends are gone. Guess you're going to have to spend more time with me!”

Powder whined again, but I patted him on the head and fed him a big apple that I had.

“This is going to look beautiful hanging right above the large fireplace,” Atali declared holding it up in the sunlight, “I wish I knew the craftsman who put this together.”

“Hey, what's the deal with the big crowd?” Sulpher said to Atali and I as the hall came into sight, “The Haddocks left a while ago.”

Sure enough, there was a very large crowd of Berserkers, Wing Maidens, and Defenders of the Wing all clustered around something and shouting very loudly.

“A mob?” I guessed.

“About what?!” Atali declared, picking up her pace.

“*And* they're all fighting!” a voice yelled over the commotion.

“What's going on!” Atali screamed at the crowd.

Quickly, the crowd quieted down and all turned to Atali who had made her way to the top of the stairs of the hall.

“What's all this commotion about?” Atali restated her question.

The massive group of people slowly parted, and two Wing Maidens stepped forward and bowed their heads.

“We just came back with our crew from collecting a few last minute things from Berserker Island, but we never got there,” one of the ladies said.

“Why not?”

“Because there was a massive battle taking place there,” the Wing Maiden replied.

“What?!” I exclaimed, joining Atali on the stairs.

“Yeah. It was weird,” the other Wing Maiden replied, “I counted more than three dozen War Lord ships, about thirty dragons with long necks and stubby feet, and another fifty dragons that sort of looked like mutated Gronckles.”

“Oh, no,” I mumbled.

“What?” Atali asked me.

“They probably all went there to get me and ended up running into each other,” I observed.

“That's not the worst part!” the next Wing Maiden said, “Your dormant volcano is erupting!”

“Oh, come on!” I said.

“I’m guessing the enormous amount of fireballs being thrown about opened up an old vent, and now a small amount of lava and a large amount of ash is pouring out of the top of Bewilderbeast Mountain,” the Wing Maiden explained.

Just at that moment, Dagur and Mala raced down the street – closely followed by Dad and Mom.

“What’s going on?” Dagur yelled to us.

“I’ve got to go!” I told Atali, “I’ll try to be back before night.”

I jumped on top of Powder and was about to head off when Atali called after me, “You can’t defeat them on your own!”

“I’m not going to try to,” I replied, “I’m heading to Dragon’s Edge.”

“Why?!” Sulpher exclaimed.

“Because now’s my chance to check up on those possibly captured dragons.”

“I’m coming with you!” Sulpher insisted, pulling herself onto Powder as well.

“Fine,” I told her, “But we need to leave now before Kroquette’s group starts heading back.”

With Powder pumping hard, we zipped through the air and headed into the clouds.

“Ohhhh,” Sulpher finally said, “I see. With everyone distracted, you can poke around at their bases!”

“Well, Kroquette’s anyway. I’m sure Scout Island is still well-guarded, and Ogard doesn’t really have anything to hide,” I replied, keeping low in my saddle to reduce air resistance.

We made excellent time by staying high above the clouds, and within two hours we were already on top of Dragon’s Edge – thanks to Sulpher’s handy map. As it so happened, Sulpher and I were wearing the Changewing flight suits, and I had, fortunately, crammed the one pocket with various maps of the archipelago. Boy was I glad that I had previously done that.

“Take us in slow,” I warned Powder, keeping an eye out for possible dragon flyers. Powder gently swooped towards the collection of brightly colored buildings and landed next to the Dragon stables as I had directed him.

Sulpher and I jumped off Powder and crouched behind a pile of boxes – carefully listening for any noise that may alert us to the presence of dragons.

“We have to be ultra-careful,” Sulpher reminded me, “Because we left our weapons at home, and you only have your shield.”

I nodded and moved over for Powder to squeeze in beside us – he hated to be left out.

“Rurgh”

Instantly, Sulpher and I picked up on the noise, and Powder growled.

“Ah,” I told Sulpher as we tip-toed over to the building on our right, “They have at least one pure-bred dragon since Powder is growling.”

“The beasts,” Sulpher growled, “It’s probably a Singetail and Deathsong.”

We finally reached the building and found an unlocked door. Being extra quiet, and after telling Powder to shut up, we sneaked in and let our eyes adjust to the darkness. It appeared that we were on the second floor of another stable-like enclosure. Down below us were four moving creatures – two of which were in the same stable together.

“Can you make out what dragons those are?” I whispered to Sulpher, “I can’t tell.”

“One of them is definitely a Singetail,” Sulpher squinted, I could recognize those funky eyes anywhere, but the other three are farther away, and it’s hard to tell.”

“Maybe this’ll help us,” I said, swiping a few papers off a table nearby.

By placing them in front of the tiny thread of light that was streaming through the partially opened door, I was able to read them.

“How terrible!” Sulpher cried out – but quietly of course, “They’ve got a Singetail, Deathsong, Deadly Nadder, *and* a Scuttleclaw!”

“We have to free them,” I said, determined, “But we’re going to need to find a larger exit for them than this door.”

“I think there’s a bigger door down and to the left,” Sulpher informed me, “My Dad said his house had something like that.”

“Cool, as soon as you open the doors, I’ll open the stable door and run for cover,” I replied as we crept down the stairs to the first level. Powder stayed up on the second level, because he didn’t want to interact with the other dragons, and I was perfectly fine with that!

Keeping in the shadows just in case the dragons would try to roast me with their fire, I reached the last and larger cage (the one with the Scuttleclaw and Deadly Nadder it turned out) and inspected the lock at a distance. It was a large, secure latch controlled by a simple but small lock. Krogette certainly knew her dragons. Deadly Nadders were smart, but they also couldn’t work with small objects, so the lock was a perfect match.

“Found it!” Sulpher loudly whispered over to me, “There’s a lever here that opens this whole section of wall!”

“Great, pull it!” I whispered back.

“With a fairly silent, “whooshing” noise, the front section of the building (which turned out to be just extra strong leather) rolled up on a large metal cylinder. No sooner had it started opening, then I lunged forward, slid the metal pin in the lock, and swung open the door – making sure to dive back behind a large desk in case the dragons weren’t friendly. That’s when I noticed that the wall had opened to reveal Ogard and Mongro.

With a triumphant roar, the Nadder and Scuttleclaw flashed outside of their cage and rocketed outside before Ogard or I could recover from our surprise.

Sulpher, seeing Ogard, tried to slap down her suit’s front guard, but wasn’t quite in time. With lightning fast reflexes, Ogard smacked her in the head with his stick and Mongro jumped right on top of her. As soon as *that* happened, I jumped out from my hiding place and advanced on Ogard.

“Ah, I should have known you would be nearby,” Ogard said when he caught sight of me – or rather my shield, because I had already pulled down my helmet’s visor.

“Nice disguise, by the way,” Ogard taunted me, “Real original.”

“Can it,” I yelled to him, “What’re you doing here? You’re supposed to be with your group!”

“I was,” Ogard replied, “But then I realized it would be a good idea to come here instead. I’m starting to figure out that you’re never where you’re supposed to be.”

“Uh, Ogard,” Sulpher wheezed, “I’m having trouble breathing. Could you tell your dragon to lay off?”

“That depends on your boyfriend,” Ogard told her, “I need his dragons.”

“You mean the ones I just sent off with Hiccup?” I partially lied.

"You didn't!" Ogard said.

"Why shouldn't I? It's a lot safer for them," I told him.

"Well, then, how did you get here?" Ogard replied suspiciously, "I didn't see a boat."

"Nice observation," I told him, "You're right, I just sent Slizer off. POWDER!"

In a swift motion, Powder swooped down from the second floor and landed right next to me, growling for all he was worth.

"Now get your dragon off Sulpher!"

"Now, now," Ogard replied, "Let's not be harsh."

"I'm serious," Sulpher whispered painfully, "I literally can't breathe."

This was becoming obvious to me as her face started turning blue.

"Tell your dragon to back down, or I'll run you through!" I yelled at Ogard.

"With what?" Ogard replied, sarcastically, "Is this another of your lies?"

"Ker-zling!"

I transformed my shield and pointed the crossbow straight at Mongro.

"Ah, quite clever of you," Ogard admitted, "But you wouldn't hurt a dragon – I know you!"

"I might," I replied.

"Thud!" Sulpher's head (being the only thing that I could see sticking out from under Mongro) went purple, and she passed out on the ground.

"I'm giving you five seconds!" I practically screamed at Ogard.

"I dare you," Ogard challenged me.

I knew that you couldn't live without oxygen for very long, so I was left with one choice. I didn't like it, but I felt like my friend was more important than another's dragon.

"Zip!"

I shot off an arrow, and it plugged Mongro square in the face. Mongro roared with pain and shot off a fireball at where I think he thought I was, but all it did was fly past me and burst apart on the Singetail's cage. The Singetail, angered by the fireball, shot back at Mongro. The Singetail's fireball exploded right on Mongro's face.

"Zip!" "Thunk"

I sent two more arrows Mongro's way, and they both met their mark.

"You beast!" Ogard yelled at me as his scarred and wounded dragon quivered but refused to get off Sulpher.

I hit Mongro once more with another arrow, in which he went limp and rolled off Sulpher; then dropped my shield on the ground so I'd be impossible to see. Ogard jumped me, but not realizing that I had already moved out of the way, he completely missed me and slammed into the Singetail's cage. Powder, meanwhile, blasted Ogard with a huge cloud of mist, and Ogard froze up instantly. I sprinted over to Sulpher and pulled her limp body away from Mongro and into the sun. Her face had turned a nasty shade of violet, and her head was already sporting a nasty bruise from where Ogard had hit her.

"Wake up Sulpher!" I whispered to her, holding her partially in my arms. Sulpher, however, remained unconscious. I tried to test her pulse, but I had never really tested someone's pulse before, and her pulse seemed to be extremely erratic.

"Come on!" I said again, starting to tear up. *I was not going to lose Sulpher as well!*



Powder came over and laid down beside us; so I propped Sulpher's legs up on his body, in hope that she could get more oxygen and blood to her head that way, but Sulpher's body still remained unmoving.

I quickly checked her pulse again, but I couldn't feel anything – sending me into another bunch of snuffles. Powder, beside me, whined anxiously.

"Oh God!" I yelled to the sky, "If you're out there, keep Sulpher alive!"

I sat there for a few minutes, holding her tight and praying for all I was worth. I was by far not religious, and I had my doubts as to if there really was *any* god, but I figured it was worth a shot. I tried to test her pulse again, but I still couldn't feel anything. I knew it could be either because I was doing her arm pulse incorrectly, or it was because she was dead.

Finally, when I had tried it all, I did the only thing I could think of doing – I kissed her. And *that's* when I felt some warmth emanating from her lips.

"Sulpher?" I whispered hoarsely, "Sulpher are you in there?"

I waited another tense eternity; then her head moved.

"PRAISE GOD!" I breathed, thanking Him.

Powder immediately perked up and leaned over. After *another* eternity, Sulpher finally opened her eyes, which allowed my heart to start working again.

"Oh," she groaned, "My whole body feels like somebody pounded it."

"It's okay," I whispered to her softly, hugging her again.

"I know," Sulpher replied sarcastically, but I think I need one more of those.

"One more of what-?" I began, but Sulpher reached her arm up and pulled me back down by my flight suit's collar and kissed *me* this time.

"I'm glad you were here for me," she told me, slowly sitting up. After that, it was only a matter of time before her face finally returned to its normal glow, and she had enough energy to stand up while holding onto Powder.

"Hey!" Sulpher exclaimed as she pulled her hand back up from Powder's head, "What's in his mouth?"

"His mouth?" I asked, confused.

"Yeah, he's got something big in there," Sulpher told me.

"Spit it out, Powder," I replied, disgusted. Ever so carefully, Powder opened his mouth and laid a dragon egg on the ground.

"Oh," I said, shocked.

"I know what that is!" Sulpher exclaimed.

"What?" I asked.

"It's a Deadly Nadder slash Scuttleclaw egg. Powder must have found it left in their stable."

"Ah. They must've wanted to branch out with another dragon hybrid," I replied as Sulpher and Powder both turned to look at me with pleading eyes.

"Hey! It's not my choice," I told them.

"I claim it then," Sulpher declared, "Since I don't have Slizer to ride anymore."

"Good luck," I smirked, "Baby dragons are a handful – I should know!"

"Yeah, right. They're just cute," Sulpher grinned.

"Just you wait and see," I mumbled, "Just you wait and see..."

"Oh, let me go release those other dragons," I exclaimed.

“No time,” Sulpher replied, “Look!”

Sure enough, a whole flock of what I assumed to be Singesongs were rapidly approaching from the sky.

“Okay, that’ll have to wait,” I agreed.

We jumped on Powder, and he took off with a massive burst of speed.

“I think I’m okay without some action for a while,” Sulpher commented as we disappeared from the Singesongs’ sight, “I’ll take a little peace and quiet.”

## Chapter 10

“Woohoo!” I yelled as I zipped downwards, picking up speed, “This is the best!”

I was testing the new zip line that Sulpher and I had installed to her tree house. The one I was on tapered out near the base of the mountain, but I wanted something a bit more exciting, so I had convinced Sulpher to help me put in another one that was right next to the main one.

At just the right moment, I pulled my body up, and while still in “flight,” I jumped off the current line and landed my zip line pulley onto the wire next to it. The zipline first appeared to follow the one I was just on, but instead of tapering out when it reached the bottom of the hill, it went back up, and that’s where it abruptly stopped.

“Alright Powder!” I yelled out to him wherever he was, “Here I go.”

After quickly judging my speed, I swung my legs forward and gave myself a bit more speed as I launched into the air. I performed a double somersault; then plunged downward again, but Powder flew up from under me, and I aced a landing onto his back.

“YES!” Sulpher cheered from way up above me. By having a pulley that didn’t stay connected to the line and having a dragon made zip-lining so much more fun, because you didn’t need to walk back up the mountain to do it again. You just took a one minute ride.

“It’s definitely my turn,” Sulpher insisted when Powder and I flew back up.

She grabbed the zipline runner and jumped onto the wire.

“Let’s go get her!” I told Powder as we jumped back into the air and dove after her. Being just as adventurous as I was, Sulpher changed zip lines halfway down as well and launched off the end even faster than I did. I nudged Powder to the left, and we gracefully caught her at the top of her flight.

“That was awesome!” Sulpher laughed, wiping her brown hair from her face.

“You realize that all the other kids are going to want to use it?” I reminded Sulpher.

“Sure, let ‘em at it,” Sulpher replied, “It’ll take them at least fifteen minutes to reach the top again anyway.”

We swooped down into the village and quickly ran inside to get our dinner.

“You’re late,” Mom and Minden both told us.

“Sorry!” I replied defensively, “Pardon me for enjoying my stay here!”

Snotlout chuckled and said, “No worries, your Moms are just being moms.”

Sulpher and I quickly pulled up a chair and dug into our lamb chops, while Dagur (who was addressing all of us) called up a Berserker scout.

“What did you find?” he asked the scout.

“Well, as you know, the War Lords and two warring dragon flying groups clashed in a major battle three days ago,” the scout began, “I was sent out after the first day, and I arrived early in the morning on the second.”

“Yeah, I know,” Dagur replied impatiently, “What did you see?!”

“Oh, yes,” the scout answered quickly, “Well, the one group of Singesongs, as they’re called, were already gone by the time I arrived, but the War Lord goons and the group of Monstrous Gronckles were still battling it out. However, I noticed that the lava from the mountain and the ash was starting to get heavy and was literally spewing everywhere. By the time the lava

reached where our main village used to be on the morning of today, the group of dragons riders was really small, and what was left of the War Lords' ships were hastily preparing to leave. When I left at about 10ish, everyone was gone and the lava had pretty much covered the island, *and* it was almost too dark to see anything."

"That's a lot of 'ands'," Dagur commented.

"Hey, if you don't believe me, just looked at the small, black cloud on the horizon," the scout defended himself.

When the scout finished, Atali walked onto the main stage.

"I realize this is hard for you," Atali told us all, "But you're welcome to stay for as long as you want."

"Thanks!" Mala answered, coming up onto the stage as well, "You've been very gracious towards us."

"Let this sword represent our friendship for the many years to come," Atali declared, walking over to the fireplace and gently resting the sword on some hooks that had been nailed into the wall.

The whole hall of people rose and clapped at this; then sat back down because the lamb chops were getting cold, and everyone liked them.

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"Alright, well I'll see you tomorrow," I told Sulpher as Powder and I dropped her off at her house that night, "Uncle wants help putting together another meeting hall."

"Well, Dad wants help pouring the foundation for another, larger combat arena," Sulpher replied, "But I'll see what I can do."

Then an explosion erupted from her room.

"What?!" Sulpher practically screamed as we ran into her room. Her table was completely burnt, and our bed was on fire.

"I'll get a bucket of water!" I told her, running to the kitchen and quickly filling a bucket with water. By the time I got back, Sulpher had stamped out the fire near her closet, and I extinguished the flames on her bed.

"What could have I caused this?" I asked.

"I'm pretty sure it has to do with that adorable baby dragon," Sulpher replied, pointing to a little baby dragon that was sitting on the floor looking at all of us.

"Certainly looks like a Deadly Nadder and Scuttleclaw hybrid," I remarked, bending down to get a closer look.

"Squak!" it squeaked when I got closer.

"Hey!" I told it, "I'm Kaizar."

"And I'm Sulpher," Sulpher said while pushing me out of the way. Sulpher slowly put two of her fingers on the dragon's head, and it immediately reached its head up. It flapped its little wings and stood up wobbly.

"Growl!" Powder said, bending down.

"Squawk!" the baby dragon said again, jumping over to him.

"I'm going to name her Amber," Sulpher told me.

"Welcome to Wing Maiden Island," I told Amber, "A place where you literally never know what's going to happen next."

## **Character Relations:**

Hiccup (Horrendous Haddock The Third):

Married to: Astrid

Children: Nuffink and Zephyr

Weapon: Inferno (without fire)

Astrid (Haddock):

Married to Hiccup

Children: Nuffink and Zephyr

Weapon: Double bladed axe

Nuffink (Haddock):

Child of: Hiccup and Astrid

Sibling of: Zephyr

Weapon: Viggo's Inferno (without fire)

Zephyr (Haddock):

Child of: Hiccup and Astrid

Sibling of: Nuffink

Weapon: Single bladed axe

Snotlout (Jorgenson):

Married to: Minden

Children: Sulpher

Weapon: Stone hammer

Minden (Jorgenson):

Married to: Snotlout

Children: Sulpher

Weapon: Sword

Sulpher (Jorgenson):

Child of: Snotlout and Minden

Sibling of: None

Weapon: Metal hammer

Fishlegs (Ingerman):

Married to: Heather

Children: Kaizar

Weapon: None

Heather (Ingerman):

Married to Fishlegs

Children: Kaizar

Weapon: Extendable axe with blade at each end

Kaizar (The Sneak Ingerman):

Child of: Fishlegs and Heather

Sibling of: None

Weapons: Odin's Storm and Hiccup's Old Shield

Dagur (The Deranged):

Married to: Mala

Children: Magur

Weapon: Chieftain's axe

Mala (The Defender):

Married to: Dagur

Children: Magur

Weapon: Long curved sword

Magur (The Deliberate):

Child of : Dagur and Mala

Sibling: None

Weapon: Double blade axe

Tuffnut (Thorston):

Married to: Tala

Children: Puffnut

Weapon: Mace (named Macy)

Puffnut (Thorston):

Child of: Tuffnut and Tala

Sibling: None

Weapon: Mace

Ruffnut (Thorston):

Married to: Eret son of Eret

Children: Nuffnut

Weapon: Mace

Eret (Son of Eret):

Married to: Ruffnut

Children: Nuffnut

Weapon: Broadsword

Nuffnut (Daughter of Eret):

Child of: Ruffnut and Eret son of Eret

Sibling: None

Weapon: Mace

Lemmrig (The Wrathful):

Child of: Grimmel and Liner

Sibling: None

Weapon: Crossbow

Ogard (Bludvist):

Child of: Drago and Dinah

Sibling: None

Weapon: Metal reinforced, wooden stick

Kroquette (The Swift):

Child of: Krogan and Kliah

Sibling: None

Weapon: Power axe