

How To Train A Speed Stinger



By Kaiser Slocum

**This book is dedicated
in memory of Rod Metzger**

How To Train A Speed Stinger, First Edition, revised and updated. Version 2.9: Plot Finished
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Chapter 1: Challenge

"You little nitwit!" the older warrior hissed in my face, "You think you have what it takes to get through this mountain?! Well you don't, you won't, and you can't. I guess I'll make your suffering shorter, by 'borrowing' your food. You won't mind will you?"

I shook my head quickly, signaling I didn't want any trouble and wouldn't give him any if he took my food.

"In fact," continued the warrior after ripping my food pouch off my back, "what if you had a little accident and never came out of the mountain!"

This statement worried me considerably, and I think my eyes got a little larger.

"What if a freak accident happened," he continued as he munched on my yak stick, "and you fell off a cliff, and I was there to see it and tried to help but you pushed me away. That'd be really – Hey!"

I took the opportunity while he was distracted with wolfing down my food to squirm away and run off. Although I was running as fast as I could, spurred on by the danger behind me, it was still not enough, and he quickly caught up. When I heard his breathing, I whipped out my Odin's Storm from my back, back flipped over him, and swung at him. This move caught the older warrior by surprise, but he dodged out of the way and pulled out his own sword. Unfortunately for him, he put too much effort into swinging the sword in an arc toward my neck. This allowed me to parry and deftly twist the sword away when it was caught between the Odin Storm's "tongs." As I swung the sword behind me, I looked him straight in the eyes.

"Now who's the wimp?" I challenged. The warrior started backing up, fear showing in his eyes.

"Kockler, Johannen!" he screamed, "I could use some help!"

From somewhere else in the vast caverns under Bewilderbeast Mountain, my sensitive ears picked up on the sound of running feet. Things were about to get just that much harder.

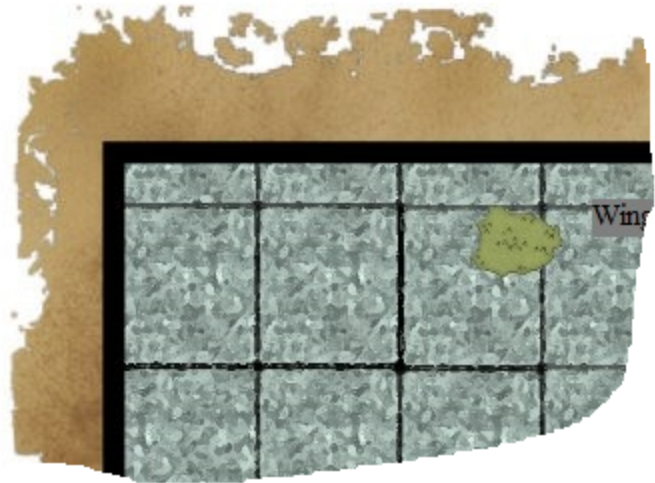
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The circle of children around me quickly yelled in protest.

"What happened next?" a boy with short brown hair eagerly asked – his eyes as round as saucers.

"Ha, well, things just kept getting worse!" I stated - keeping up the suspense.

"But you are so amazing, and the other Berserkers were supposed to be your friends!" another tall girl spoke up.





"I know, but I was young then; and not as strong. Plus, I didn't expect to have to protect myself from other warriors."

"What happened next?!" the teacher prodded, interested in my story as well.

Well, I knew there wasn't a lot of time before the other warriors arrived, so I raced forward – pressing the warrior in front of me into a panicked run. He continued down the main trail, but I took the left fork. Running like crazy, I took a left, then a right. Eventually, I reached a narrow ledge that jutted several hundred feet above the ground. A single pebble, dislodged by my foot, tumbled over the edge - I never heard it hit the ground. Pushing myself against the cave's wall, I inched my way around the ledge until I reached another tunnel. Then, I kept on running – not bothering to keep track of where I was anymore. If I couldn't get out alive anyway, there was no point in keeping track of the right path out of this stupid mountain. Just when I thought that I had lost them, a creepy, dry voice echoed through the tunnel.

"Well, well, well, here you are little one!"

I spun around to see another, more crazed-looking warrior advancing on me - his torch eerily reflecting our shadows off the walls of the tunnel. He advanced on me slowing with his axe poised over his head - looking for the kill.

With a yelp, I turned back around and lunged forward into the darkness – but forgot that there was only a skinny ledge. My feet teetered on the edge of the ledge as I quickly back tracked, but the warrior blocked my way and swung his axe straight at my head.

I was able to dodge out of the way, but doing so caused me to lose my balance - I plunged over the edge of the cliff.

I jammed my Odin's Storm into where I thought the cliff wall was (though I wasn't sure since it was pitch black) and held on. Amazingly, my weapon met rock, and my freefall came to an abrupt stop with my arms feeling like they were being yanked out of their sockets. After the crashing of rocks and boulders ceased, I listened for the crunch of footsteps up above - almost too faint to be heard but noticeable nonetheless. The footsteps became quieter and quieter as he sauntered off, undoubtedly thinking that I had plunged to my death. Pressing myself against the cliff's wall, I tried to find a foot hold – but I couldn't see anything and my legs couldn't find anything supportive.

Then, I had an idea. Being careful to remain pressed against the wall, I pushed up on the handle of my Odin's so that its points worked towards the wall. Then, in a quick motion, I pulled it straight out and jammed the left point as far as I could into the wall. This simple process worked – though it slammed me face first into the wall (since my hands were occupied with my weapon). Amazingly, my weapon held, but, unfortunately, my face didn't.

I had designed my weapon myself – it was like an axe, but without any middle section and the outside stems arced in a shallow parabolic pattern. I was impressed that my weapon was helping me through all of these scrapes I was continually finding myself in. Carefully, I maneuvered the Odin's Storm and jammed the right point into the wall – then the left – then the right – and so on. This was incredibly time consuming and also costly in terms of arm strength (for every turn, I only moved down about another foot). I had no way of knowing how close I was to some resemblance of floor, but I honestly didn't care. I was going to give whatever strength I had before I plummeted to my death. After what felt like forever, I was having



significant trouble rotating the Odin's Storm in the wall, and after even longer, my grip strength was starting to significantly fail. Thus, I put into action my backup plan.

I used a little more strength to rotate the Odin's Storm a complete 360 degrees and dug out a nice sized chunk of rock which fell into my open mouth. Then, I spit it out and started counting how long it took to hit the ground. To my surprise, it hit the ground in only about one second, and I could also hear it bounce along the ground as well. With this encouragement, I coaxed my arms and hands into giving me just a little more effort and continued down the cliff until my grip failed altogether. I fell for a little; then my feet met the ground. I bent my knees until they met my face, but it wasn't enough. I collapsed onto the ground with a loud snap and a searing pain in my left knee, besides the pain in my face. I groped around for my weapon and slung it back onto my back, then started hobbling on my right leg. At this point, I was in serious pain, and my face really hurt after the face plant.

I quickly realized that I wasn't going to get anywhere unless I came up with a plan of action on how to get out of the mountain; so I stopped and listened.

To my left, I heard a faint noise, and I recognized it as the sound of running water. It appeared to be coming somewhere to my left, so I crawled and limped onward. After a while, my hands ran into a solid wall of rock, but the sound of rushing water still sounded like it was coming from the left. I slowly, painfully crawled forward through what felt like a U-turn.

When I ran into a wall again, I realized that there was light seeping into the cave— quite a lot of it actually. With excitement seeping through my tired body, I hobbled toward the light and found myself in a room filled with ice. Great icicles hung from the ceiling and emerged from the floor - some of which must have been several meters thick. As I continued through the cave and towards the source of light, I saw my reflection in the ice - my face, arms, and legs were all dirty, scraped, and coated with blood. Suddenly, my reflection was disturbed. The icicle that I was currently passing had an intriguing rupture in its purity. Near the base of it was an egg-like object that looked sort of like a beach shell. Its swirly pattern captivated me. So, instead of worrying about my life, I decided to take the shell with me. I figured that I would show it to my dad, Fishlegs, who was always very interested in sea and animal life. After I hurriedly hacked it out of the icicle - rubbing my already damaged hands raw, I continued hobbling onward. At the end of the massive cavern, I came upon an opening to the outside in which I could see some trees and flowers. Slowly, I made my way outside and realized that I was about halfway down the mountain – I could even see some of the defense lookout towers and a catapult or two down below me. The descent down the rest of the mountain was ludicrously hard – even for a fit kid like me (did I forget to mention I was only 10?). The last thing I remembered was approaching a catapult way up on the top of a steep, grassy slope – then I must have passed out.

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I woke up in my house with my mother ("Heather" as she was affectionately called by my dad) looking down at me.

"Hey Mom," I groaned.

"Oh, Kaizar! I'm so glad you are okay. You made it through the mountain faster than any warrior ever has – but what happened to you? You look like you were attacked by a wolf! Your left leg was even broken!"



“It’s a long story,” I replied through gritted teeth, because my leg was really hurting. Then, I remembered my seashell.

“Mom, was I found with a funny-shaped seashell?” I asked.

“Why yes, you were. I put it over there on your desk,” she replied – pointing over to my wooden desk, where, indeed, it was partially wrapped in thick cloth lying in a box.

“It is very intricate, so I wrapped it up to keep it from getting damaged. You go back to sleep now, Auntie Mala set your leg, so it will be healing I think.”

“Thanks Mom,” I replied – then fell back to sleep.

It was about the middle of the night when I awoke again. I was awakened because there was a funny and disturbing noise coming from my desk. I carefully pulled off my covers and inspected my left leg. Indeed, there was a large, crudely shaped cast over it, but it wasn’t hurting much anymore so I gingerly lifted it off the bed and set it down on the floor. Then, I grabbed a nearby stick (using it like an improvised crutch) and slowly made my way to my desk where my parents had lit a small torch for me. On my desk, the white cloth housing the seashell was shaking rapidly. I carefully pulled the cloth off the shell and found that the shell was shaking very violently, and it felt quite warm – almost burning (thus I quickly set it back down again). Then, it exploded!

The top part of the shell sailed off and punched a nice hole through the ceiling of my room, while another part launched horizontally and slammed into a picture of a Razorwhip that my mother had made – leaving a nasty scorch mark. The third fragment of shell flew out my door. I was wondering where it had landed when I heard a yell from my parents’ room – Dad! Before I could check on him though, there was a funny “squawk!” and I quickly looked down with amazement – because there before me was an animal that I had never seen before. It had two powerful legs, a long mouth and a nice, slender tail with a spike on the end of it.

I stared at the funny creature lying on the length of cloth in front of me... and it stared up at me. Then, Dad stumbled in.

No offense to him, but he has an ample frame and when he is stumbling around in the dark, it is nothing short of a maelstrom. Anyway, he barges into my room.

“Kaizar! What are you doing! You’re supposed to be in – “

“GRRROWL!

The little creature in front of me stood up shakily and gave a funny, squeaky growl at Dad. Dad in turn let out a scream and fell over – squashing my mini model of a Bewilderbeast that Uncle Dagur had made for me on my fifth birthday into a million pieces.

“SPEEDSTINGER!” he yelled.

“Shing!”

From outside my room, I heard the tell-tale sign of my mom extending her collapsible, double-bladed axe.

She vaulted into the room expertly, but tripped over Dad and ran into the wall.

“Oof!” Dad said.

“Grrrr” said the creature in front of me.

Mom quickly caught her balance and moved closer to inspect the small creature in front of me.

When she saw the broken piece of shell on the ground below the dragon painting, understanding dawned upon her.



“Wait a minute! That wasn’t a seashell; that was a speedstinger egg!” she exclaimed.

At this point, Dad managed to stand up and pointed his beefy finger at me.

“What are you doing with a baby speed stinger?” he exclaimed. Before I could answer, the baby stinger raced forward, leaped off the table, flew directly over Dad’s right arm while stabbing him, and hit the floor in a defensive stance – growling.

“OWE!” Dad wailed – then reached for the torch on the wall, but - funny enough - his arm had straightened out and his hand didn’t work. Instead, he just slammed his hand into the door. I flinched.

“Umm, what should I do?” I asked Mom.

“Could you try calling it off?” she asked.

“How exactly do I call off a ‘speedstinger’?” I asked.

“Just talk to it like you would a yak,” she said.

“Stop, you beast!” I roared in my best you-better-behave-yak voice. Immediately the speed stinger, backed up to me, but didn’t let down his tail which he was waving menacingly in the air.

“What do I do now?” I asked Mom.

“Reach your hand out towards it slowly,” Dad finally chimed in once he had regained his balance. I reached my hand out toward it warily – not wanting to suffer the same paralyzing effect that Dad had experienced. The baby speedstinger turned towards me, but instead of attacking me, it came forward and put its head up to my hand and closed its eyes.

“Awe, I never have gotten tired of that sight,” commented Dad.



Chapter 2: Shock

“That was the beginning of how I met Slizer!” I told the group of kids as I patted Slizer on his head, “We’re best friends now!” Slizer nodded in turn.

“Sooo... your parents let you keep him, and everything has worked out wonderfully!” exclaimed a little girl in the back of the crowd.

“Actually,” I continued, this time very seriously, “Fishlegs, my dad, told me that there is an island where he should go. A place called ‘The Hidden World’!”

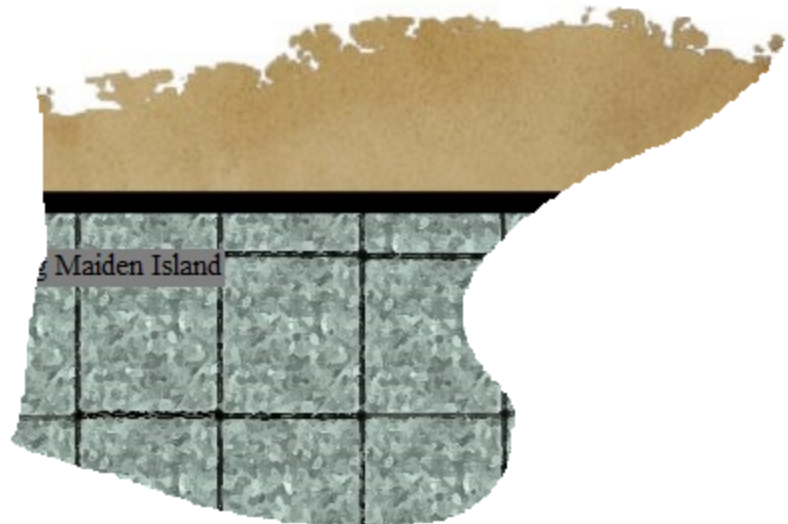
“Why does he need to go there?” another girl with an oversized, spiked, metal helmet asked.

“Because it isn’t safe here in the human world,” I replied, “Some humans don’t like dragons and want to hurt them. The best way we can protect them is keeping them safe in a place where no one can find them.”

“But no one knows where ‘The Hidden World’ is, so you can keep him... right?” asked another boy with a nasty black eye.

“Thankfully, yes. However, I hope one day I will be able to return him to his rightful home – wherever ‘The Hidden World’ is. In the meantime.....who wants a ride on Slizer?” I asked. Every hand shot straight up into the air – they all wanted a ride on the only dragon in the known archipelago.

Slizer kindly gave a few rides to some of the kids, but we had to leave eventually – because I had to get to *my* training. Today, I was going to face my uncle Dagur in a hand-to-hand combat duel. Dagur was one of the strongest warriors on the island and also the chief of the Berserkers *and* King of the Defenders of the Wing since he married the Queen of the Defenders of the Wing – Mala. When all the dragons left the known world many years ago, the Defenders of the Wing tribe’s island was overrun with lava from the local volcano since their Eruptodon was not there to eat it; thus, they had all moved to Berserker Island. Now, the Berserker Tribe was a very large and prosperous tribe of many great warriors and with a rich heritage. Because of the fact that the island was inhabited by the native tribe of Berserkers and the tribe of the Defenders of the Wing, Dagur was called anything from chief, to king, to uncle (as was my case!) Actually, I had never beaten him before in a duel, but then again, the last time I fought him was at a Dreadfall event three years ago, and it ended in me getting a broken leg. As I was at the top of my class, I was given the “honor” of fighting him in a mock duel. Mock





duels were the most popular form of sport and entertainment on the island, and, although many were wounded in these duels, everyone loved them.

When I arrived at the training “Doom Dome” as we students called it, one of our teachers, Klagar The Saldic, was giving last minute tips to a few freshmen students battling it out in the main arena. I watched for a while; then sauntered off to talk with some fellow seniors. This was my last year at Warrior Training Camp. Afterwards, I would be officially accepted into the “Berserk Guard” as they were known, since I had already completed the commencement trials which were to make my way through Bewilderbeast Mountain (which I had completed when I was ten years old and done several more times afterward. I still held the record for the quickest time because of that crazy adventure when I was ten). Some of my fellow trainees were talking about their upcoming trip through Bewilderbeast Mountain.

“Got any tips for us, Kaizar” asked Suly The Tough.

“Don’t die?” I responded. Everyone laughed, and someone slapped me really hard on the back – it was Dagur.

“Love your sense of humor, Kai-nephew,” Dagur told me, “Ready to get creamed?”

“I’d ask you the same question, Dag-dude!” I replied.

“I HATE nicknames!” Dagur roared at me.

Klagar came up behind him, “Chief, save the words for the ring – you’re up!”

Dagur laughed his quirky, maniac laugh and marched off to the ring – Slizer and I following.

“Sorry kid, no dragon!” Klagar told me. Then he winked, “Slizer is already the reigning champ – you gotta give your uncle a chance!”

“Alright!” I laughed. When Slizer had turned two years old, he had started participating in the daily fights in the town square and had not lost a single battle – he was just too fast and strong. No one could remember his current winning streak – it was way too long. Interestingly enough, I had never fought Slizer because he never would fight me – I guess he was just too loyal to me.

When the horn blew, I lined up on one side of the ring – Dagur on the other. Then, the horn blew again, and we pulled out our weapons – Dagur had his favorite chieftain’s axe, and I had my Odin’s Storm. I invented it myself with some help from Dad and Mom. Many people had tried to make one for themselves, but they never were very successful – mostly because no one was really interested in making weapons. They just wanted to use the weapons. The horn blew again.

When Dagur was about five meters from me, he surprised me by slinging his axe at me. I caught it just in time with my Odin’s Storm and hurled it away behind me. Then, I charged him. I did several preliminary cuts, and a few chops – but Dagur is a master at dodging and easily evaded my swings. I then decided on a new tactic – I let him go retrieve his axe. The crowd encircling the arena roared with displeasure as I stepped aside, but I had a reason for this move, and I hoped it would pay off. Dagur deftly ran by, snatched up his axe, and turned to face me. Then, I roared with excitement and bore down on him – though I slowed down at the last minute so I couldn’t be caught off balance.

Dagur, not expecting me to slow down, parried with where he thought my weapon was going to be – however it was not there. Thus, his axe was where I wanted it to be; I thrust my weapon so its two tongs slipped under the outstretched blades of his axe then twisted and yanked. Much to Dagur’s surprise, his axe was pulled straight out of his hands and flung into the air; it



flew behind me and crashed into the chain link providing the dome part of the “Doom dome.” Some of the spectators ducked as the axe sliced into the chain link. While Dagur was recovering from this shock and my Odin’s Storm was behind me (since I had yanked it backward) I thrust my foot forward and slammed it into his torso. Dagur was then smashed up against the wall. With that, I lunged forward and thrust my Odin’s Storm straight around his neck – thus he was caught up against the wall and couldn’t dodge. However, Dagur flattened to the ground and slipped his head through my weapon, then kicked up at me – hitting me square in the chin. I stumbled back while the crowd yelled. Dagur turned around to pull my weapon out of the wall and use it as his weapon, but I was too quick and wrapped my hands around his waist. Then, I slung him around and forced him to the ground. However, Dagur just rolled around and crushed me under his weight – but I pulled my knee up and hit him square in the stomach. By now, the crowd was pure chaos as everyone cheered for their prospective warrior (I could hear Slizer’s distinctive roar throughout the noise though – and that gave me encouragement) I thrust my hands forward and around his neck – just as Dagur did the same to me. However, we didn’t strangle each other because Berserker law declared the fight to be a draw. Dagur got off me and we both stood up and bowed, then shook hands.

“Nice fight, Uncle” I replied, “You still have some good tricks up your sleeve, old man.”

“Oh, come on!” Dagur grumbled, but he gave me a playful slap on the back.

“We’ll fight again, that’s for sure, Kai-dough!” he shot back.

I mumbled to myself but followed Dagur out of the arena and up into the crowd. We were instantly torn about as people clamored to shake our hands and congratulate us. I shook a few hands, but I wanted to go meet up with my friend, Lemmirg, so I climbed on Slizer’s back, and he forced his way through the crowd. Slizer was always very menacing-looking, and the crowd quickly parted for us. With a mighty jump, Slizer flew off the stands, landing on the ground expertly; then took off toward my friend’s house.

My friend was named Lemmirg and had arrived a few years earlier. He and his mom were found in an old rowboat a few miles off our coast. Supposedly, their island had been attacked by the War Lords from the North, and they had barely escaped. Since then, we had become great friends. Lemmirg was an expert with a crossbow, which was interesting because very few people on the island used bows and arrows.

“Hey! I like the saddle!” Lemmirg told me when I rode up.

“Yep, it is so much more comfortable for me *and* him then riding bareback!” I replied. Slizer agreed with a complimentary growl.

“Doing anything tomorrow?” Lemmirg then asked as the wind blew his head of white-blonde hair about.

“Not much, I’m getting ready to trek up the mountain to wish the new challengers luck!” I replied.

“Oh! That’s today? I’ll go too.”

I hopped off Slizer and started up the hill with Lemmirg. Lemmirg’s house was on the outskirts of town since he was non-native to the Berserker and Defenders of the Wing tribes, so I could see the line of people that were already making their way up the steep mountain path.

“What have you been up to?” I asked Lemmirg, knowing that he wasn’t allowed to participate in warrior training.



"Oh, you know. Practicing my aim, helping my mom with the garden, sewing together a new suit of armor - the usual," Lemmirg told me.

"Don't you ever get tired of your schedule? I mean, it seems kind of boring," I commented.

"Well, I guess; but it's a whole lot more calm than having to defend my village from attacks every week or so!"

"Ha, very true!"

"However, I do get plenty of time to run - so...beat you to the top!" Lemmirg yelled to me as he capitalized on his head start.

"Nice try Lemmirg; but you're never going to beat Slizer!" I yelled back up to him. I quickly started off after Lemmirg with Slizer gaining ground at a remarkable speed. Within a half minute, I could see Slizer passing up some of the other people way up ahead. I ran in short strides so that I conserved my energy up the steep incline. I was concentrating so hard on my breathing and running technique that I plowed into some warriors and their parents at the back of the line about halfway up the mountain.

Wow! I guess I must be a faster runner than I thought!

"Kaizar! Over here!" yelled a familiar voice. It was Queen Mala. She was calling to me from the top of the watch tower that the majority of the people were standing around. Confused, as to why everyone was crowded around one of the many watch towers around the island, I pushed my way through the people and entered the watchtower - after confirming my identity with a tough Berserk Guard who was standing nearby. Then, I climbed the steps and made my way to the top of the tower. On top was Mala, Dagur, my mom, and a few other important Berserker elders who were all supposed to be at the top entrance to Bewilderbeast Mountain, but were all staring intently to the North.

"Take this," Mala told me and handed me a small telescope device. With many questions bouncing around in my head, I put the telescope to my eye and looked in the direction that everyone was gazing in. In the distance were three boats all flying the War Lords' flags.



Chapter 3: Ultimatum

Then, there began a stampede down the mountain to meet the ships. Mala made the decision to sound the warning horn. In all my years, the warning horn had only ever been sounded twice, both of which were to warn of incoming maelstroms. Since this was a warrior-oriented island, everyone (even the smallest children) was assigned a job depending on the type and intensity of the threat.



“Heoor, Heoor, Heoor!” The horn in this watchtower was sounded and quickly picked up by the guards manning the rest of the watchtowers. Soon, horns were sounding all over the entire island – nearly deafening me. Those who were not already making their way back down the mountain quickly scattered – some ran to their respective beaches while others took off to load their catapults, and others raced to town to roll out the temporary defense walls.

“Kaizar, I wouldn’t normally ask for this favor, but I need a quick ride; can I borrow Slizer?” Mala asked me.

“Of course,” I replied. Though this could be construed as an emergency, I was shocked that Mala would want to ride a dragon (I had heard from my parents that Mala was not very enthusiastic about riding dragons – she honored them too much). Mala and I, along with the other tribe elders, almost flew down the staircase and barged through the tiny door way (some of us almost fell and two elders got jammed in the doorway behind me). Outside, Slizer was waiting patiently – looking a bit confused about all the commotion. Mala grabbed onto Slizer’s saddle, swung up onto him with a quick motion, and shook his short reigns.

“Hurry!” I shouted to Slizer just as he started to shake her off (as he did to anyone who tried to ride him who wasn’t supposed to). Slizer took off down the hill at an even faster pace now that he had a crazed female on his back and was going downhill. I quickly lost track of him. As this was only a level two emergency, my station was in the town as a hand-to-hand combat fighter, so I began my descent down the hill. I had just about caught up with Lemmirg when I realized that I still had Mala’s hand-held telescope; so, when I reached a somewhat level field, I looked through it at the War Lord ships again. Now that they were closer, I could see that there were really only three of them, and they were not loaded with men either. Even more surprising was that each ship was flying a white flag!

“Lemmirg,” I said when I caught up with him, “Those are the only ships out there, and they are all flying white flags!”

“I don’t care if they are surrendering. I want to teach them a lesson or two!” exclaimed Lemmirg.



“Just because some of them destroyed your village, doesn’t mean you should hurt them to get revenge,” I reasoned.

“Where would we be if no one revenged! I must avenge my village!” Lemming shot back. I just shook my head. By now, we had reached the main village, so I scurried towards the western side behind a high, portable “Gronckle-iron” gate (I guess some dragons named “Gronckles” had made the lightweight iron we Berserkers coveted. The normal iron was much more heavy and brittle). When I reached my station, Slizer was already there with a few other warriors. One of them, a trainee I recognized from the freshman class of this year had a message for me.

“Queen Mala says that you need to hide Slizer,” he told me matter-of-factly.

“Slizer, go hide in Bewilderbeast Mountain,” I commanded while pointing towards the mountain. Slizer nodded his head; then took off.

“She’s right. We don’t want to take any chance with the War Lords figuring out that we have an honest-to-goodness dragon,” I commented to the group.

“It really is too bad that they have to take advantage of dragons,” an older warrior beside me spoke up, “They are such magnificent creatures!”

“What was your experience with them?” the trainee asked.

“I lived with the Berserker tribe and for twenty years I saw and trained with dragons. Mine was a Thunderdrum that I called ‘Blaster’,” continued the older warrior, “He was a magnificent beast; but, like all the rest, he had to leave with the rest. Even ‘Sleuther,’ Dagur’s renowned Triple Strike, had to leave. I’ve never seen Dagur cry except for when Sleuther left.”

By this time, I assumed the boats had reached the dock and that Mala, Dagur, and the island’s best fighters would be there to greet them. The tribes’ boats were mainly kept on the eastern part of the island, but a few were kept at the front docks. Part of the defense mechanism included manning all available ships. I guess Mala was the defense coordinator and that Dagur was the attack coordinator – though he never was needed because we never attacked anyone!

“So, why did you get chosen for this position?” I asked the young trainee.

“I’m a knife expert,” he replied proudly, “When it comes to very close combat, I guess they thought I’d be a good fit.”

“What kind of knives do you prefer?” I asked.

“Well, the three pronged-,” he began, but was caught off by the sound of running feet and a Berserk Guard barreling towards us.

“Kaizar,” he wheezed, “Mala needs you.”

“Me?!” I exclaimed.

“Yeah, you!” The Berserk Guard grabbed me by the arm and took off back towards the docks. The docks were actually a good half mile from the main village, so it took about three minutes to actually reach them; then another minute to get on board the first War Lord Warship that was docked there.

On board were several Berserker elders, a few Berserk soldiers, and a whole collection of War Lord Goons who were grouped around a rather imposing general who stood several feet tall. They were all talking rather quietly until I climbed aboard in which Dagur spoke to me.

“Kaizar!” Dagur turned to me, “This man here says you have a dragon!”



This completely caught me off guard, especially when Dagur gave me several quick, slight winks. I jumped a little bit at first, confused as to what was going on, but suspected what I needed to do. I quickly feigned innocence.

“WHAT!?” I said in my most surprised voice, “That’s preposterous! Dragons left more than a decade ago. Why would I have one! They EAT people!”

“Don’t mock me,” replied the thick brute of a general next to Dagur. Once again, I noticed how tall he was in contrast to the rest of my tribes’ people, and he had a colossal sword on his back. “My job is not to see if you’re a liar, but to tell you that if you don’t hand over your dragon by the end of next week, then we’re going to wipe your tribe off the face of this earth!”

“Surely you have the wrong man,” I quickly replied, “You’re looking for Kaizar Ingerman?”

“Yes, Kaizar THE SNEAK Ingerman.” This startled me even more than his first comment, because only my closest friends and family knew my middle name. The fact that the general had somehow heard of it frightened me a little.

“How do you know my full name?”

“Well, that’s simple. There are spies in your midst, and they told my commander everything I tell you now. I’ve already given you your final offer. Either you take the dragon to our scout island, or you let me do it. But whatever you do, you had better get it done soon or your tribe is going to die because of you!”

“Give the kid some slack!” Dagur replied angrily, “We don’t have it, so how can we give it! Your spy is wrong and just wants to pick a fight!”

“Uh, no. He’s not. Now if you don’t mind getting off my ship, I have an unfortunate message to give to my commander!” the general replied haughtily.

“You’re not going anywhere!” Dagur declared, while standing right in front of the man and gripping his axe tightly, “NONE of you are!”

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you!” the bigger guy threatened.

“Well, if your chiefs are going to attack anyway, we might as well make the attack three boats less! Whaddaya say?”

“I say – MOVE OUT GUYS!” the man yelled to his partners.

“Get ‘em all!” roared Dagur to the Berserk Guard soldiers on the dock and those standing around nearby.

Quickly, a bunch of excited warriors jumped onto the War Lords’ ships. They were battle-crazy (this being the first “real” fight in years). The big beefy guy charged Dagur, so I let him to it because I knew he wasn’t going to win. I, instead, followed Mala towards the back of the ship while the main Berserk guard dealt with the War Lord goons protecting their general. Up above (on the higher deck) were a few goons with the captain, so I dashed up the steps – directly behind another Berserk Guard. A goon stepped forward and knocked the Guard off balance at just the right moment after he had stepped onto the deck. The Guard tried to get his footing and defend himself, but another goon crept up behind and flipped him overboard into the water below. As unfortunate as this was, it also distracted the two goons, so I pulled out my Odin’s Storm and swung it hard at the closer goon’s helmet. With a resounding “clang” the soldier’s helmet caved in, and he collapsed to the ground. The other performed a chop at me, but I parried it with my Odin’s Storm and swung his axe sharply to the right; then I performed a quick kick with my leg at his chest armor. This, in turn, caused him to lose *his* balance. After that it



was a simple matter of knocking his axe away and tossing him overboard. I turned around to see how the other dozen fights were going. Dagur was still fighting the main general on the ship's deck, and Mala had just finished subduing the captain. The other Berserk Guards seemed to be having a bit more trouble, but more and more Berserkers were arriving by the moment and were quickly overwhelming their foes. I scurried down the ladder and advanced on the general (that Dagur was fighting) from behind. He was so busy trying to get a hit on Dagur, that he completely missed me all together. I brought my Odin's Storm down on his helmet so hard that he keeled over. Dagur looked up surprised; then grinned.

"Well, you struck again!" he replied just as Mala rushed by, "Pun intended."

"You guys," yelled Mala pointing to a pack of Berserker warriors standing nearby, "Take these War Lord boats to the main docks. The rest of you, make sure any prisoners are safely imprisoned in the main jail quarters." Then, Mala pointed to Dagur and I, "You guys come with me, we have to start strategizing for when the War Lords attack!" Dagur and I nodded our heads. We had come in contact with the War Lords before in small sea battles, and found that, although our men were slightly better at fighting, the War Lords definitely had the advantage of numbers. Thus, anyone on this island knew we were in for a brutal fight – one in which could easily not go our way (as the general had threatened us).

"Are we sure that the War Lords will attack? What if they're just calling our bluff?" I asked Mala. "That definitely is an option – considering that launching a full scale attack to capture one measly dragon seems a bit insane. However, I'm going to prepare for them anyway," Mala replied.

When we reached the town's square, Mala stood up on the main platform and yelled to everyone milling around (most of them were still confused as to what was happening).

"Alright guys!" Mala announced, "The War Lords are coming to attack us, so we have a lot to prepare for. We're going to need everyone working together to have a chance to pull this off. We're not ever going to surrender!" At this, the crowd cheered, excited at the prospect of revenging our long-time enemies.

"Also," Mala continued, "Better hug all your loved ones, because they may not be alive for very long." Then, the crowd of people suddenly became very silent.

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The next day at warrior training camp, Klagar had a message for all of us.

"I'm canceling all classes until further notice," Klagar announced, "As of now, I want all of you helping out your parents and the village in whatever way you can. If you're not busy, I want to see you here practicing your hand-to-hand combat techniques and crossbow skills, okay?" All of us trainees nodded our heads and began to disperse. Next to me Suly sighed, "I was going to participate in the trek through Bewilderbeast Mountain. Now, that's going to have to wait."

"Well, on the positive side, at least you won't die in there!" I told him.

"Hey, Kaizar! I'm going to work on my rock climbing skills. Do you want to come along?" Magur said, running up to me and Suly. Magur was my very ego-centered, training-possessed cousin and son of Dagur and Mala. As their child, Magur was pretty spoiled, so he was normally very annoying. However, I had to admit that he was an extremely good warrior.



Excited at the prospect of not being stuck in the village setting up defense walls, I eagerly agreed, "Sure! You want to come along Suly?"

"Why not?" he said. With Magur leading, we took a lesser used path that wove around to the right of Bewilderbeast mountain and led to the east docks.

"I found this awesome rock slide over here the other day, and I thought it would be a great way to tune my rock climbing skills!" Magur said, excited at the prospect of a grueling climb. Suly leaned in next to me and whispered quietly, "You know your cousin is a little crazy, right?"

Before I could answer, Magur spoke up while flexing his muscles, "I heard that Suly! You think you can take me on?"

"I'm good!" Suly replied quickly.

"Well, then; Race me to the top!" Magur said taking a sharp left and starting to scramble up the steep rock field. The branch in the path that Magur had taken led to a fairly steep incline – not actually a rock face. What was interesting about the incline was that it was several feet deep in chunks of rock which made it incredibly hard to get a good footing. As we watched, Magur almost slipped all the way back down.

"Here goes nothing!" I told Suly, starting on my way up. Seeing me going up the mountain, Slizer, who had been following the three of us, decided that he would do that too. Unfortunately, he couldn't do it. Despite having long claws and strong legs, Slizer couldn't get a very good grip because of the webbing between his claws.

"Owe!" Suly yelled as a small avalanche of rocks cascaded down from Magur and fell on Suly's face. Meanwhile, Slizer decided upon a different tactic. He backed up a few yards, then ran forwards at full speed. He hit the bottom of the incline super-fast and shot up the incline at an incredible speed. His pure speed allowed him to push on the rocks before they came loose - as was the problem for Suly, Magur, and I.

Magur, seeing himself getting beaten by Slizer, picked up his pace, and Suly and I followed suit. I scrambled around from side to side of the incline as I tried to find bigger rocks to push off. Meanwhile, way up ahead, Slizer was nearing the top of the incline to the small, grassy plateau above. But that's when he hit the loosest, smallest bits of rock. Before I even knew what was going on, Slizer slipped on some of the rock, lost his advantage of speed, and started rolling back down the hill.

"Watch out!" I yelled up to Magur as Slizer barreled towards him in a flurry of small rock chunks. "I'm not falling for that – oof!" Slizer slammed directly into Magur and caused them both to start bouncing down the hill.

"Ahhh!" screamed Suly, trying in vain to get away from the impending doom above us. I also tried to lunge out of the way, but my left foot slipped on a loose collection of rocks.

"Whump!" Soon, all four of us found ourselves sprawled out on the ground below in a chaotic pile of dragon, rock, and humanity.

"Why does every part of my body hurt so bad?" Suly asked sarcastically.

"Maybe because of your *stupid* dragon!" Magur yelled at me as he stood up.

"Hey! He can't help having webbing between his feet!" I groaned back, slowing pulling myself to my feet.

"Well, looks like his evolution process gave him a bunch of useless skin," Magur shot back.



“Evolution?! That’s not evolution, it’s called ‘adaptation’ dummy. Speed stingers ‘adapt’ to their climate and develop small changes that help them survive better in the wild.”

“Well then smarty, explain to me what that webbing is for!” As much as I wanted to come up with an answer, I literally had no idea why he had webbing between his feet. As far as I knew, it was completely useless.

“Ha! You don’t know, do you?” Magur laughed at me. Seeing me getting bullied, Slizer decided to step in. With a menacing growl and waving his sharp tail in the air, Slizer advanced upon Magur.

“Heh, heh. Hey there, Slizer. You wouldn’t hurt a friend would you? I mean -,” Magur started to say, but he wasn’t able to finish because Slizer stung him. All Magur could say before he seized up was, “Owe!”

“I guess we’re carrying him back to town,” I told Suly who was brushing the dirt off his clothing.

“Awe man. Can’t we just leave him here?”

“Nah, we can’t risk Dagur and Mala’s wrath,” I replied. With Suly carrying his feet and I carrying Magur’s torso, we made our way back down to the village and left him at his house.

“What happened to him?” Dagur gasped when he saw us carrying Magur in.

“He tussled with Slizer,” I replied matter-of-factly.

“You know better than that Magur! Are you crazy?! He’s a *speed stinger*!” Dagur yelled at the frozen form of Magur.

“We’ll be going now!” Suly said quickly, beating a hasty retreat.

“Well, Slizer,” I began as we were heading home, “What do you feel like eating tonight?”

Slizer didn’t seem to understand me, but he hurried up his pace – knowing that dinner was not far away.

While eating my fish that night, I asked Dad why speed stingers had webbing between their claws.

“Oh, that’s easy. Speed stingers used to be only able to travel over dry land, but eventually they adapted so that they could they could... travel across water,” Dad replied thoughtfully.

“Wait, they can run across water?!” I exclaimed in disbelief.

“Yes, yes they can!” Dad replied, slowly remembering what he knew about speed stingers.

“Why did you never tell me?!”

“I don’t know. I guess I kind of forgot about that part,” Dad replied.

“That is so cool! I have to try that out with Slizer tonight!”

“Well, wait a minute,” Mom interrupted, “We have to discuss about fortifying our house for the invasion.”

“You really think they’ll attack us?” Dad asked.

“I’m not sure, but I’m not willing to take the risks associated with not getting ready,” Mom replied.

“Well here’s what I think of it,” I told Mom, “If the War Lords do attack us, what is the chance that they will not make it into town?”

“Oh, I’d say a thirty percent chance,” Mom replied.

“Exactly! And would it be a good idea to leave them a ton of well protected houses to use while they invade us?” I asked.

“Duh, No!” Mom replied.



"Then why in the world should we go to all the work of beefing up our house if it is just going to get destroyed during the battle? And, if they don't attack, we just saved ourselves a whole lot of time!"

"Wow, that's good thinking," Dad replied, polishing off his plate of salmon and chicken.

"Then we should probably just box up all of our possessions and place them in the basement and seal it off to return to later," Mom told us.

"Great!" I replied, "You guys can do that while Slizer and I head to the beach." I quickly stood up from the table and headed for the door.

"Yeah, that's not happening," Dad told me, "You're helping too."

"Awe, really? Do I have to?"

"Not if you don't care to keep any of your stuff," Dad said.

"Fine, I'll help." Luckily, I had a speed stinger to help me, and Slizer was strong. What with my family having a massive basement (as all Berserker houses did), Slizer and I managed to drag down my bed and a few other important pieces of furniture that I liked in record time. Then, I borrowed a few wooden crates from my parents and packed them with some random papers, books, tools, and wooden dragon figurines.

"That's the last of my stuff," I told my parents while plopping a particularly heavy box on the floor of the now-crowded basement.

"Thanks, Kaizar," Mom told me as she pulled in a box that held her collection of battle axes,

"You can leave with Slizer now if you want."

"Cool!" I said, "Come on Slizer!" I raced for the door and waited for Slizer, but he didn't come.

"Come on Slizer!" I yelled up the stairs, "We can go!" Silence. Curious, I ran upstairs and into my room. Lying on the floor was Slizer who was whimpering softly.

"Slizer!" I exclaimed, bending down to check him out. He looked okay, and his heartbeat was normal, but yet he looked like he was in terrible agony.

"Mom, Dad, something is wrong with Slizer!" I yelled down to my parents.

As I watched, Slizer lied there, but kept slapping his tail on the floor.

"Is something wrong with your tail?" I asked Slizer quietly.

Slizer growled at this remark and jabbed his tail into the wall.

"Hey, careful!" I said (as his tail was very sharp). No sooner had I said this than I saw a small trickle of purple liquid drip down the wall. I carefully pulled Slizer's tail out of the wall, and the trickle of purple liquid dripped down the wall. When I noticed that the end of Slizer's tail (right before it turned into the spike part of his tail) was bulging more than normal, I had an idea. Just then, Dad and Mom ran into my room and gasped when they saw Slizer.

"What's wrong with him?" Mom asked me.

"Can you quickly get a small bucket with some thick leather spread over the top?" I asked her.

Mom nodded and ran back outside, but Dad stayed and noticed the purple liquid that had now drained onto the floor.

"What's this?" he asked me.

"I think it's Slizer's paralyzing acid. I'm guessing his body is making an abnormal amount of it, and it is causing him considerable pain. I'm hoping that I can drain it from his tail," I told Dad.

When Mom returned with the bucket, I set it on the floor and stabbed Slizer's tail into it repeatedly – squeezing it slightly every time. Slizer growled in pain at this, but didn't refuse my



help. Dad and Mom watched fascinated as I drained the acid from his tail. I knew that Slizer was only able to get rid of the venom when he stabbed something because of the anatomy of his tail spike, so the leather allowed the tail to drain some of the venom each time, and the bucket collected all of it, which I wanted to inspect later on.

Eventually, Slizer stopped whimpering and started to relax more. After another few minutes, his tail stopped bulging and began to look more normal.

"Look at all this acid!" I said, taking the shredded leather off the bucket. The bucket was almost full of the speed stinger venom and was all bright purple.

"Think of all the ways we could use this!" Dad exclaimed excitedly.

"I bet I could make a fortune off this," I replied, lugging it downstairs. After Mom helped pour the venom into a metal bucket in case the venom was corrosive, I ran back upstairs to check on Slizer. Although he was finally able to stand up, he was whimpering again. Sure enough, his tail was starting to bulge again.

"Mom!" I yelled down to her, "I need another bucket covered in leather!" This time, though, Slizer was able to stab the leather himself. By the time I finally got back to bed, Slizer's venom production had finally returned to its normal state, and I had at least two gallons of speed stinger venom.

"What could have caused this?" I asked Dad while I blew out the torch in my room.

"I'm guessing it was due to the combination of salmon, trout, and tuna he ate tonight," Dad guessed.

"Hmmm..."

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The next day, Slizer and I went to the town market to see if there was any interest in Speed Stinger venom. In one corner of the market, I noticed a collection of soldiers from the Berserk Guard.

"There he is!" Klagar said to a bunch of men that he was talking to, "Come on over Kaizar!"

"These are some friends of mine that are in the Berserk guard. They're looking for some younger men to join their ranks," Klagar continued.

"I would be very proud to!" I replied excitedly.

"What is your preferred weapon?" an older warrior asked me.

"This!" I said, pulling my Odin's Storm off my back and showing it to the man.

"Fascinating!" another said, looking it over.

"And what type of shield do you use?" the older warrior asked again.

"Shield?" I asked, puzzled, "I don't use them, they slow me down."

At this, the older warrior shook his head, "They may slow you down in one-on-one combat, but in real battle, you're going to need one to protect yourself."

"You had better go get one," Klagar told me sternly. This embarrassed me immensely; so I quickly turned around to leave.

"What's that in your hands?" another one of the men asked me before I could leave.

"Oh this?" I said lifting up the incredibly heavy bucket of Speed Stinger venom, "This is Speed Stinger venom."

"Let me see that," Klagar said, grabbing it from my hands and opening the top of the bucket,

"This just looks like purple liquid to me."



"Alright then," I retorted, still upset at getting embarrassed by him in front of the other, older warriors, "I dare you to take a quick sip of some of it!"

"Yeah, but it's probably dangerous, whatever it is," Klagar quickly replied.

"Well, if you don't think it's Speed Stinger venom, then what do you have to lose giving it a try?" one of the warriors spoke up.

"You swear it's not going to hurt me?" Klagar asked me.

"Nope, but you'll be frozen for a few hours," I replied. Klagar, laughed, cupped his hands into the bucket and took a big swig of the purple venom. I, however, grimaced slightly.

"Hmmm, rather tasteless," Klagar replied, licking his lips, "In fact, it almost tastes like...."

"What did you say?" I asked him. However, Klagar didn't respond. He was quickly turning pale and his arms and legs started seizing up. Within a few seconds, he went completely rigid and toppled over.

"Well, I guess you were right," the warriors laughed. One of them, however, was very intrigued with the venom.

"Hey, I have a very ornate and high-quality shield at my house that I'll trade you for this venom," he said.

"Let's take a look at it," I replied.

It turns out that the warrior's house wasn't very far away.

"I have it boxed here in this crate," the warrior said, pulling out a very dusty crate out of his basement, "I found it on the beach one morning a few years ago and liked it so much that I kept it. The problem is that it sometimes opens up and does weird things, so I found it a little unreliable." With that, the warrior pulled the shield out of the crate and handed it to me. It was very shiny and had a red dragon symbol painted on the front of it. I could tell it was made out of Gronckle Iron (due to it being abnormally light) and was carefully crafted at that.

"What do these levers do?" I asked the warrior pointing to several small levers near the handle on the back.

"I don't know," the warrior replied, disappearing back into his basement to put the crate away. Curious, I flicked one of them, and the shield instantly transformed into an awesome-looking crossbow. When I collapsed it back into the shield, I pulled another lever and a rope and grappling hook flew out of the front of the shield and wrapped around one of the house's beams. Then, it retracted and pulled me straight up into the air. I quickly found myself dangling from the ceiling. As the warrior continued talking about how he found the shield, I frantically flipped the same lever again. Fortunately, it was the correct one to flip. Unfortunately, I was not expecting it to release me quite so quickly. Before I knew what was happening, I dropped to the floor as the rope went slack. Then, the rope immediately rewound and disappeared within the shield.

"Well," the warrior said, coming out of the basement, "You like it?"

"You've got yourself a deal!"

I left the house without any Speed Stinger venom, but then again, I gained an awesome shield and I could always get more from Slizer.

"Alright Slizer," I told him as we jogged to the west beach, "Let's see if you can run on water!"

On the way, though, I couldn't help trying the rest of the levers on the back of the shield. I recognized the one that launched out a grappling hook as I had seen before, so I pulled another one next to it – not quite sure what to expect. Out of the shield flew a pair of bolas. The kick



back caused me to fall over backward, just as I realized the direction the bolas were flying in. Slizer just so happened to be in front of me, and the bolas caught him right in the legs. Immediately, Slizer pitched over and tumbled down the hill towards the beach.

"Wait up Slizer!" I yelled as I stood back up and raced after him. With a final thud, Slizer spring boarded off a long, flat chunk of rock and rocketed into a small sand dune. I winced.

When I finally reached him, Slizer had already bitten off the rope and was glaring at me angrily.

"Sorry!" I apologized, "this shield is really sensitive!" I shook it to prove my point, but then another pair of bolas shot out and nailed Slizer in the head. With a loud roar of pain, Slizer shook his head and charged me. I quickly hid behind the shield and Slizer smashed into it with a loud "Clang!" Looking dazed, he limped backward and passed out onto the sand.

"Man I love this shield!" I said

When Slizer came back to his senses, I offered him a nice, fat chicken leg from my lunch pouch; then, directed him to run into the ocean. Slizer looked at me, confused.

"Come on, Slizer. Run over there!" I said, pointing into the bay, but Slizer just stared at me and cocked his head. Then, I had an idea. I bent low, with my new shield in front of me, and spun around quickly. After I gained enough momentum, I let the shield go, and it flew through the air and out into the ocean. Seeing an opportunity to revenge himself on the shield, Slizer took off after it. With his usual speed, Slizer tore across the beach and launched straight into the ocean. However, instead of plunging into the surf, Slizer simply ran over it and snatched up my shield just as it plunged into the water. Not slowing down, Slizer turned a sharp U-turn, dodged a stray wave, and ran back to me.

"You *can* run on water!" I said with an open mouth. I got the feeling that Slizer hadn't even known about that skill, because instead of chewing on the shield, he ran back onto the ocean and sprinted across its surface. The pure number of possibilities this skill allowed excited me immensely.

After whistling to him to come back, I jumped onto his saddle, "Slizer, let's go!"

Somewhat reluctantly, Slizer ran back towards the water and plowed forward onto the ocean. Although now considerably slowed down, Slizer was able to keep us above the water, though it looked like he was running through thick mud now. The pure thrill of flying across water was exhilarating, and I thoroughly enjoyed it – until Slizer faltered and I was thrown head-first into the ocean.

"Alright, Slizer, you got me back!" I told him when I breached the surface of the water, "We're going to need to work on your stamina."

Unfortunately, Slizer was too tired to take me back to the beach, so I had to swim back which was very tiring - especially since I was wearing my normal clothes which weighed me down.

When I finally made it back to the beach, I collapsed on the sand next to Slizer.

"Well, well, well, if it isn't the little scared boy?!" a raspy voice said from in front of me. I sat up with a start and saw Kockler standing there. Kockler never did make it through Bewilderbeast Mountain and blamed me for it every chance he got. Being a good ten years older than me, he always thought he was better than me, despite the fact that I had beaten him in every hand-to-hand combat tournament we had ever participated in.

"What's wrong this time, Kockler," I asked him, extremely annoyed.

"Going for a swim in your clothes, huh?" He replied with a massive, smug smile.



“Ya’ know Kockler,” I said, completely ignoring his comment, “I just got this new shield, but I bet you can’t see the small writing on the front of it!” I picked my new shield off the ground and shoved it in his face. Wanting to prove himself, Kockler squinted carefully at the front of the shield. Then, I pulled the bolas launcher lever. Before he knew what was happening to himself, Kockler was lying on the ground completely tied up.

“Hey! What was that for!” he yelled at me.

“Whoops! Sorry about that!” I told him, while Slizer and I made a hasty exit.

“You’ll pay for this, Kaizar, if it’s the last thing I do!” he yelled after me.

By the time I slogged home, it was already dinner time.

“I’m home!” I yelled to my parents, when Slizer and I barged through the front door, “Sorry I’m late, it turns out that Slizer can run on the water, but he can’t always take me back from the water.” Dad looked at my soggy clothes and groaned.

“Maybe you should have prepared bett- oh my! Where did you get that!” Dad said, pointing at my new shield.

“Oh this? I got this from Slagre,” I said, not understanding its importance.

“That’s Hiccup’s old shield!” Dad said, “Let me see that.” Dad snatched it out of my hands and turned it over.

“Well, what do you know? It is! How did Slagre get it?” Dad questioned

“He said he found it on the beach,” I replied.

“Hiccup lost this many years ago during a War Lord boat raid,” Dad explained, “We all thought it was lost. Amazing how it has turned up after all these years! Have you figured out all the cool features?”

“A few, one of them even turned out to be handy when I had to subdue Kockler on the way over.”

“Well, now, that *is* cool, but we really need to discuss something else,” Mom interrupted, “I participated in an elder meeting, and we discussed the possible presence of a spy among us.”

“You really think that War Lord general was telling the truth?” Dad asked (he almost always asked that type of “you really think?” question).

“After questioning him and his men thoroughly, they all agreed to the presence of spies here, but none of them would give us any clue as to who they are or even if it’s just one person. It’s very frustrating,” Mom told us.

“It’s also probably an attempt to make us less coordinated and more suspicious of each other,” Dad replied thoughtfully, “but it is very suspicious that the War Lords would know about Slizer – especially since we pretty much keep to ourselves.”

“We all agreed to keep a look out for anyone that may be a spy, so I’d recommend you do too. However, don’t bring it up with anyone as we want to keep this news covert,” Mom finished.

“As much as I would like to suggest a few possible suspects, everyone on this island seems pretty loyal to the Berserker and Defender of the Wing cause,” I thought out loud.

“Weird, right?” Dad commented.

“Well, let’s get some good rest, because we’re all going to need to keep on working hard to get the island ready for this possible attack,” Mom said, “Oh, and Kaizar? I talked with Mala, and she said that you should work with the rest of the Warrior Trainee Seniors to train. Can you do that?”



As much as I wanted to work with *actual* warriors, like the Berserk Guard, I didn't want to decline an order from my aunt, so I agreed.

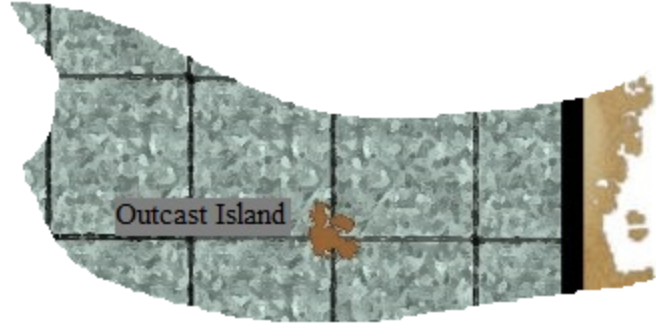
"Great, we may have a shot at this!" Mom said, leading back in her chair.

"Well, now that that is over, who wants to play a game of Maces and Talons?" Dad asked, pulling out the game board.



Chapter 4: Battle

In the next few days, Berserker Island was thrown into organized chaos. People ran everywhere, fortifying this, rebuilding that, making another catapult, practicing their crossbow aim, readying the battle ships, etc. Most of the elders of the village agreed that it would be at least a month before the War Lords arrived, what with all the preparation



they needed to do. Thus, it gave us time to thoroughly question the prisoners and prepare. Unfortunately, it was nearing summer, which gave us the least possible advantage as our infamous, frozen winters tended to wreak havoc on ships. Nonetheless, all of my tribe had really bonded together and were churning out catapults, weapons, and stockpiles of supplies in preparation. Every inch of the town was covered in machinery, and most of the slopes of the mountain were also full. When I wasn't training with the rest of my graduating class, I was assigned with Slizer to move heavy equipment (as Slizer was a little stronger and a hundred times faster than a yak).

On this particular day, most of the village was working on stockpiling food, so Slizer and I were in the Doom Dome fighting classmates.

"I wish we could be of more help," I said to my combat partner as I swung my Odin's Storm at him and ducked underneath his sword.

"I know right? I feel like we're all good, but not quite good enough yet," he replied, parrying my thrust and repositioning his feet.

Across the room, one of our unlucky classmates had been paired up with Slizer and was just then tossed through the air. I heard hisscream from behind me and quickly ducked, but my sparring partner was preparing a short assault on me and didn't see the danger in time. He was immediately flattened on the ground – "Oof!"

As the two boys disentangled themselves, a thought came to me.

"What if we could attack the War Lords *before* they got to us?" I wondered aloud.

"How would we do that?" Suly asked, as he sharpened his axe on the dome's grinding stone.

As I pondered this, a girl on the other side of arena performed a perfect backflip over her opponent, using his sword's handle as a bar to push off.

"I've got it!" I shouted, startling Lucke and Mahre so badly that they ran into each other.

"We could raid the War Lords' ships before they make it to the docks and turn their own ships against each other!" I exclaimed.

"And how could we do *that*?" Suly asked, sounding terribly skeptical.

"Do you think we could steal one of those War Lord boats?" I replied.



“Um, maybe?” Suly said, not understanding what I was thinking.

“Alright guys,” I said, “I think I have an idea to give our tribes a leg-up in this upcoming battle, but we’re all going to need to brush up on our sailing skills and hope for a very dense fog!”

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

The morning of one of the greatest battles in Berserker history began early on Mondor’s Day. I was sound asleep when all the horns blew. Every person with extraordinary eyes were assigned to every lookout tower and consequent horn on the island and were looking all day and night from many different points around the island for any sign of approaching ships. Once, the village was almost awakened in the middle of the night when one of our fishing boats approached the dock a little later than expected. It was actually pretty funny.

However, this sighting wasn’t a joke and was definitely not funny. I sprang out of my bed just as quickly as Mom, and we raced downstairs and outside before Dad had even fallen out of bed. Already, several of our neighbors had woken up and were racing to the highest available point to see the approaching ships. I scaled the nearest catapult and gazed out into the distance but didn’t see anything. There was a murmur of disappointment among the crowd as everyone else experienced the same sight, but then a strange horn was heard in the distance – a funny lilting noise that emanated from the northward direction. The War Lords had indeed arrived.

“He, Heo, Heorrrrrrr!” sounded our horns again, and instantly the island erupted into chaos.

“Remain in an orderly fashion!” I heard several of the Berserk generals yell, but no one heard - even the common soldiers were running about in every which direction. Slizer and I had to shove our way through a sea of humanity before we made it to the Doom Dome. Inside, half of my classmates had already arrived and more were arriving by the second.

“Wait. Is that you, Lorf?!” I asked him as I stared at a boy with a helmet so big it looked like it would snap off his head.

“You got that right!” Lorf said proudly, “There is no way my head is leaving my body with this bad boy!” Lorf tapped his helmet to prove its strength.

“And there is no way you’ll be able to see,” I mumbled to myself as Lorf tilted his helmet to talk to me.

“Alright guys, we’re going to stick with Kaizar’s plan; so we all need to make our way to the East beach as quickly as we can. When you get there, wait for the rest of us so we can commandeer a boat. Okay?” Magur shouted to all of us. There were several lousy war cries, and everyone stamped back out in the crowded street, I turned to Slizer, “You have got to go hide in the mountain, Slizer. I don’t want anyone finding you.” Slizer whimpered, as he probably didn’t want to leave me alone, but, luckily, he obeyed and quickly disappeared from my sight and up into the mountain as I ran toward the beach.

As I narrowly avoided knocking an elderly man over, I slowly made my way out of town. Before long, I ran into Magur.

“Hey, Kaizar. You know I’m a big fan of this plan, but did you get my parents’ permission? We don’t want to crash *their* plan,” Magur told me.

“Well, uh, not exactly – but I think it’ll be fine with them,” I replied hesitantly.

“So, you haven’t gotten their permission, but we’re doing this anyway?” Magur asked.

“Heh, heh?” I replied nervously.

“Oh brother,” Magur replied.



"Hey you agreed to it and didn't tell your parents either!" I reminded him.

"Well, would you if you were in my shoes?" Magur countered.

By the time we reached the East beach, I could see the masts of the War Lord ships sticking out of the morning fog.

"What are you guys all doing here?!" the main general of the East beach shipyard asked us.

"Could we borrow one of the stolen War Lord ships? We have a plan that may or may not have gotten permission from my parents," Magur told him (making sure to lower his voice when he got to the "may not" part).

"Well, I guess so," the general replied warily, "We can always use some extra hands, and I've seen you guys down here a lot lately."

"Why don't some of you get on that small one, right over there, and the rest of you take that larger one over her," the general told Magur, "Whatever you do, though, make sure to maintain a partial U-shape with the rest of us - per your parents' orders."

All of us quickly nodded our heads, but we knew we weren't going to follow his orders.

The graduating class of this year had about fifty members including me, so we swarmed the boat and quickly set about opening the sails and raising the anchors. I found myself on the smaller boat with a handful of other classmates while Magur took charge of the larger one. As our whole island's armada sailed out towards the War Lord ships, I was finally able to get a good grasp on the sheer number of ships and men that were coming our way. And, just as I had hoped and predicted, the notorious Berserker fog that was well-known among these parts was just as dense as usual. Things were going exactly according to plan.

"Anchor here!" the captain of the ship next to us said, when we were slightly in front of his boat.

"Sorry! We're going on!" I yelled back.

"Let's sail a little to the left to merge into the fog!" I told my fellow warriors as Magur's ship surged forward as well. Despite the screaming of the other ships' sailors to come back, we advanced forward towards the rapidly approaching collection of War Lord soldiers. The War Lord ships were sailing in perfect order and close proximity to each other which made our two ships stick out like a sore thumb. However, we disappeared into the fog just as quickly as we were noticed, which meant we could turn our boats without being noticed. Gargt was steering the ship and performed a perfect turn in sync with the other War Lord ships that we could see a scarce few meters away. The fog was so thick it was hard to see much of anything, and most of us young warriors weren't experienced sailors.

Essentially, we had just disguised ourselves perfectly. Suddenly, to our ship's left, a war ship bore down upon us and had to swerve slightly to avoid hitting us. This, then, brought our ships together which gave all of us the opportunity to hop aboard the other ship. I vaulted over onto the new ship and sized up my opposition. Quite a few of the goons had noticed the unusual crowd of War Lord soldiers (which they initially thought we were) but were confused as to what we were doing out of line of the main thread of ships. On board this particular ship, there were about a dozen men, two of which came toward me since I was in the lead (Magur's ship was to our right and couldn't readily assist us).

"Hey, can I speak to your captain?" I asked them. This surprised the goons, but one of them called up to the captain.

"So, what do you want to say?" the captain said as he swaggered towards me.



“Oh, I would like to say, bye-bye,” I told him. With that, I swung my Odin’s Storm at his head and chucked him off the side of the ship. Immediately, the other goons caught on and charged me. Making sure to keep my cool, I slugged two in the helmet and dodged out of the way of the others, whose momentum caused them to plunge off the deck.

“Get that kid!” screamed a soldier in the crow’s nest, pointing at me. Several big thugs converged on me, but I nimbly dodged out of the way and rained down blows upon them. In doing this, I got turned around a bit, and one goon crept up from behind me. However, I heard his heavy footsteps, so I launched out my shield’s grappling hook onto one of the wooden bars holding up a sail and zipped straight up into the air. Meanwhile, the soldier behind brought his axe straight down to where I had been, but instead ended up clobbering another goon. Then, I retracted the rope and landed down on him. Meanwhile, the rest of my classmates subdued what was left of the crew. As soon as I realized that we had taken out the entire ship’s crew, I also realized that a nearby ship had come up alongside and was starting to more offload soldiers onto the deck.

“Want some help?” Magur said as he ran up alongside me

“Gladly!” I replied.

Magur quickly produced his axe and, screaming a maniacal scream, advanced forward with me following. Magur slung goons to the right and left like they were just bags of flour, and I clobbered anyone that dodged Magur. After crossing the wooden plank that had been placed between the two ships, Magur and I proceeded to take out the goons on the other ship. Three soldiers advanced on Magur while a higher-ranked general singled me out. I easily met his sword’s thrust and parried with a quick chop. The general tried to kick me, but I dodged and shoved him backward. However, he managed to catch himself and retreat into a defensive stance.

“Look out behind you!” I told him, but it was too late, Suly had already slammed him from behind.

“Welcome to the club, Suly! Your timing is impeccable!” I told him.

“Was that ever in question?” Suly asked while shoving another goon off the deck.

“Thunk, thunk,” arrows from somewhere behind me zipped past and pierced the deck. I immediately turned around and saw some archers aiming at us from a nearby ship. I deflected a few wayward arrows with my shield, then transformed my shield in a crossbow and returned fire. This caught them by surprise, and allowed me to pick one off. Magur, having finished dealing with his three goons, then ducked behind a stack of barrels.

“Heads up!” yelled a voice from our previous ship. Sure enough, another one of my classmates was turning the wheel on the ship, and it promptly ran into another War Lord ship to its right. Magur, seeing this was a good idea and being closer to this ship’s steering wheel, followed suit. This completely distracted the archers, and I was able to get a front row seat as the ships behind weren’t able to steer away in time and smashed into us. This caused a nasty jam of ships in the previously perfect floating armada. With their ships out of commission, more goons decided to rid themselves of our menace. However, all of us young Berserker warriors were swarming everywhere, and as the War Lord ships got closer to the island, our island’s boulders and arrows were slowing them down. This, in turn, caused enough chaos to let us fly just under the radar. However, it also became harder to watch my back and take out goons at the same



time, but I knew that every moment I split the goons' focus from attacking the island was a moment well spent. Finally, I decided to make a break for the second deck of the current ship I was on to get a better view of what was going on. With two quick strokes, I managed to create an opening and scramble up the ladder. All around the mass of collided ships streamed the rest of the War Lord boats who were launching just as many boulders, arrows, and spears towards the island as our tribe was launching back. Now that I wasn't fighting, I realized how close to the island we were getting and even as I spoke a massive boulder blew through the air and punched a hole through the ship's deck. Unfortunately for me, it also punched through the bottom of the boat, so I quickly found myself on a sinking ship. As the boat sank, the goons that were left on board ran towards the ladder as well. I was trapped. I figured that I would have to jump off the boat anyway; so, I ran forward and plowed right off the second deck and into the collection of goons scrambling up the ladder. My momentum easily shoved them back down to the deck. I landed a few feet away from the ladder and right in the midst of the panicked group of goons trying to scramble for safety. I plunged my Odin's Storm at the nearest goon and tried to parry what attacks I could. With a well-aimed kick, I managed to stun a particularly skinny goon; then I plunged my weapon forward to finish him off. However, he fell before my weapon got to him. Then, the other goons around me also fell down.

"Thought you could use some help!" Suly told me, as he threw a goon overboard.

"Much appreciated," I replied - finishing off the last three goons and making a flying leap onto a nearby ship.

I was just about to say, "We're safe now!" to Suly, who was beside me, when I realized that we weren't because I had just hopped onto a War Lord catapult ship.

The good news, though, was that Magur was already on the ship. Suly ran to the left and I took the right. It so happened that the catapult experts were better at using catapults than weapons, so Magur and I made great progress.

"Where is everyone else?" I asked Magur as I blocked a swing by a goon, and knocked him overboard.

"They are located a few boats to the east," Magur replied while dueling with a higher-ranked goon. I kicked another catapult soldier in the back and threw him into Magur's opponent.

"Let's go back to them. It's too dangerous here by ourselves," no sooner had I said this than an unconscious soldier collapsed onto my back and flattened me to the deck.

"Careful Suly!" I yelled to him, "I'm here too!" Magur parried a soldier's sword swing and countered with a heavy slice.

"We can't go back there. I told them to take any of their ships back to our line so we could repurpose them," Magur told me as he took out the ship captain at the steering wheel.

"Oh, well, that's a good idea. Hey, do you smell smoke?" I replied as I looked around.

"Yeah, all those flaming arrows lit the docks on fire, and now it's catching some of our and their boats on fire," Magur replied, squinting toward the island.

"Ugh," I sighed, "Let's get to a boat on the outskirts of this fleet and get back to our island. I'm getting pretty tired."

"Over there!" Magur yelled to me, pointing to a War Lord ship that was breaking away from the rest and turning towards the east, "That's some of our classmates!"



I watched as the boat started off towards our line of ships that was much closer now than it used to be. Suddenly, a massive boulder shot through the air and punched right through the boat, which promptly started to sink.

“NO!” I yelled, “We’ve got to go help them!”

We ran across our current ship’s deck and jumped onto a nearby warship. The problem is that we didn’t get very far because more War Lord goons attacked us.

“Will they ever stop?! How many of them are there!” Magur called out to me, frustrated. Aiming carefully, I launched my shield’s grappling hook around one of the mast’s wooden beams and swung over the crowd of goons to the other side of the ship. Then, I simply retracted the rope and flew over onto the next boat.

“Leave us alone!” I screamed at a goon that pounced on me. I wacked him in the helmet and threw him across the deck. I quickly realized that the majority of the War Lord ships were now upon the island, and that all of the goons were on the main decks, ready to hit the land. Thus, running from ship to ship was only going to get more dangerous. However, I couldn’t go anywhere now, because this particular ship that I was currently on was loaded with archers.

Thus, they were easy to pick off, but I had to watch out for their arrows. I slid across the deck, ducked behind a pile of crates; then, I swung over them and knocked an archer to the floor. A few of them converged upon me, but I kicked, sliced, chopped, and punched them out of the way – using strength that I pulled out of seemingly nowhere.

“Heads up!” Magur called from somewhere behind me. I quickly ducked, as he flew across the ship’s deck on a rope - nailing archers along the way.

“This way. I saw a few others on that boat with Suly,” Magur told me while waving me towards a larger, catapult ship. I vaulted off the ship’s deck and swung onto the other boat. When Magur plopped onto the deck beside me, Suly spun the ship away from the main fleet.

“Whump!” a few classmates launched a colossal boulder through the air that punched straight through a nearby War Lord ship.

“Hey! This is a lot more fun than hand-to-hand combat!” Gargt laughed.

“Good! Then you can take out that other ship which is trying to ram us,” Magur yelled over to him - pointing at a particularly menacing ship that had noticed us.

Gargt and a few other scrambled to reload the catapult, while the other ship bore down upon us.

“Swing the boat to the left!” Magur yelled up to Suly. Miraculously, our boat swung out of the way just in time, but that threw off the aim of Gargt’s catapult which launched the boulder into our ship’s mast.

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“What were you guys thinking?!” the ship’s captain yelled at Magur and I, “We specifically told you NOT to go out on your own.”

“Sorry,” I mumbled.

“You better be!” he yelled at me; then turned to Magur, “You’re dad wants to talk to you right away!”

Magur nodded grimly, and our ship slid in along the East beach docks and some of my fellow warriors laid down the gangplank.

“Oh, man. I am so tired!” I told Magur as I dragged my feet over the path to the main village.

“Tell me about it,” Magur replied – his usual swagger gone.



"What do you think you're father's going to say?" I asked him.

"He's going to yell at me and be all nice to you because you're his nephew," Magur told me.

"Ha, well, let's hope!"

Suly and the rest of the warriors dispersed to their in-island jobs, but Magur and I made our way into the chaos of the village (dodging boulders and arrows as they fell like hail) and looked for Dagur or Mala, as we were the ones in charge of our little escapade. We finally found Dagur in the main square. He had a huge crossbow and was loading and shooting it like his life depended upon it (which, in retrospect, was probably true).

"Dagur!" I yelled to him over the noise of the fighting going on at the docks, "Where should we go?"

"Hey, I saw you kids taking down a whole lot of goons out there," Dagur told us while not missing a beat, "Good job. How about you fortify the third line right above the village, okay?"

"Uh, that's all you have to say, Dad?" Magur said, amazed.

"Uh, huh. I mean, I would have killed you if you didn't come back alive - but since you seem okay, I'll let you off the hook."

Dagur's comment was pretty ironic, but I nodded my head, glad to get a job that wouldn't require fighting for a little bit.

"Magur, I'm going to my house to grab a snack. I'll catch up later!" I told him.

"A-okay!" Magur told me as he wearily jogged off. It was pretty hard to make my way to my own house because the streets were still clogged with warriors running here and there with weapons, supplies, and buckets of water. As soon as I got inside, I sagged to the floor.

"Ohhh. My back hurts!" I groaned. I took my time raiding the cupboards of whatever was left and drinking some water that Mom had left on the counter. Then, I headed up the mountain to my new position.

"What were you thinking!" Mom yelled at me when I plopped down behind a row of iron walls next to the long-range archers, "You could easily have been killed! Only thirty of the original fifty warriors came back with you!"

"Sorry, Mom," I told her, "But right now isn't the time to expend energy on arguing. I just need to rest up now." Mom grumbled and stomped off, clearly not happy. I found out later that Aunt Mala and Uncle Dagur wouldn't let me be in the first line of defenders, and had only just agreed for me to be positioned with the long-range archers (thanks to Mom's bargaining, who realized my zeal to beat up the War Lords). Thus, when Mom found out that I had gone out into the "red zone" (as it was called) without permission, she felt betrayed. Out in the ocean, I could see that *our* ships were struggling to maintain their U-shape of sorts away from the island. As far as I could see in the Northern direction, War Lord ships were still arriving – hundreds and hundreds of them.

"Kaizar! I heard you were just out there!" Lemmirg said, coming over to me.

"Yeah," I smiled, "But those goons are tough, and it feels like we hardly put a dent in them!"

"Uh huh, it doesn't look good," Lemmirg replied.

"We're still going to have to do our best though," I replied.

"ROAR!" The loud noise startled me, but I recognized Slizer's roar.

"What are you doing here, Slizer!" I yelled to him, "You need to get out of here!"

"Perhaps we should just hand Slizer over," Lemmirg suddenly said.



On a normal day, I would have been aghast, but as more and more warships came into sight, I quickly began to think that Lemmrig could be right.

"It's not too late?" I asked.

"Trust me, you can still hand him over," Lemmrig's confidence made me feel better, despite its unfortunate note, but the sounds of splintering wood and yelling coming from below steeled my nerve.

"Maybe I will, but not after I've done all I can to make sure Slizer is safe!" I mumbled.

"Well, I hope for your sake, we can," Lemmrig replied.

Mala had skillfully ordered all of Berk's ships to form that wide U shape away from the island; this allowed the main bulk of the enemies to appear to have a straight attack on the island. However, all of our warships had been outfitted with extra hard, Gronckle-iron spikes underneath the water and in front of the ship. Thus, they could just ram many of the ships and slice them clean in two (as had been demonstrated on one of the captured War Lord ships a week ago with fantastic results).

Thanks to our skilled catapult-experts and archers, many of the other warships were sinking. However, more warships just kept arriving by the moment, and the War Lord goons had finally been able to land and were streaming into the village. Besides that, a few War Lord ships had gotten smart and started sending ships around beyond the U of Berserker boats – coming in from the East and West. That wasn't good either.

Our soldiers fought bravely, and the catapults and long-range arrows just filled the sky with fire and rock – taking out countless ships, but our ships still were few, and they were one by one being sunk or overwhelmed. By afternoon, some of the outlying warships had made it to the West and East beaches and were off loading supplies and men onto the shore, while the main groups of ships were making progress through our village. Just when I thought things were lost, the War Lords stopped their advance and just "parked" in *our* village. Soon, a runner came by to tell us that the village was, indeed, overtaken by the War Lords, but we were instructed to wait out the night, which I was glad about as I could use the rest.

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All that night, we waited in anxious silence: tense for a midnight attack by the War Lords, but it never happened. When the morning came, we got new directions.

"Kurgis," the messenger spoke to our general, "Dagur wants your battalion to hit the ships and men entering on the West shore."

"Tell him they're as good as dead!" Kurgis replied to the messenger.

"Alright guys! Let's move!" Kurgis yelled. Despite my incessant arguing, Slizer refused to leave me again; so I decided to use him to my advantage. I swung onto him and followed my battalion down the hill towards the West shore. There were already a few portable Berserk Guard catapults and warriors down there keeping the War Lord goons busy, but they needed reinforcement so I guess Dagur had decided we were best suited for the job. About two hundred paces from the main fighting, the archers held back and began an arrow assault. Slizer and I waited for the arrows to cease then charged forward. Slizer, rested from last night, and full of energy covered the ground almost instantly and started using his lethal tail right away. In seconds, the ground was literally covered with completely paralyzed enemies. This meant that my line of warriors hardly saw any action for the first half hour until another large collection



of War Lord warships arrived and sent a hail of boulders and arrows our way, before unloading another group of men. I still couldn't believe how many resources our enemies were using to just get one dragon – they were crazy!

The War Lord goons immediately recognized Slizer – but were all paralyzed thereafter and never got around to spreading the news about where the speed stinger was. My shield came in handy as I had it in a semi-permanent position angled over my head to protect my shoulders and facial features that were not covered by my helmet. About the same time that both of our sides ran out of boulders and arrows was the time that my rank (the third) hit the line of War Lords' men. Without a sound, I attacked (Dad always said yelling wastes your energy). I took out two goons with a pair of bolas launched out of my shield; then swung my helmet into the face of another, while deflecting an axe away from me with my Odin's Storm. I quickly became enveloped in a surge of fighting humanity – hacking away where I could and trying to find a good position where my back would be facing the rest of my group. Slizer was long gone, and I really hoped he was okay – but my life was on the line too, so I just kept on fighting like I had the day before.

"Clang!" I caught a goon's sword and twisted it away from him – then knocked him out with a swing from my shield. He fell backward into one of his comrades, who then found himself right in the way of an arc cut by me. I back flipped over a particularly mean looking group of goons, and struck them down from behind them. Knocking one over the head with my Odin's, I caved in another's helmet with my back swing. Next, I thrust my Odin's Storm forward again to parry a sword coming my way, but it was yanked out of my hand from someone behind me. This scared me, but I made a split second decision to use the grappling hook function on my shield, and hooked it around an overhanging limb of an oak tree. Using a goon as a stepping stool, I swung into the top branches of the oak and got a bearing of where I was. Evidently, it was a War Lord general that had grabbed my Odin's Storm and was now coming toward the tree, followed by a whole section of newly off-loaded soldiers. Way over to the right was the main portion of my group, wearing away at a previous surge of War Lord soldiers. Up ahead, I could see that there were only a few archers left – one of whom was Lemming thankfully. Using my shield as a bludgeon, I leapt out of the tree and onto the top of an oncoming group of soldiers, flattening the general and his bodyguard. Picking my Odin's Storm off the ground, I took on the others with a slight height-advantage (due to being on top of their general).

"Clang" "Cloof" "Keorow" I let loose my anger (at them having attacked my home) and took out four right off the bat. Then, I was hit from behind ... and bit the dust.

"See ya," a terrible voice announced above me. I tried to twist out of the way but felt something large fall on top of me. I batted at the object behind me with my shield, then squirmed away to find the entire troop of attacked soldiers out cold on the ground. Ahead of me to the left was a wave of soldiers collapsing to the ground - Slizer at work. By this time, I was super close to a docked ship, so I boarded and ran down the deck. It seemed deserted, but I noticed someone on the upper deck, so I climbed up. A single soldier stood in a defensive position in front of me – his rock hammer poised.

"Wump" His hammer hit the wooden floor boards, sending splinters into the air as he sunk his weapon into the floor after missing me. Then, I attacked. My spontaneous chop caught him in his chain mail, and he stumbled backward. With a quick swing from my shield, I sent him



overboard. Then, I turned around and ran towards the ladder to get back down – but I had forgotten about the hole in the ground created by his swinging hammer, and fell through. “Argh!” I yelled as I hit the ground – hard. I stood up and looked around me – it was almost completely dark. I stumbled about trying to find a way out. Over to my left appeared a tiny sliver of light, so I made my way over to it. Indeed, there was a trap door to the main deck. I grinned with satisfaction and quickly pulled myself up. However, I instantly felt a sting in the back of my neck.

“Knockout dart!” I surmised – then collapsed to the floor.

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I woke up with a start, but my head was super heavy and my eyes refused to open. So, I just lay there for a while trying to get my bearings. I picked up on the sound of water and a slight noise to my left.

I pulled myself up and propped my back against the wall. I was in a small cell. To my right, there was another human sleeping on the ground. I quickly looked down at my hands to find that they weren’t restrained amazingly. Slowly and painfully, I moved.

“Who’s there?” I asked.

“Wh-what?” The other person woke up and turned in my direction, staring at me. I was very surprised to find out that it was Lemmirg. He was also unbound, and started to stand up – looking at me carefully from the other cramped cell.

“You okay, Kaizar?” he asked.

“Ohhhh, my head hurts!” I replied, gently shaking it in hopes of getting my “wits” about me.

“They got us!” Lemmirg growled.

“How’s the fight going?” I anxiously asked him.

“I don’t know,” Lemmirg mumbled angrily, “The last thing I remember was fitting an arrow into my crossbow and plugging a particularly mean goon in the face.”

“How in the world did they get you?” I asked him.

“Probably the same way they got you – with a knockout dart,” Lemmirg reasoned. For the next few minutes, I rested my head. Then, when I felt better, I stood up and shook the bars of my cell to see how strong they were.

Just then, I heard running feet from above, and two War Lord goons emerged at the stairwell.

“So! You’re all awake – well that’s too bad for you,” the older one told us, “You’re going to tell us what we want, or else!”

“Oh brother,” I mumbled to myself as the two guys walked over to my cell first. *Wouldn’t you know it? They decided on me!*

Just as the older soldier inserted his key into the lock, an excited voice from above yelled, “Storm dead ahead!” The two soldiers looked at each other; then, entirely forgetting about me, raced back up the stairs.

“Boom!” As if on cue, thunder blasted through the sky

“One, two, thr-,” the flash of lightning lit up my entire cell, and I saw through a small iron window high up on the wall merciless, unforgiving waves and no land in sight. I was caught in a dangerous boat with dangerous men in a dangerous sea not anywhere near my island – what else could possibly go wrong?!



Chapter 5: Escape

“Boom!” the lightning sounded again – louder this time. It was definitely getting closer. Despite the sailors’ best efforts, the ship did not appear to be escaping from the storm.

“Lift up the sail!” a loud voice from above barked, “Strap down those boxes! You there, I want that mast strengthened.” As I listened anxiously to what was going on up above, I whispered a few prayers to Thor.

“Kaboom!” the lightning roared again. This time, however, the thunder was followed by the sound of splintering wood and a roaring fire beginning.

“Fire, fire, fire!” yelled some men up above. That was when I felt some water hit my head. I instinctively looked upwards (even though I couldn’t see anything) and got a ton of water on myself.

“LAND DEAD AHEAD!” yelled someone else from up above. This was getting crazy! Everything was happening at once. However, I was still locked in a small cell, and there was water pouring in onto me.

“Guys!” I yelled as loud as I could, “There’s water coming into the boat!” Either they didn’t hear me, or they didn’t care because no one acknowledged my call for help.

“Any ideas, Lemmirg?” I anxiously asked him. Lemmirg didn’t answer; instead I heard a “click” and the sound of creaking metal.

“I’m out!” Lemmirg yelled.

“What the-?!”

“I’m coming!” he yelled over to me. I heard him shuffle towards my cell and insert a key into the lock. By this time, the water flooding in from somewhere above me had flooded the floor up to my calves.

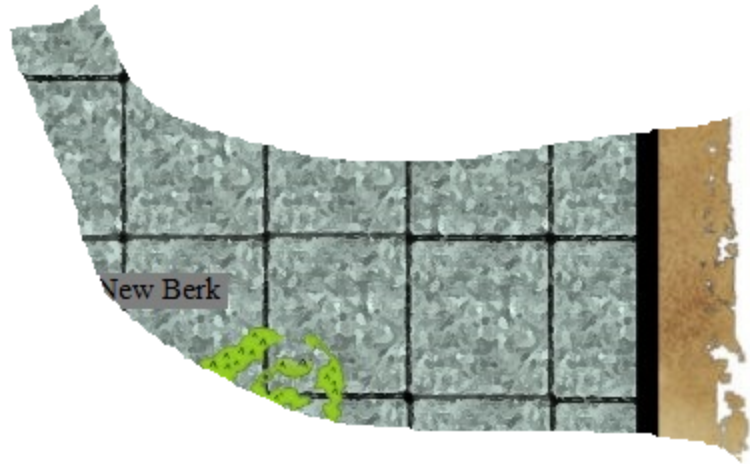
“Grab your stuff, I’ll meet you above deck!” Lemmirg told me – taking the time to light a torch on the wall so I could see what I was doing.

I immediately searched through a large crate of random weapons near the main door and pulled out my shield and Odin’s Storm. With the light from the torch I could see a large gash in the top left of the boat and the point of a sharp rock poking through. Lemmirg was right (like usual).

We *were* going to sink!

As I slung my shield onto my back, the ship shuddered violently, and I heard some more commotion going on up above.

“Lower the row boats!” yelled a commanding voice.





As soon as I ran onto the main deck, I spotted Lemmirg waiting for me in the shadows of a few boxes – watching the War Lord goons lower row boats into the tumultuous seas.

“Nice job Kaizar! Let’s go apprehend one of those row boats!” he told me. I started forward, but the boat suddenly rocked to the left, and I slipped and fell. Jamming my weapon into the wooden floor boards, I kept myself from sliding over the edge. I looked up to see Lemmirg grab onto the ship’s railing, and that is when I noticed the massive wave heading straight for the boat. “Hold on!” I screamed as the whole warship overturned. I heard the screams of some of the goons a little ways away just as I was yanked off the ship and thrown into the sea. The ocean was freezing cold and extremely dark. I thrashed around for a while, before throwing myself forward in a frantic swim. I emerged from the water and took a huge breath of air - just in time to get doused by another wave. When my head broke the water again, I looked around to see if anyone else was around – but I couldn’t see anything! My armor – though good for battling in – now became my enemy as it was super heavy and weighing me down. Thus, I shook everything off but my light shirt and pants (I wasn’t a fan of being naked even if there was no one around to see me). I started doing the survival kick towards where I thought the land in the distance was. I just hoped I could make it that far. A few kicks later, another monster wave swept into me and shoved me back into the water – I came up sputtering. That’s when I was suddenly swung into the air.

Something grabbed me by the back of my shirt and just swung me into the air, I quickly reverted to my defensive position as I fell back towards the water. However, I never hit the water, because I landed on something first – something that was moving at a rapid speed on top of the water! To my amazement, it was Slizer. He was splashing across the water at an incredible speed – leaping over particularly large waves like they were just obstacles.

“Oh Thor!” I told him, “What are you doing here?” Slizer didn’t respond however – as he was too busy running, but he did shake his head as if it was obvious that he would follow the boat that held me captive. I guess he must have been incredibly stealthy to keep track of the boat without anyone spotting him. With a quick look behind me, I saw that there was nothing left of the ship or any row boats. I could only assume that everyone on that ship was dead. The visibility just wasn’t very good. Within a few minutes, we were approaching the island. It was pretty large, with a large volcano centered near the middle of the island. All around the island was a huge expanse of forest. Finally, Slizer rocketed onto the sand, and he collapsed to the ground – tumbling me off. I crawled away from the water’s edge onto the floor of the forest with Slizer, and then rested my head against a tree. I had lost my weapon, most of my clothes, and Hiccup’s shield. Dad was NOT going to be happy – that is, if Berserker Island hadn’t been overrun with War Lords goons. The worst feeling in the world was that I couldn’t help my tribe – what with being on an island in the middle of who knows where. Then, I remembered that Lemmirg was also somewhere out there - probably dead. I put my face in my hands and sighed.

Slizer meanwhile, had been lying on the ground – breathing heavily. Suddenly, he stood up and growled at the trees. I immediately stood up too, because I knew that Slizer had excellent hearing and that anything he thought was a threat would be a threat to me too. I looked around for a stick or something and saw a curved branch on the beach. I ran over, snatched it up, and walked up behind Slizer. Slizer, however, began backing up towards the left. His head kept



swinging from the left to the right – as if there were multiple enemies somewhere out there in the dark.

“Who's out there?” I whispered to him.

Immediately a dozen or so lights flared up and illuminated a bunch of people only a few paces away. Slizer and I were now backed up against a large overhanging cliff hemmed in by these new threats. To my right and front were a bunch of middle-aged females with silvery outfits, funky masks that doubled as helmets and long, slender swords. To my direct left was Slizer, but beyond him was a relatively short, but extremely muscular man with a young female by his side. The man was carrying the biggest stone hammer that I had ever seen. It was about as long as Slizer's head and twice as thick.

Next to the man, was a young female who was also carrying a large (but metal) hammer. She was covered with dirt and mud, and her clothes were very disheveled (perhaps she didn't wash them very much?)

“We're the wing maidens!” the muscular man boomed over to me; then looked at the stick in my hands and added, “You realize that stick isn't going to do you a bit of good, right?”

I dropped the stick. “Umm, I'm Kaizar and this is-,” I began.

“Woah! Is that a speedstinger?” the man asked me pointing at Slizer with his hammer. His muscles bulged simply holding the hammer in his outstretched arm, and I wondered if he spent all day doing pull ups.

Slizer growled at the man and bared his teeth. As the man got closer, he shone his torch in the air and got a good look at Slizer and I (who looked just as bad as the girl with the metal hammer).

“Yes?” I answered warily. On one hand, I wanted to run away, but the people in front of me were certainly not War Lord goons (as was obvious by their clothing) and weren't outright threatening me. Thus, I felt I could negotiate with them for at least a little while.

“Quick!” the man said to the girl next to him, “What type and variety is this speedstinger?”

“Water variety of type 'leader' and also a titan-wing kind,” she spoke up, somewhat dryly.

I wasn't sure what all that meant, but I hoped it meant Slizer was extra-special.

“Could I ask what exactly wing maidens are?” I asked the man (who was obviously the leader). The other females just stood there and stared at me.

“Perhaps you've heard of me?” the man said to me – slinging his hammer onto his back and flashing me a proud smile, “I'm Snotlout Jorgenson. Son of Spitelout Jorgenson – Monstrous Nightmare wrangler and Fabulous Six Hero!”

“Well, Sir Snotlout,” I replied while putting my hand on Slizer to keep him from growling, “I'm sorry to have landed on your island, but I was captured by the War Lords from the North, and –.”

“The War Lords of the North! They're all the way out here!” Snotlout exclaimed.

“Yes, sir. They were after this speedstinger,” I replied.

“Well, that puts the cream on the honey cake!” Snotlout exclaimed, “I'd bash all their big heads myself if I could! Any enemy of the War Lords is a friend of mine. I've gone up against those guys plenty of times in my day, and they certainly don't take kindly to dragon-friendly people like me. What's your last name boy? Why don't you come down to our village and rest up. We can get you some nice, warm clothes and feed you.”



"Thank you very much sir, I'd really appreciate it," I said, surprised at the quick change of events. "My name is Kaizar Ingerman."

"And this is Sulpher, my daughter, and these other girls," Snotlout waved his hand at the other ladies in his party, "Are the wing maiden- WHAT?! Your last name is Ingerman!"

"Yes?" I answered (by this time I was really confused about what was going on).

"You wouldn't, by chance, have heard of Fishlegs Ingerman, would you?"

"Yes, he's uh, he's my dad," I replied.

"Ha! Who knew?! Small archipelago. Well, then, we've got a lot to talk about," Snotlout told me. He turned and walked off into the forest as if I knew what to do. The heavy rain that had been coming down a moment earlier declined to a slight drizzle as Slizer and I followed Snotlout – my boots squishing in the soft ground.

"Can I touch your dragon, Kaizar?"

Sulpher fell into step next to me.

"Well sure!" I replied – not wanting to turn down the chief's daughter. Sulpher reached up and patted Slizer on the head. Slizer nodded at her then kept on going.

"Try scratching his neck. He really likes that!" I told her. Sulpher reached up and started scratching his neck. Immediately, Slizer stopped walking and flopped onto the ground, growling contentedly and waving his legs in the air. The wing Maidens behind us stared in wonder at this sight.

"Awe, he's so cute!" Sulpher said to no one in particular.

"Ha, he's a great friend, but he's also a battle machine when he needs to be!" I told her.

"HURRY UP GUYS! I smell some yak chops waiting for me!" Snotlout yelled back to us.

As we ran to catch up with the group, I decided to strike up a conversation with Sulpher.

"Sooo, have you guys been out here searching for me for very long?" I asked.

"Nah, we were just alerted about a half hour ago of something approaching the island," Sulpher replied.

"Are there a lot of mud pits around here?" I said, looking at her clothes.

"Nah, I just don't like changing out my outfit – takes too much time."

I thought for a moment.

"Oh, so you aren't related to the other wing maidens?"

"Not completely. My mom is one, though," Sulpher explained, "I'm guessing you're asking why I don't look as clean as the rest of them."

"I mean no offense at all, but it makes them look much cooler in their stylish, shiny outfits," I told her honestly.

"You really think so?" she asked, suddenly interested.

"Yeah," I admitted.

By this time, we had crested a small hill and were just entering a village. Square in the middle of the village was a large building that Snotlout barged into as soon as he reached the front doors.

"Time for dinner!" Snotlout yelled back to me as he entered the building.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Dinner was an interesting affair on Wing Maiden Island as I found out. Inside the main hall (as it was called) were several tables covered with large cauldrons of soup and piles of bread and



other vegetables. Snotlout swaggered up to a small table at the very front of the room and plopped down into a massive throne next to two ladies and started chewing on a huge yak stick. "That's where I normally sit," Sulpher told me while pointing to the table that Snotlout was eating at. "It's for the leader and the chief of the wing maidens as well as their families."

"Where should I sit?" I asked.

"Oh, you can sit next to me," Sulpher replied quickly.

I was shocked by the invitation, but looked down at my clothes – stained with mud, sand, and dripping with water which made me look even worse than Sulpher.

"Is there any possibility that I could change or dry off my clothes somewhere?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," replied Sulpher – as if a dirty outfit didn't matter, "Follow me." Sulpher let me back outside and past a few buildings to the left until we came to a small shack under a collection of pine trees.

"This is our guest house, and it has a pump and fresh clothes you can use," Sulpher replied to me.

"Thanks! Could you take Slizer back with you to get something to eat?" I asked her.

"Of course," Sulpher replied, then scratched Slizer on his neck, "You're a good boy, aren't you?" Slizer growled happily.

"Okay, he's used to eating out of a bowl. I'll stop by in a minute," I told her.

"Bye!" she waved to me as she and Slizer hastily walked back to the hall.

Inside of the quaint "shack" was a pump and a few assorted sizes of clothes – one of which looked about my size. I took off mine and put it on a rack. After a cold bath in some water that I pumped up. I put on the guest clothing. It was surprisingly comfortable and quite clean.

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"So," Snotlout began when I sat down at the main table next to Slizer and Sulpher, "How did you meet 'Slizer' and get here?" Everyone in the hall looked my way, anxious to hear my story. It was at this time that I noticed that there were only about three other males in the entire place.

"Sure, well, I found Slizer's egg when I was on an adventure in the mountain at Berserker Island," I began.

A half hour later, I had recounted all of my crazy adventure in getting to know Slizer; clear through my kidnapping by the War Lords and my arrival on the island.

"Fascinating," Snotlout said as he sawed apart some bread with a large knife, "Your dad, Fishlegs, is the only person that I've completely lost contact with. He always did like your mom. Why, I remember when I was trying to impress her, but she never did like me. Oh well – I scored better anyway." Snotlout waved a hand at the woman next to him.

"That's my mom, Minden," Sulpher whispered to me, "Next to her is Atali, Queen of the Wing Maidens."

"I noticed there aren't a lot of men on this island, is there a reason for this?" I asked Snotlout. Snotlout and about everyone else in the room laughed uproariously at this question.

"Ha, well, the Wing Maidens used to be a female-exclusive island until all the dragons left.

When the dragons left, the Wing Maidens realized that they would need a few males to keep the village going, so they allowed men back on the island. But, as you can tell, not many boats pass by here – so we're still female heavy. In fact, you're the only new male I've seen within the last year!"



"I do like seeing Tuffnut, every two years, though!" Snotlout finished.

"Oh, you mean like Tuffnut Thorston!" I exclaimed remembering the boy twin of those that my father and Snotlout hung out with when they were younger.

"Yep, he's a funny quack, but also really friendly," Snotlout told me, "Do you have any friends?"

"Well, I have quite a few friendly acquaintances. My best friend, Lemmrig, was with me in that warship that sank," I replied sadly.

"I'm so sorry!" Sulpher told me, "I know how you feel! My best friend died at sea two years ago."

"Well, that's life. No one lives forever!" Snotlout commented resting his feet on the table (much to Atali's displeasure).

"Kaizar," Minden spoke up, "Could we help you get back to your island?"

"Thank you, ma'am, I would really appreciate it. However, I do have a question. Snotlout, you said that Tuffnut visits you every now and then – does he know where Hiccup lives?"

"Of course! He lives on Outcast Island and visits New Berk all the time. He still goes over there to prank them every Snoggletog."

"After the recent events at home, I want to get Slizer to the Hidden World. Since only Hiccup knows where it is, I was wondering if you could help get me to New Berk so I could drop Slizer off before heading home?"

"Sure! I'm happy to oblige a fellow dragon-lover. Of course, it'll take a day or two to prepare a ship and all that, but Laurel here (Snotlout waved to a Wing Maiden at a table to the left) knows where Outcast Island is and can get you there right under the noses of the War Lords."

"The War Lords regularly go by here?" I asked, nervously.

"Nah," Minden chimed in, "But they live only a day's boat trip from Outcast Island, so you have to be careful."

"Welp!" Snotlout exclaimed, standing up, "It's time for some shut-eye. Gotta give this bod some rest!" Some of the wingmaidens giggled, and everyone got up and started picking up the food.

"We take home the extras to eat for lunch and breakfast tomorrow," Sulpher told me, "We only all eat together for dinner."

As I helped Sulpher pack some loaves of bread into a box, Snotlout came over to us.

"Sulpher, would you show Kaizar around tomorrow. We wouldn't want him to leave this place without knowing the rich heritage and resources we have here!" he winked at me.

"Sure!" Sulpher agreed readily, "We'll meet right in front of this hall early tomorrow!"

As soon as the dinner had been packed up, and I had carried a few boxes of food over to Snotlout's house, I walked back to the guest shack and collapsed into the small, fur-covered bed. Slizer followed my example and curled up nearby. In a matter of seconds we were sound asleep.



Chapter 6: Betrayed

The sun came up bright and early the next morning. The birds outside were chirping and everything felt right with the world – a whole leap and jump from yesterday's events. As I began my wakeup sequence, I thought about my parents and my tribe, who may be still battling it out at Berserker Island. I thought about my lost weapons and Lemmirg, and I most thought about this new island full of people that were *interesting* to say the least.

However, Slizer wasn't the meditating type and, what with being a natural nocturnal animal, decided it was time for me to get up. He grabbed my robe by its hood and yanked me straight out of bed and from under the nice warm blankets.

I flew across the room and smashed into the wall.

"Owe! That hurt Slizer!" I told him, rubbing my neck. I got up, then launched myself at Slizer's body. Catching him off guard, I slammed him to the floor and locked his legs in a special Berserker hold that Mom had taught me.

"GROWWWLLLL!" Slizer said, revealing his many rows of sharp teeth. He snapped at me, and swung his tail towards me. Nimble dodging out of the way, I sidestepped his tail and flung him across the room into the iron tub. Slizer sure knew how to start the day off! Every now and then, Slizer and I had a playful morning fight. I guess the adrenaline of the previous night wasn't completely gone from either of us.

Slizer shook his head and came back at me. He swung his tail at me, but we both knew I could dodge out of the way. I could predict about 70% of his tail strikes, what with spending a lot of time with him. Slizer snapped at me, but I jumped behind a metal rack that my old clothes were drying on, and Slizer's head went right through the metal bars. As Slizer disentangled his head from the rack, I jumped onto his back and held on tight. With a mighty fling, Slizer shot me back across the room and right towards the door. Unlike last time, however, I swung my body around and planted my feet skillfully on the door so that I could launch myself back. Unfortunately, someone had just opened the door so my feet met a face instead of the door.

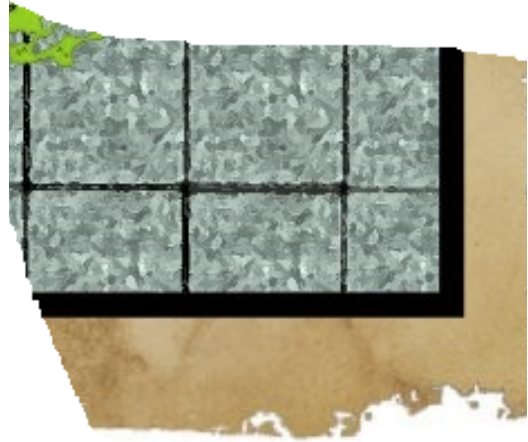
Snotlout was knocked over flat on his back, and I somersaulted over him and sprawled out onto the ground. A few Wing Maidens standing nearby gasped.

"Heh, uhhh, morning, Snotlout?" I said to him.

To my surprise, Snotlout immediately jumped to his feet and gallantly struck a pose.

"And that is how you pretend to be surprised by an attacker!" Snotlout announced to those standing around.

"Wow! That looked SO realistic!" a Wing Maiden honestly replied nearby. It now dawned upon me why Snotlout had become chief of the island. He could turn something bad into something





good – sort of. Then, I realized what I was wearing. I was still wearing the guest robe from the shack which was now torn up slightly with my short brawl with Slizer who was just now coming out to me sheepishly.

“Well, I can’t see I approve of your outfit,” Snotlout continued, looking at me, but Sulpher is waiting for you next to the hall. She’s to keep you occupied while the rest of us are working on preparing the ship and crew for you – it should be ready next morning sharp!” He declared. I quickly pasted on a big smile and thanked him.

“No problemo!” Snotlout generously told me.

As he walked away, he yelled, “Snotlout, Snotlout, Oi, Oi, Oi!”

I chuckled to myself then quickly ran back into the quest shack and closed the door.

“Next time we fight,” I scolded Slizer, “Make sure I’m fully dressed!”

I quickly put on my old clothes that had dried super stiff and cold, but at least I was used to them and they fit me okay. When I finally found my way to the hall, I looked around for Sulpher but didn’t see her anywhere.

“That’s funny,” I told Slizer, “Where is she?” Slizer growled and trotted off to the front doors where a young woman was standing. Naturally, I followed Slizer - being curious as to where he was going. When I got closer to where Slizer had stopped, I suddenly realized that he was standing next to Sulpher. She had gone through a *complete* transformation since last night. Her face was washed and her hair was neatly combed and pulled back. In addition, she was wearing a clean, fur overcoat with her large, recently shined hammer slung on her back and was sporting a new pair of black pants with a short skirt over the top – just like the rest of the Wing Maidens. However, the skirt and the overcoat was largely composed of small, white pieces of what looked like scales.

“Kaizar! Good morning!” Slizer announced to me, “I saw you walking by a few times and thought that maybe you were ignoring me.”

“No,” I replied quickly, “I just wasn’t expecting you to look so different from last night.”

Sulpher smiled pleasantly and presented me with the package in her hands, “I brought you a present,” she said shyly. Evidently Slizer wanted to know what was in it more than I did, because he grabbed the paper in his teeth and yanked it off. Inside was a full set of clothes complete with an exquisite helmet.

“This is what I like to do on my spare time,” Sulpher told me, “On an island many miles away there used to live a huge dragon called the Screaming Death. He had almost impenetrable scales, every few years I go over there and collect as many shed scales as I can and then make these clothes which function like really comfortable suits of armor.” Sulpher waved her hand over her clothes and the outfit in my hands.

“Honestly,” Sulpher continued, “The clothes you are wearing right now are terrible!”

“Since when did you become a fashion expert?” I asked teasingly.

“Since last night, obviously,” Sulpher said while rolling her eyes, “The helmet is interesting because I made it with my father to look like the face of the great Bewilderbeast!”

Sure enough, the helmet *did* look like the head of a Bewilderbeast (according to the many drawings that Dad had insisted I look at). The main section of the helmet was white made out of large sections of Screaming Death scales as well as some sea-sponge inside the helmet for



extra comfort. Outside were two horns, but they came out in front and wrapped around. When I put it on, I genuinely felt like a Bewilderbeast.

“Raugh!” I said for Sulpher’s benefit.

“Roar!” Slizer replied, jealous that he wasn’t the only one that growled now.

“Thanks, Sulpher, is there something I could have for breakfast?”

“Yep, I packed a little breakfast for you in this pouch so you can eat as we walk,” Sulpher told me while handing it to me.

“I decided we should go down to the beach, because there are always some good findings after big storms like last night. You game after you put on your new outfit?”

“Sure.” The outfit was surprisingly comfortable and so much better than my old clothes that smelled faintly of salty seaweed.

As I contentedly munched on a berry biscuit, Sulpher led me away from the village and along a small trail that circled down from the village and back to the beach that I had barely made it to last night.

“So,” Sulpher said, “How old are you?”

“I’m eighteen, but I literally just had my birthday last fall.”

“Wow! I’m eighteen too, but my birthday is in the spring.”

“Okay,” I replied, trying furiously to come up with something to talk about. As we rounded a thick growth of evergreens, I saw the beautiful morning sunrise. To my right, the sunlight glistened off Sulpher’s metal hammer.

“Are hammers your favorite weapon?”

“Absolutely, although most of my tribe uses swords as you saw. My dad introduced me to a hammer when I was really young, and I have really fallen in love with them – they pack a mighty punch!”

“I’ve never really used one myself, but they certainly look dangerous!”

“Check this out!” Sulpher said, then slipped her hammer off her back and slammed it into a small pine tree to my left. The pine tree cracked immediately and split in two.

“Holy yak!” I said, “You’re strong!”

“Yeah, you don’t want to underestimate me,” she replied, smiling.

When we reached the beach, I could see that it was covered with various objects that had been washed ashore from the storm of the previous night. Slizer went over to investigate a bunch of seaweed and Sulpher began combing the ground for various shells.

“Do you make shell necklaces?” I asked.

“No, but I like to make decorative ‘blankets’ of shells and hang them up during holidays. It’s a lot of fun! *And* – OWE!” she cried. Sulpher pulled her hand back from a small pile of sand she had reached into and sucked her index finger, “*What’s* in there?!”

I carefully brushed away the sand and found the tip of a metal handle – a handle that I instantly recognized.

“My Odin’s Storm!” I cried. I yanked it out of the sand, and carefully turned it over in my hands. Aside from it being rather slimy and grimy, it didn’t look any worse for the wear.

“Woah, now *that’s* cool looking!” Sulpher exclaimed.

“Of course I’ll have to make a new back holder for it to replace the one I lost in the ocean, but that won’t be too hard,” I mumbled to myself.



"I've never seen anything like that. Did you make it yourself?"

"Yep," I replied proudly, "Although I did have some help from my dad." Sulpher came forward to check it out.

"It looks light, but a little weak," she commented.

"Try it!" I told her, striking a defensive posture. Sulpher whipped out her hammer and swung it full force at my Odin's Storm. Not only did I catch her hammer with it, but I was able to push the hammer down towards the ground.

"Woah!" Sulpher replied as she relinquished and slung her hammer onto her back again, "What kind of metal is that?"

"It's called 'Gronckle Iron'," I told her, "Light – but super strong!"

At that point, Slizer padded up to us and emptied a bunch of pretty shells in front of Sulpher.

"Wow! He likes you," I told Sulpher.

"You're a good little boy," Sulpher said and scratched Slizer on his neck. Slizer growled with pleasure and flopped onto his back.

"Well, let's go over to the other beach and see if there is anything else," Sulpher told me.

We walked back into the forest and turned due east. Just as we were getting close to the beach, I smelled smoke, and Slizer growled a warning. I stuck my arm out in front and grabbed Sulpher's arm.

"Shh, someone is here," I whispered. We dropped to the ground and slowly crested the hill. Down below us at the beach was a smoldering fire.

"Someone has been here recently, and it wasn't a Wing Maiden," Sulpher said quietly, "All of us are way more responsible than that." She motioned to the fire that was still smoldering and a collection of tin cans lying about.

"Perhaps, we can follow their footprints," I responded. Slizer, Sulpher, and I stealthily ran down to the beach. While Slizer kept watch (or listened actually) I carefully investigated the fire, and Sulpher tried to trace the footprints. Judging from the heat of the fire, it had been doused not more than ten minutes ago. Sulpher meanwhile traced a pair of footprints close to the water's edge where something was glinting in the sunlight.

"Hmm," I mumbled to myself as I moved on to study the footprints nearby, "Deep soles, irregular prints – must be at least three War Lord goons heading roughly in the direction of the village."

"Hey Kaizar!" Sulpher yelled over to me, "Look at this funny shield!"

Sulpher had pulled a round shield out of the sand near the ocean and showed it to me.

"Nice," I said, still distracted with the footprints.

"It looks like it's made of Gronckle Iron too!" she yelled to me, slipping it onto her arm. That's when I suddenly realized whose shield that might be.

"There are a few funny levers here on the back," she said.

"Wait! DON'T PULL THOSE!" I yelled, but a little too late. The shield's front part opened and shot out a small, metal grappling hook. I ducked just in time as it soared over my head and wrapped around an elm tree's branch. Then, the shield reeled in. With a scream, Sulpher was yanked into the air and slung over the branch.

"Ahhhhh – oof, ohhh." I quickly ran over to see if she was okay.

"You okay? That's actually my shield. It was Hiccup's old one and has a whole lot of hidden functionality," I yelled up to her.



“Tell me about it,” she groaned.

That’s when three War Lord goons emerged from the forest and charged me. I guess they had heard Sulpher and I talking (they couldn’t have missed Sulpher’s scream) and come back to their campsite. I happened to be the unlucky person that they saw (Sulpher was so far up in the Elm tree that they didn’t see her). Slizer, who was a few paces away sniffing in some bush, turned around and disappeared into the forest.

The goons quickly bore down upon me; the one in front wielding a short-sword. He made it to me, but the others didn’t. Sulpher swooped down from the tree and hit one of the goons head on with her hammer. Then, Slizer shot out of the forest and paralyzed the second guy in the legs, so that he tripped and face-planted into the ground. My goon poked at me with his sword, but I dodged it and brought down my Odin’s Storm on top of his sword – cutting it clean in two. Then, with my backswing, I knocked him out.

“Wow! That was a lot of fun!” Sulpher exclaimed. She then pulled out a small horn she had on her belt and blew it. For being a small horn, it certainly was loud.

“HOORRREEEE!”

“That’s just my distress horn,” Sulpher told me, “Though we aren’t in distress, I don’t want to carry all these guys back to the village.”

“Yeah,” I agree, “They stink!” They did, in fact, stink. Even Slizer wouldn’t get too near them. I guess they didn’t shower too much?

Within five minutes, a dozen or so wing maidens burst out of the dense scrub brush of the forest and descended on the unconscious War Lord goons.

“You guys okay?” the older one asked us when they realized we weren’t in distress.

“Yeah, would you mind dealing with these thugs, Carla?” Sulpher addressed the older one.

“Yeahhh, do you know how they got-” Carla was interrupted by Snotlout who burst through the brush like an elephant and leapt over to us with a gigantic bound.

“Wait,” he said when he realized that we were not in distress, “that’s all of them?”

We all nodded our heads.

“Oh, come on,” Snotlout whined, “I wanted to participate too. What rotten luck.”

“I’m not sure if I would use the word ‘lucky’ for us,” I replied.

Snotlout guffawed, “You’re just modest.” Then, he shrugged and continued, “I sent a message off to your island that you’re okay and are traveling onwards.”

“How? Berserker Island is crawling with War Lord Goons, and my tribes won’t know your people.”

“Trust me, boy. I’ve got my methods!” Snotlout replied confidently.

“Thanks Snotlout. I owe you one,” I replied gratefully, “Let me know if your ‘method’ finds out if we still have a hold on our island, okay?”

“You bet! Don’t worry, though; if your tribe is as skilled as Heather, Dagur, and Mala is – they’ll be fine,” Snotlout told me, “By the way, I appreciate you protecting my daughter.”

This caused me to blush. “Oh, it really wasn’t anything – she could have beaten them all herself.”

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That night at dinner, Snotlout brought up the next day’s trip.



"Well, Kaizar, we've got the boat ready to go. We'll ship you off at daybreak – sharp," he told me.

"Dad," Sulpher interrupted, "Can I go too?"

"Absolutely not," Snotlout told her, "We need you here."

"For what?!" Sulpher whined, "I'm tired of being bored here – I've investigated every nook and cranny of this place."

"Well, umm, I guess, I need you to..." Snotlout couldn't seem to come up with anything, so Minden chimed in.

"Honey, let her go. It'll be good for her to experience the real world. She's almost an adult now," Minden said, putting her hand on Snotlout's shoulder. This pretty much melted Snotlout.

"Alright," he huffed, "But make it quick and stay out of trouble!"

"As quick and as safe as an entire trip to New Berk and back will take," Sulpher giggled in my ear.

I rolled my eyes.

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The next morning, Slizer and I were up even earlier than the day before and ate a big breakfast with Snotlout's family at his house.

"Kaizar, I want to introduce to you Laurel," Snotlout announced to me, waving his hand toward a Wing Maiden sitting at the table with us. Laurel nodded her head at me. She appeared to be a good ten years younger than most of the other wing maidens, so I figured she must be a semi-new recruit.

"Laurel is our best sailor and navigator!" Snotlout continued.

"I know," Sulpher reminded her dad, "Thanks for helping Laurel! This is going to be lots of fun!"

"BUT keep them out of trouble!" Snotlout commanded Laurel, who nodded her head in approval. I guess Laurel wasn't a big talker.

Snotlout polished off his hunk of brown bread with a large cup of citrus water and stood up.

"Well, let's get down to the shore. The sun only shines part of the day, ya' know!"

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When we finally made it to the beach, I saw our ship. It was relatively small, but had several sails and two large masts. It appeared to be a ship made for speed.

"Be safe, Sulpher," Snotlout sternly told her, coming over to us.

"Yeah Dad, I will," she replied – winking at me.

Snotlout then turned to me, "I've enjoyed your company; perhaps I'll be able to see old Fishface again someday." Snotlout gazed off into the horizon, probably thinking of all the fun adventures he had with his group from Old Berk. "Stay safe, and keep care of Slizer!"

"Will do, sir. Thanks for your hospitality," I told him.

"Let's go. We have a long way to go!" Laurel reminded us all. With that, she cranked up the anchor and unfurled the sails. The collection of Wing Maidens on the beach all waved goodbye. However, Atali just stared after us; like she realized something weird was going on – but I didn't have Atali's ability to read a situation. If I did have it, I might have done things a bit differently...

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Thanks to a nice breeze and a whole lot of sails, we were already making good time.



"This is SO cool!" Sulpher came up from behind me and leaned on the railing, "We get to spend an entire month together on this adventure!"

"Don't get your hopes up, this could be dangerous," I reminded her.

Then, just like that, things got dangerous. The first warning was when I heard Slizer from below let out a roar right before I heard the telltale noise of an arrow; then Slizer fell silent. Slizer had just gone down below deck a minute ago, and neither Sulpher nor I had gone below deck since we left shore.

Sulpher gave me a quizzical stare, but I raced across the deck and was about to jump down through the deck's trap door when someone came up out of it. It wasn't Laurel – it was Lemmirg.

"Oh my goodness! Lemmirg! What are you doing here?!" I exclaimed, completely shocked. Lemmirg was carrying his cross bow and leveled it at me.

"You're going to Scout Island," he said fiercely.

"What?" This really was confusing me. *Why was he here? Why was he pointing his crossbow at me? What happened to Slizer? Where was Laurel?*

"You didn't know?" he asked me while climbing out of the lower deck.

"I'm the spy, Kaizar. I didn't have to rescue you from the sinking ship. I could have left you to rot because I had the key and wasn't the one that the War Lords wanted. In fact, I am higher ranked than the two-cent fools on the ship. I'm Grimmel's son!" he yelled at me, as if I knew who Grimmel was.

I saw Sulpher sneaking up behind him, so I kept talking to him.

"Who's Grimmel?" I asked.

"You don't know! Oh brother," he replied, slapping his hand onto his forehead, "I'm very interested in your little dragon friend. He's going to be of great help to me!"

"Did you hurt him?!" I yelled angrily.

"No, just knocked him out. Now if you don't mind putting down your weapon, I would like to bind you up," Lemmirg said.

Sulpher swung her hammer straight at Lemmirg's head. At the last minute, Lemmirg saw my eyes flicker and tried to dodge out of the way, but he was only partially successful. Sulpher's hammer met its target's helmet and hit it with a sickening crunch. Lemmirg collapsed onto the deck and his crossbow fell to the deck and bounced toward me. Scooping it up, I quickly bent down to see if Lemmirg was alive.

"Don't touch him!" Laurel yelled at me.

I looked up to see Laurel with her sword at Sulpher's throat. "One false move, and you won't see your girlfriend ever again!"

Sulpher's face blushed, but she whispered to me, "It's okay, I'll be fine!"

However, I couldn't do it. I didn't want Sulpher to be hurt because of me, and I knew Slizer wouldn't want that either.

"Drop your weapon and climb below deck!" Laurel commanded me.

"How could you do this Laurel! You were supposed to help us; not kidnap us!" I exclaimed.

"Turns out that *other* tribes realize I have more potential than as a sailor. When your friend Lemmirg here offered me a nice position in his tribe, I couldn't resist. It's a whole lot better than being stuck on your island!" Laurel said – shaking Sulpher a little.



Sulpher grimaced, “But my dad *trusted* you!”

“Well, I guess he’s wrong – as he is with most things!” Laurel replied, “Now get moving!”

I reluctantly tossed my Odin’s Storm and Lemmirg’s crossbow onto the ground and climbed down into the hold. Laurel then drove her knee into Sulpher’s back and shoved her roughly in behind me. Sulpher consequently flattened me while I was climbing down, and we both hit the floor.

Laurel locked the trap door behind us.

“I’m so sorry, Kaizar,” Sulpher said as she crawled off me. “I didn’t see Laurel behind me,” she added, “and you were willing to get recaptured for me.”

Weirdly enough, this was the second time I had been captured in the last week.

“Well, Sulpher, you wanted some excitement, and you sure got it! The best we can do is wait and watch for a chance to make a break for it.”

“I’ll show Laurel that she can’t hurt me!” Sulpher said, anger starting to overcome her.

Meanwhile, I crawled over to where I thought I Slizer was. He was lying in the corner – sound asleep and with an ugly knockout-dart in his leg. I quickly pulled it out, and stared at it thoughtfully.

“Has Laurel been working for the War Lords for a long time?” I asked Sulpher.

“I don’t think so; she must have just met Lemmirg when he arrived on the island with the other War Lord goons,” Sulpher reasoned, “She’s always been very dedicated to the Wing Maiden cause!”

“Well, this is just great. My best friend who I thought was dead turns out to be a mortal enemy!”

I said, “I don’t know if I preferred him dead!”

Sulpher rummaged around and found a canteen of water and a cloth that she soaked. She then carefully washed Slizer’s wound and wiped his face.

“He’ll be fine,” she assured me. Mom taught me a little about doctoring.

That’s when I had an idea – and I was sure it would play a part in our escape.

“Laurel forgot to take my shield!” I excitedly whispered to her. I slipped Hiccup’s shield off my back and transformed it into a crossbow. Then, I fitted the knockout dart into it.

“Bed-time anyone?” I quietly asked her.

Sulpher smiled.

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The next week was the most boring week of my entire life. I realized that although my life on Berserker Island had been full of moments of peril, I infinitely preferred them over complete boredom. Laurel and Lemmirg never opened the trap door; they just left us below, which was okay in the respect that there was plenty of food and water, but it was also cramped and dark and going to the bathroom was... difficult.... I played some word games with Sulpher, and we played with Slizer who woke up eventually, but mostly we just sat.... and sat.

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“They’re down below?” a gruff voice asked from above.

“Yep, them and the two-legged lizard,” replied Lemmirg’s slightly muffled voice.

“Get your nets, bolas, and arrows ready,” Lemmirg said, “That dragon is one fast critter!”

I could hear a lot of tramping feet on the deck above.



“Let’s get ready!” Sulpher whispered to me. I nodded my head; then got in position with my crossbow and knockout dart. I positioned myself so that I could hit whoever first opened the trap door. Then, Slizer climbed part way up the small ladder so that he could perpetually strike those up above. Sulpher, on the other hand, came up with a dangerous idea to light the boat on fire. Using a pair of flint and magnesium stones, she lit some torches and shoved them into the floorboards of the main deck. Then, she grabbed a large piece of metal that we had worked on shaping the entire trip long and shoved it against the sides of the boat’s hull so that it cut us off from the fire. The fire quickly spread, and we could smell the smoke faintly. Then, the guys started to open the trap door.

“Hey, uh, do you smell smoke?” one thug asked.

“Yeah, and I hear it too,” replied Lemmirg, puzzled.

“Over here!” another yelled from farther away – it’s right under the floorboards.

“It’s going to burn the dragon!” the first, rough voice said, “Quick, get them out!”

Thus, the thugs opened the trap door – but way too hastily. One was quickly plugged by a knockout dart, while the other two were immobilized by Slizer’s tail. Sulpher, who grabbed onto Slizer’s body was lifted straight out of the trap door and landed on the deck as Slizer shot out of the trap door. I stuck my shield outside of the trap door first; then got out myself.

Both Lemmirg and an older looking man were on the other side of the boat – looking in amazement at us emerging. Lemmirg aimed his crossbow at Slizer, but I launched a pair of bolas from my shield faster and pinioned Lemmirg’s arms together – causing his crossbow to fall to the ground harmlessly. The older man came at me with his axe, but Slizer shot by and stung the guy in the arm.

“OWE!” he yelled, grabbing his arm. Sulpher, who had found her hammer in a crate, swept the guy off the deck in one swing. Lemmirg, meanwhile, had been put off balance by the flying bolas and stumbled off the deck, plunging into the cold water below. As we had discussed, I leapt onto Slizer and shot off the boat. We fairly flew across the wooden dock and onto the War Lords’ Scout Island – otherwise known as Berk by older Berserkers. The ramp up to the main village of Berk was incredibly long and steep, but Slizer was very sure-footed and we made good time (paralyzing unsuspecting goons the whole way up). With a mighty leap, Slizer blasted off the last of the dock ramps and into the main town. Unfortunately, we landed right in front of a large group of soldiers that were having a meeting (probably before leaving to Berserker Island). All of them immediately recognized the particular dragon standing there.

“Go!” I yelled to Slizer, and we cut through the town bouncing over fences and tearing across a long bridge.

“Get those two!” the soldiers all yelled to each other. With “feet on fire,” Slizer tore past several large catapults, a tall watch tower – then we ran into a tall cliff with one cave off to the right.

“Other way!” I yelled to Slizer, but when we turned around, we saw that the bridge that we had just crossed was full of soldiers coming our way.

“Let’s hope this cave is comfortable,” I mumbled to Slizer. I slipped off him, and we disappeared into the cave.

The cave was actually well-lit, and we made our way through the damp tunnel fairly quickly. At the end of the entrance tunnel was just one spacious room separated in three sections. On the left, was a large cell with strong, iron bars reaching from the floor to the ceiling. The right was



also a large cell, but it had something inside of it. Inside, lying on the ground was a glowing dragon, with a thick, pointed head and long, beautiful wings. I remembered one that looked like that in my dad's Dragon Book – it was called a...a... Flightmare!

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Slizer and I waited in agonizing silence at the entrance to the room – listening to our pursuers outside.

"They're in there," one of the guys said, "You four – go and fetch him out."

There was a trampling of feet, and four War Lord goons armed with axes came down the tunnel. I quickly ran towards them, pleading desperately, "Help us, please! The flightmare is loose and bit my arm." Slizer wasn't sure what I was saying, but the goons thought I was telling the truth and stopped when they reached me.

"Is it completely free from its chains?" one of them asked anxiously.

"I don't think so. If we attack it at once, we can probably subdue it!" I finished.

With that, the soldiers slowly crept forward, and I fell in line behind (which was a very bad mistake on their part). I quickly slammed two in the head with my weapon, and Slizer easily took out the other two, knocking them to the ground.

"Got 'em?" a voice from the other end of the tunnel asked.

"Nope, we got them! The Flightmare is loose and on *our* side!" I yelled back out – lying of course. There was silence for a minute and a bunch of rapid whispering. Then, one of them yelled back at me, "If you don't surrender yourselves, we'll – oof!" A piercing war cry reached my ears, and I recognized the voice – it was Sulpher.

"Get them boy!" I yelled to Slizer as I ran outside to provide backup.

Outside was a large assortment of men, who were all trying to get at Sulpher, but just trampling each other in the process. Slizer had an easy time of running along all their backs and paralyzing the majority of them. Two guys noticed me and charged me, but I slammed one in the face with my shield and parried the other guy's sword with my Odin's Storm. Then, I shoved my weapon forward to throw him off balance while blocking his chop. With a backhand slice and leg kick, I sent both of them down. Meanwhile, Sulpher was handing out concussions to the other goons and crushing their weapons like they were toothpicks.

"Hi-Ya!" she yelled while knocking a soldier on the head. Slizer protected her back, with some perfect stings to goons' faces. Then, just as I finished off another beefy goon, I saw, coming up the bridge, a whole armada of soldiers with a massive fire-arrow launching catapult.

"Sulpher! Get a boat ready and break me out later tonight. I'll try to stay here and hold these guys off!" I yelled to her. Sulpher looked at me with concern in her eye, but willingly jumped on Slizer and took off around the mountain.

Working fast, I laid my Odin's Storm on the ground and positioned myself against the rock face, my shield ready. I watched as the arrow catapult was bent back and released. A hail of arrows cascaded all around me, but I held tight to the shield and wasn't hit. As soon as the last arrow bounced off my shield, I picked it up and slung it into my transformed crossbow. Aiming carefully, I fired; then loaded and fired again. This enabled me to pick off a few of the War Lord soldiers, but it wasn't enough to take them all out as they charged me. Plus, I wasn't a very good shot.



When the closest goons were about ten paces from me, I picked back up my Odin's Storm and advanced on them. Lunging in and out, I swung my weapon about – hitting a soldier with every motion. Backswing, upper hand, chop, sling, arc-slice: I used every possible trick I had ever learned while planting my shield in every available face. When I was straight in the middle of the chaos, I crouched low and spun around – my Odin's Storm outstretched. After cutting off many of them at the knees, I ran towards the bridge. Some of the unhurt goons yelled and screamed at me from behind, which only helped push me to run faster. Halfway across the bridge, a massive shadow loomed over me. I looked up to see a red and black dragon soar overhead and land straight in my path. Its evil eyes squinted at me, and it lowered its sharp, white horns at me. On top, was none other than Lemmirg.

"Where'd you get *that*?" I asked Lemmirg, crouching into a defensive position.

"Wouldn't you like to know!" he screamed at me – anger overcoming his entire face. With that, his dragon launched a stream of thick, green goo at my head. Quickly raising my shield up, I caught the stream which cascaded off the shield and dripped to the bridge. Instantly, there was a fizzing noise and the bridge's boards started dissolving. Whatever that green goo was, it was a strong acid.

The dragon launched another stream of goo at me, which I also caught with my shield. But the added acid ate through the wooden planks of the bridge and suddenly, I felt the boards beneath me give way. Jumping quickly, I managed to grab hold onto the other side of the bridge and swing myself back up.

"Well hello there, little devil!" boomed a voice from above me.



Chapter 7: Pranked

"Where is Sulpher!?" Lemmirg yelled at me from the other side of the bars.

"I don't know! She just ran off and left me in the dust," I partially lied back.

"We tracked down Slizer," Lemmirg continued waving his hand and Slizer who was across the way in the Flightmare's cage, "But Sulpher is still eluding us." I shook my head.

"Look, Kaizar. We don't want to hurt you or her, so make it easy on yourself and tell me where she is."

"Lemmirg, I honestly don't know where she is. She literally could be *anywhere!*" I replied honestly this time.

"Hmmpf, well if we find her," Lemmirg angrily growled at me, "We're torturing you *both!*"

"Whatever," I replied as Lemmirg marched out of the room with some soldiers. Across the room, Slizer was nuzzling the flightmare. He had taken an immediate liking to her.

When the flightmare whimpered and flopped onto its side, Slizer stood up and paced about anxiously. It was very obvious to me that the flightmare was very sick.

Meanwhile, I inspected the bars of my cage and hoped that Sulpher would be able to break me out. However, I was also sure that this cave would be well guarded. On one side of the huge segment of bars blocking me off from the main cave was a small door with the key lock.

Later that night, a War Lord goon sauntered into the cave to check on me. When he circled around by Slizer's cage, I yelled, "Sting him!"

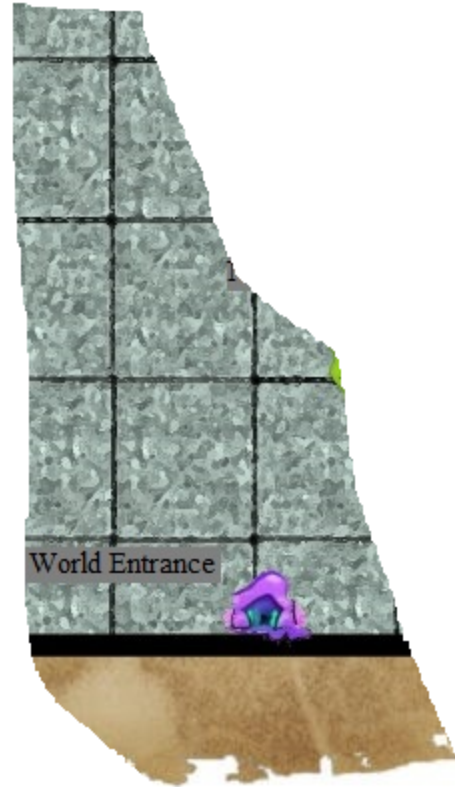
Quick as a flash, Slizer slapped his tail between the bars and shoved his spiky tail into the soldier's bare arm. The man screamed with pain; then, went rigid and fell to the floor.

"Can you get the key?" I asked Slizer. Slizer looked at me and tried to fit his head through the bars, but he was just a little too big.

"Rats," I said – fully aware of what would happen to me should another soldier arrive. A tense hour later, I heard footsteps approaching – and since they were pretty heavy pounding, I assumed that another War Lord goon was approaching. Thus, I put into action my plan B which was simply to lie sprawled out on the floor of my cell.

I listened – trying to calm my breathing as the person entered the main cave. I waited for the gasp and outright rage when the goon saw his fellow soldier on the floor. Instead, I heard the click of a key turning in a lock. I opened my eyes slightly and saw Lemmirg opening my cell.

"You can stop pretending to be unconscious, Kaizar," Lemmirg told me.





"What are you doing?" I said, standing up.

"Letting you loose - better make a run for it!"

"But you hate me!" I told him.

"Ha! That's what I wanted you and everyone to think. I was spying for the War Lords so that I could eventually spy for you guys," Lemmirg replied.

"Wait, so you did spy for them?" I said, still angry at him.

"How else could I convince the War Lord generals that I was them? I'm the son of one of the men that they worked with, but after they didn't treat my mom and I respectfully, I decided to work against them. The best way I saw was to work for their enemies."

"I'm still confused," I said.

Lemmirg gave me a push to the front of the cave and unlocked Slizer's cell.

"Do you think that can find a way to help this nightmare?" Lemmirg called over to me, when his eyes fell upon the nightmare.

"I don't know anything about nightmares, but maybe I can find someone who does."

"The way these goons treat their dragons is just despicable!" Lemmirg mumbled.

"Come on, Slizer. We can come back for her later," I told him. Reluctantly, Slizer exited the cell and crept after me down the tunnel.

"Stay safe!" I said to Lemmirg.

"You know I will!"

Before Lemmirg could change his mind, Slizer and I rushed down the tunnel and to the cave entrance.

At the entrance to the cave, with their backs to us, were three soldiers talking loudly to each other about the latest Maces and Talons contest hosted at the Whispering Tree Tribe's Island. I turned to Slizer and motioned to the goons with my Odin's Storm. Then, we attacked. I swiped my Odin's Storm along their helmets while Slizer stung them all in the back. Cautiously, we peered outside the tunnel and adjusted our eyes to the darkness. Just when I could see the path back down into the main village, my eyes picked up some motion to the right – but Slizer didn't even growl.

"Oh, come on!" Sulpher whispered, when she had crept over. "You didn't leave any for me!"

"Whoops! My mistake," I joked. Sulpher punched me in the arm.

"Show off," she said, rolling her eyes, "Well, I got a small boat ready by the docks that we can use. Let's get going!"

Just then Lemmirg exited the cave.

"Wow you guys certainly are fast!" Lemmirg told me, "Safe travels!"

Sulpher stared at him with her mouth wide open, but I shoved her towards the docks.

"I'll explain later," I told her.

Slizer, Sulpher, and I stealthily made our way back to the ship. For being a war-centered island, they certainly didn't have a lot of guards on duty at night as we found out (and I suspected that Lemmirg had something to do with reduced number as well).

As we made our way to the ship, making sure to keep to the shadows, Sulpher told me of what she had been up to for the past few hours.

"Slizer and I got back to the docks, but a soldier spotted us and got a whole troop of soldiers to follow us. Slizer protected me, but got captured when they tied him up with bolas. However, I



hid and, when the soldiers left with their 'prize,' I hunted around for a small, fast craft. The one I got even has a portable spear launcher!" Sulpher excitedly told me as we approached the docks.

As we got closer to the ship, I noticed it was very much like the Wing Maiden boat, but with some iron plating and a large spear launcher on the deck.

"Do you know which direction we need to head to reach Outcast Island?" I asked.

"Well, Laurel was supposed to know that. But since I didn't really want to ask her, what with her betraying us and all, I decided to check out the map that I found in the cabin over there,"

Sulpher replied, pointing to the small, covered portion of our boat, "If you man the rudder, I can get the sails up."

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Due to a good wind and the cover of darkness, we made it to Outcast Island in only eight hours – in the early morning hours of the next day.

The island was pretty much just rock, and it seemed to be barren of life.

"Uh, where's everyone?" I asked, slightly confused. Slizer sniffed the air, but didn't react.

"I don't know!" Sulpher replied, "I've never been here before!"

When the boat hit the shore, we jumped out and walked up the beach.

"So you're sure that Lemmirg is actually with us?" Sulpher told me as well followed a faint trail through the rocky ground.

"That's what he said at least. It just seems strange that he would be so bad to us and be good the next minute," I replied.

Sulpher nodded, "We'll just have to be extra careful around him from now on."

"Let's go this way," I said, noticing another more obvious trail on the ground.

We started making our way up the little trail as it curved farther and farther up into the hunk of rock that the map said was Outcast Island.

"So, supposedly a Tuffnut and Ruffnut live here?" I asked Sulpher.

"Yep! They're pretty funny, but seem -," Sulpher began.

"Ki-Yi-Yo!" a voice from above chattered. With a swoosh, an object fell through the air and hit the ground a few feet in front of us – wiping out terribly.

"Oof... Who goes there?" the man in front of us asked. He was tall and wiry with a long blonde beard.

"Hey, uh, you wouldn't happen to know someone named-," I began.

"Tuffnut! It's me – Sulpher!"

"Oh, yeah! Whatcha doing here?" Tuffnut responded – puzzled.

Sulpher put her finger to her lips, covertly looked around, and whispered, "We're looking for directions to Hiccup!"

"Ohhh," Tuffnut bellowed – destroying all resemblance of secrecy, "Ya mean the skinny viking with the squeaky voice and the one leg. Yeah, I know that guy."

"That kid can wait," Tuffnut continued, "As for you guys, you need to come try out my *new* boar-pit!" Sulpher clapped her hand onto her forehead.

"Uh, should I be worried?" I whispered over to her. Before she could answer, the rock nearest me moved.



“Don’t mind my guys,” Tuffnut told us nonchalantly from in front of us, “They just like their camouflage!”

Sure enough, outcasts emerged from everywhere – all of them dressed to the hilt in rock-coloring and scrub brush. Several of them carried huge maces.

“Uh, boss,” one of the outcasts asked, “What’re we supposed to do with the lizard.”

“The what?” Tuffnut asked, turning around. I pointed to Slizer who was looking with interest at all the camouflaged men.

“Oh, that’s just a speed stinger... AH! Speed stinger!” Tuffnut finally realized, “RUN!!!”

Tuffnut ran away as fast as he could but smashed into the sides of a rock cliff and wiped out again.

“Hey, it’s just Slizer. He’s really nice,” I quickly added.

“Wait, he’s trained?” Tuffnut said, getting up. I nodded my head.

“Oh ho, cool! Okay, I have this great idea, if we could milk him for his venom, then we could prank Ruffnut by putting it in her food and then...”

“I forgot to tell you,” Sulpher said to me, “The twins *love* pranking each other.”

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The actual living quarters on Outcast Island were hidden deep inside the center of the island in a massive array of tunnels and caves.

“This is pretty cool,” I admitted to Tuffnut as we navigated through a tunnel lined with torches,

“Did you guys make all these by yourselves?”

“Nah, they were made by the chief and guys before me – the great Alvin the Treacherous and his outcasts. Outcasts never get very old and aren’t very smart, so when Alvin died, the outcasts asked me to be their leader. How could I refuse? They offered me a massive boar pit!” After another few twists and turns, we finally emerged into a large section of cave where dozens of people were laughing, eating, or standing around in front of a huge bonfire and statue of a massive man with an ornate helmet (who I assumed was Alvin the Treacherous).

“Ruffnut!” Tuffnut roared across the room, “We got visitors!”

A middle-aged lady about my father’s and Snotlout’s age came over to us. She had a piranha on her chin which an older girl was trying to pull off. However, the girl wasn’t opening the jaws; she was just pulling, which proved to be incredibly painful on Ruffnut’s part and not very effective.

“Did you do this!?” Ruffnut accused Tuffnut, pointing to the fish on her head.

“Nah, that was Puffnut,” Tuffnut told her, “But she did a good job!”

“There’ll be repercussions for this, you know,” Ruffnut barked at Tuffnut.

“You don’t even know what repercussions are!” Tuffnut snapped back.

“Uh, yeah, it’s an unintended consequence occurring some time after an event or action, especially an unwelcome one,” she said.

“Snap!” The girl managed to pull the piranha off Ruffnut.

“Thanks dear,” Ruffnut told her.

“This is Nuffnut,” Tuffnut told me and Sulpher, pointing to the girl, “She just had her 19th birthday. And her,” Tuffnut continued pointing to another girl by the fire who was lighting an unsuspecting outcast’s boots on fire, “Is Puffnut!”

“Wait, so is Puffnut your daughter?” Sulpher asked.



"Yep! And Nuffnut is hers," Tuffnut told us while pointing at Ruffnut, "But enough of the introductions, let's have some dinner, and I'll hear your story!"

"Wait," Tuffnut said in mid stride, "Your mom isn't with you, is she?"

"Uh, no?" I said, confused.

"Rats, her cooking is SO much better than anything we come up with here. Oh well," Tuffnut said, shrugging his shoulders.

The food did prove to be rather funny tasting and also looked pretty disgusting, but I was too polite to say anything, and the other outcasts didn't seem to care.

"Well," I began, "It all started when I tried to make my way through Bewilderbeast Mountain."

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"Well, I never saw *that* coming," Tuffnut declared, "Heather married old Fishlegs."

"Actually," Ruffnut commented, "*I* saw that coming."

"In fact," Tuffnut continued as if Ruffnut hadn't said anything, "do you remember when we first met Heather and I said that I could bump you off? Wasn't that so hilarious!"

"No!" Ruffnut replied sharply, "Heather couldn't ride a Zippleback to save her life!"

"True," Tuffnut conceded – finally responding to Ruffnut, "And her skull isn't as strong."

I pasted on the biggest smile I could to make my hosts feel good, but I really was getting tired of their constant, almost-nonsensical banter. As if on cue, a large, muscular man swaggered into the cave. As opposed to the short, bulky, bearded outcasts; this man was tall and actually looked like he had a decent IQ.

"I have returned!" he declared, "And have new intel on the War Lords' men!" He strode over to the table where Tuffnut, Ruffnut, Puffnut, Nuffnut, Sulpher, and I were eating and noticed Sulpher and I.

"And who may you be, my friends?" he asked, holding out his hand. Sulpher and I shook it in turn.

"I'm Kaizar Ingerman, and this is Sulpher Jorgenson," I told him.

"And *I*," the man announced loudly as if his name was the only one that mattered, "am the great Eret son of Eret – the finest dragon trapper and trainer the world has ever seen!"

"Um, there are no dragons anymore," Sulpher commented.

"Oh, well, yes – well, I was the best dragon trapper and trainer the world ever saw!" Eret finished.

"Ha!" Tuffnut cut in, "You didn't stand a fig up to Hiccup!"

"Well, yes, but I was close!" Eret quickly said, trying to save face.

"And Fishlegs was better – so was Heather; even Snotlout!" Tuffnut continued while ticking off names on his fingers.

"Well, my intel about the War Lords revealed a rare turn of events," Eret began – trying to maneuver away from Tuffnut's argument, "They appear to be shipping off a large number of their men somewhere to the northeast. They actually don't have a lot of guys there at the moment!"

"Dad," Nuffnut interrupted Eret, "Puffnut pranked Mom with a piranha!"

Before Eret could say anything, I spoke up, "Wait! You're married to Ruffnut?"

"That's right!" Eret said, "Why, I remember when I first met her that I didn't even like her, but..."



Eret kept on talking, but I zoned him out. All the characters and people that Dad had interacted with in his past were starting to turn up in my crazy adventure. How they were interconnected in this giant web of relationships was frankly astonishing. As I got to know and listen to each member, I could start piecing together a large portion of my dad's adventurous past, and, as it started to look, he had a whole lot of excitement and intrigue in it.

"Excuse me sir," a nearby outcast was saying to Tuffnut, "Your afternoon boar pit run is ready!"

"Alright!" Tuffnut yelled, "Let's go!"

"Well, I've got to go help set up a new scout tower on the southern part of the island," Eret quickly told us. He started walking off.

"Scared you're gonna get creamed again, Eret?" Tuffnut challenged him.

Eret froze in mid stride, sighed, and spun around, "You're on!"

Everyone at the table jumped up and started running to the left. This caused all the rest of the outcasts in the room to jump up from their tables and follow them.

"Come on!" Nuffnut said to me, grabbing me by the hand and pulling me down an adjoining tunnel.

"What's going on?!" I practically screamed over the horde of people running madly down the tunnel.

"To participate in the boar pit games of course!" Nuffnut said.

"Kaizar, wait up!" Sulpher yelled from somewhere behind me.

"Is she your girlfriend?" Nuffnut said, searching for Sulpher amid the mass of outcasts.

"Well, I wouldn't quite go that far," I told her. Suddenly, Sulpher and Puffnut knifed out of the crowd and ran into Nuffnut and me. Somewhere down the end of the tunnel a horn blew. If the shoving mass of outcasts around us wasn't bad before, it certainly was now. All four of us were shoved to the ground and trampled.

When the tunnel emptied out, we all sat up and rubbed our sore backs.

"I told you we should have just left these two behind!" Puffnut said to Nuffnut.

"Yeah, but I wanted them to participate with us. What with them being new and all," Nuffnut replied. Suddenly, a devilish grin spread across Puffnut's face, "Good idea! Come on guys!" Puffnut and Nuffnut took off running down the tunnel.

"Do you know what this is all about?" I asked Sulpher as we jogged after the two girls.

"Not really. All I know is that it involves wrestling greased boars and that it's dangerous," Sulpher replied.

Half a minute later, Sulpher and I emerged outside the massive networks of tunnels and into the blinding evening sun. In front of us was a huge, circular pit with various sharp objects and bludgeons littered about and a dozen or so big, fat, slick boars wandering around. All around the pit were flimsy, wooden benches in which hundreds of outcasts were sitting excitedly.

"How come most of the people here are males as opposed to your island?" I asked Sulpher as we made our way to the right where Puffnut and Nuffnut were.

"The island was originally inhabited by real outcasts, and they were 99% males. Now, the tribe consists of people in general so more females are arriving as you can see, but it is still in its early stages. It's sort of like a reverse Wing Maiden Island."

Tuffnut jogged over to us from a large, wooden platform and handed us some stereotypically outcast clothes.



“Put these on. You’re about to get *very* messy,” Tuffnut told us, pointing over to a few small shacks where we could change.

“Why do I have a bad feeling about this?” Sulpher mumbled to herself.

After choosing one of the nicer looking shacks, I changed my outfit. The outcast one was incredibly uncomfortable, but it also had some iron armor plating which I figured might come in handy. Outside, I met up with Sulpher who looked terribly funny in her new outfit, but I didn’t say anything.

When Sulpher and I arrived at the large platform that was protruding over the boar pit, Tuffnut waved us on. In addition to Sulpher and I, there was Tuffnut, Ruffnut, Eret, Nuffnut, and Puffnut.

“Welcome outcasts to the evening boar pit contest! We’re here with current champion Tuffnut Thorston hot off last night’s close victory. Will he keep his lead?” boomed a large outcast who was standing on a tall tower overlooking the boar pit grounds and talking into a massive bull horn like object.

“The rules are like normal,” the outcast continued, “Down below in the boar pit are seven large baskets corresponding to each of the contestants. Also included in the pit are twenty boars, one of which is the big, black boar. Each boar is worth one point except for the big black one worth five points. All they have to do is simply wrestle as many boars as possible into their basket. The contestant with the most points wins. Oh, and watch out for the bludgeons and mud!”

To the left, a bunch of outcasts, pulled up on a lever that opened a massive metal gate. From behind the gate a thick wall of mud spewed out and drenched everything in the pit.

“Tonight, for our three guests, are Sulpher Jorgenson, Kaizar Ingerman, and our very own Eret son of Eret! Are you ready!!!” screamed the overly excited announcer outcast.

“YES!” roared back Tuffnut, Ruffnut, Puffnut, and Nuffnut. Eret just looked over at Sulpher and I and said, “See what I deal with every day?”

“GO!!!” yelled the announcer.

To the left, some outcasts pushed down on another lever, but nothing happened. I was just about to ask Nuffnut what the lever does when I found out. Turns out, the lever activated the wooden platform that all of us contestants were standing on. The platform promptly dumped us straight into the pit.

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I came up spitting mud out of my mouth. In front of me, Tuffnut and Ruffnut were fighting over the big black boar. Next to me, Sulpher was just getting up.

“This is absurd!” Sulpher said, trying to stand up in the squelchy mud.

I had just gotten myself to stand up straight, when the big, black boar shot out of Tuffnut and Ruffnut’s grasp and hurtled towards Sulpher and I.

“Duck!” I yelled. But Sulpher was already ducking. The boar ended up flying past us and nailing Eret in the head.

“HEY!” he roared as Tuffnut snickered. To my right, Nuffnut had just succeeded in tossing a particularly greasy boar into his basket.

“Let’s work together,” I said to Sulpher who nodded her agreement. As a mob of six boars mobbed Ruffnut, Sulpher and I picked up a few bludgeons lying in the mud and attacked two boars nearby. I hit one of them square on the back, but it didn’t even flinch and, instead, lunged at me. I dodged and swung at it again – smacking it in the face as it jumped up at me. Sulpher,



meanwhile, was fending off a few other boars that were coming at her aggressively. One of them launched itself at her, but when Sulpher dodged it flew past and landed on a spiked mace. Squealing in pain, it stumbled away.

“Kaizar!” Sulpher yelled over to me as I was mobbed by a pack of boars and fell head first into the mud (I could hear the crowd cheer with excitement when I fell), “I’m going over to our baskets. You lead boars to me!”

I wasn’t sure what her plan was – as far as I was concerned this was a ludicrously hard game, but I did know how to attract the boars’ attention. With a wild war cry, I attacked boar after boar – swinging at them mercilessly. The boars, in turn, grew very angry and started chasing me.

“And Eret lands the black boar! That’s five points for him!” the announcer boomed.

I kept focused and, with a pack of at least eight boars bearing down upon me, I sprinted for the baskets, and consequently Sulpher. When I was practically upon her, I crouched down to the left. The boars behind me, seeing Sulpher, all jumped at her. However, Sulpher dodged them, so the boars kept sailing through the air and landed straight into Sulpher’s basket. That was the genius of Sulpher’s plan – let the boars put themselves into the baskets. At this clever plan, the crowd gave a roar of approval.

“Are you going to let any of them fall into mine?” I asked Sulpher. As the eighth boar flew past Sulpher’s head, she turned to me and smiled, “Nope! Tough luck Kaizar!” I groaned.

“And that leaves us with two boars!” the announcer told us, “We have five for Eret, five for Tuffnut, three for Ruffnut, two for Puffnut, two for Nuffnut, five for Sulpher, and zero for Kaizar.” Sulpher and I scanned the pit, looking for the last two boars. To my left, Ruffnut, Puffnut, and Nuffnut were fighting over one of the boars and to my right, Tuffnut and Eret were fighting over a boar.

“I’ll take the boys, you take the girls,” I told Sulpher as I slipped and slid away. Tuffnut was clinging to the boar like it had no grease on it, and Eret was trying to get Tuffnut off by bashing his helmet with a bludgeon. The problem was that Tuffnut didn’t seem to be bothered. I jumped into the air and slammed into Eret – sending him into the wall. Then, I turned around and tripped Tuffnut. The boar, suddenly free, took off. However, I got to him first, scooped him up and started towards my basket. Behind me I heard Eret and Tuffnut squelching through the mud after me.

“And that makes four for Ruffnut!” the announcer said, as Ruffnut managed to sling the boar into her basket. Sulpher, seeing me with the last boar, came towards me. When I was about three meters from my basket, Eret jumped me from behind. I threw the boar to Sulpher who caught it. Then, Eret and I hit the mud. Not wanting to get too deep in the mud, I rolled to the right to avoid getting trapped under Eret. However, Sulpher, who was about to get tackled by Puffnut and Nuffnut, decided that her only hope of getting the boar to the basket was using me as a launch board. With that, she ran on top of me and jumped off with all her might. Just as my eyes sank below the mud, I saw her flying through the air towards her basket.

After thrashing about wildly for a few seconds, I finally pried myself from the mud and sat up. Up above in the stands, the outcasts were going wild, and Sulpher was jumping about - yelling and cheering. Tuffnut and Eret were arguing over who had done better.

“Thanks for helping me Kaizar. Too bad you came last,” Sulpher said, coming over to me.

“Don’t mention it,” I replied dryly, “Really, don’t!”



“And that leaves us with our winner - Sulpher Jorgenson!” the announcer bellowed to the crowd.

“Alright guys!” Tuffnut announced to us, “Let’s go get cleaned up!”

A few rope ladders were lowered down from the sides of the pit, and we all climbed up and out.

After washing off most of the mud in the large tubs in the small shacks (I guess every island has small guest shacks?), we all walked back into the tunnel network.

“Tuffnut?” I said, catching up with him, “The reason I came here was to find Hiccup. Do you know where ‘New Berk’ is?”

“Do I know where ‘New Berk’ is? Of course! Eret even had several maps of how to get there,”

Tuffnut told me, “When are you leaving?”

“Well, as soon as possible, I guess.”

Eret came up from behind us and said, “I can give you a map tonight, Kaizar. Then, you can leave tomorrow if you want.”

“That’d be great! Thanks so much!” I replied gratefully.

“No problema amigo. Ahora, necesito mi cama!” Tuffnut replied, launching into Spanish.

“Nuffnut,” Ruffnut told her daughter, “Can you show our guests their rooms?”

“Yes Mom!” Nuffnut said, “Follow me!” Nuffnut led Sulpher and I down a tunnel to our right and through a large cavern full of weaponry to a low-ceiling cave that had been renovated with metal plating to create a few small, enclosed rooms.

“Let me go make sure your rooms are ready,” Nuffnut told us, disappearing into the two rooms on the far right (I found out later on that night that the real reason Nuffnut wanted to check the rooms out was so that she could stick moldy bread under our goose-feather pillows).

“How about we meet out here about sunrise?” I told Sulpher.

Then, we disappeared into our rooms, and I flopped onto the hard wooden bed. Slizer followed me in.

“I’m sorry I haven’t paid much attention to you today,” I told Slizer, “What with all the new people and *games*.”

Slizer growled softly, and sprawled out on the floor – a distant look in his eyes. He was probably thinking of the nightmare. I hoped that Hiccup would be able to send a force of men to take back the nightmare, now that most of the War Lord goons were off fighting the Berserkers. In a matter of seconds, I fell asleep.

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“Dad,” Puffnut whined the next morning at the Outcast Island docks, “I want to go see New Berk too!”

“It’s really not all that exciting,” Tuffnut insisted.

“But you always go and prank them, so it **MUST** be!”

“Oh, it’s plenty of fun here!” Sulpher told Puffnut, not wanting her to come along. However, Ruffnut had a completely different idea.

“Yes, yes,” Ruffnut said to me. She grabbed Puffnut and Nuffnut by their collars and shoved them towards Sulpher and I. “Take them away for a while and come back in a few weeks. No hurry. Now don’t forget to tell Hiccup and Astrid ‘hi’ for me and be safe. Bye bye!”

“Wait, but-,” Tuffnut tried to get a word in edgewise, but wasn’t successful. Sulpher tried to also say something, but Ruffnut was already marching all of us onto our ship. Slizer, who was already onboard, looked at me as if to say, “You’re taking these two girls with us!”



“Bye!” Ruffnut told us again as the outcasts pushed our boat back into the water.

“Wait, I want-,” Tuffnut yelled, coming towards the boat quickly. He wasn’t quite as excited to have Puffnut and Nuffnut gone as Ruffnut was. However, he slipped on some seaweed that had just been dropped on the ground by Ruffnut and plowed headfirst into the surf.

“Blargh – blub, blub!” Tuffnut yelled – thrashing around wildly.

“Have fun Dad!” Puffnut yelled to him as we sailed away.



Chapter 8: Assault

“So,” Puffnut was telling me while helping adjust the sails, “I have this *great* idea for a prank on New Berk. What if we disguised this boat to look like a giant shark – complete with teeth and big fins. Then, we could have me hanging out of its mouth like it was eating me and-,”

“Puffnut,” I replied, disgusted, “Where are we going to get the shark disguise?”

“Just a minute,” Puffnut waved my comment off like it didn’t matter, “So we float up to New Berk, and everyone comes out to rescue me. Then, we blow the ship up, and it looks like an exploding shark, and everyone will be totally freaked out!”

“So, we still don’t know where we’re getting the shark disguise,” I replied.

“Oh... yeah. Well, it was a good idea!” Puffnut said – not in the least bit deterred. I rolled my eyes. Then, I was pushed overboard.

“Hey!” I yelled up to Nuffnut who was standing there grinning. Puffnut gave her a high-five.

“Sorry! My mistake,” Nuffnut replied, reaching down to help me back onto the ship. I extended my hand and had almost grabbed hers when she pulled her hand back, and I fell back into the water.

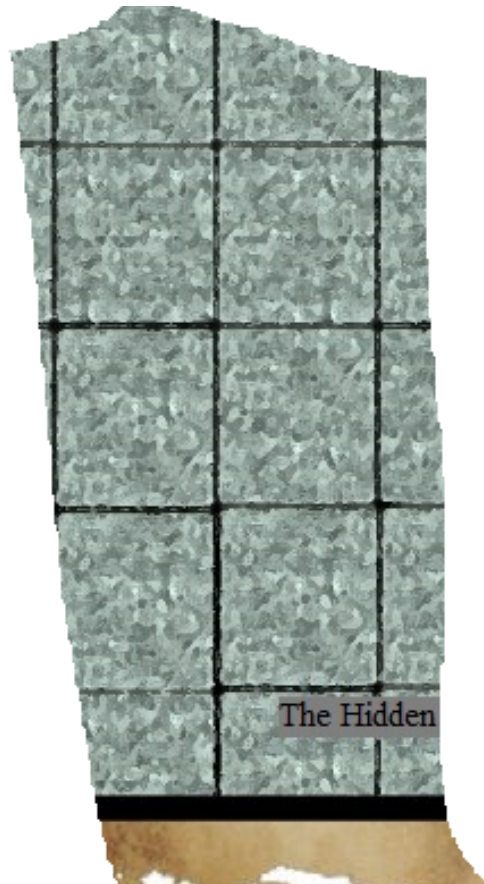
“Darn it, you guys!” I spluttered as Sulpher kindly offered me *her* hand. As soon as I was back onto the ship, I spun around, pointed into the watery distance, and yelled, “SHARK!” Immediately, everyone turned to see what I was pointing at, but I didn’t because there was no shark. Instead, I shoved both Puffnut and Nuffnut into the water.

“Serves you right!” Sulpher scolded them, doubling over in laughter. I snickered and, instead of helping them out, decided to head below deck to find some lunch.

“REPERCUSSIONS!” I heard Puffnut yell after me.

Beneath deck, the Outcasts had stocked up on way more food and water for our journey to New Berk than we needed. However, as it turned out, Slizer had already beaten us to the salted salmon.

“Slizer!” I scolded him, “We need to be conservative with our food supply.” (Though, in actuality, I just wanted some of the fish myself) Slizer, who was napping in the corner, quickly turned away to avoid my gaze. After some digging around, I found a nice chunk of brown bread and





contentedly munched away at it while I swung myself back onto the deck and sat down. Puffnut and Nuffnut were just now climbing onto the ship.

"My hair's all wet!" Nuffnut cried out – shaking her head violently, "and it smells like salt and seaweed!"

"Well, that's a better smell than what you used to smell like!" Puffnut shot back.

"Hey! It takes a lot of work to get my hair smelling like muddy, greasy boar!"

"Whatever," Puffnut said, waving her hand, "You can use my brush down below."

"AHHH!" Sulpher's scream instantly caught my attention, "NUFFNUT!"

"Not again," I told them, "You don't ever stop do you!" With Nuffnut and Puffnut trailing, I jogged to the helm to see how Sulpher had been pranked. She was standing near the front-most mast with her boot stuck in a small puddle of tar.

"Ugh," Sulpher groaned, "This is not coming off."

"I'll go boil some water," I replied.

"Hey, uh, guys," Puffnut interrupted, coming up behind us.

"What nerve you have! These boots were made by my mother, and I don't want *tar* all over them. Why can't you guys just be serious for once?!"

"Umm, Sulpher," Puffnut continued.

"Serious, Puffnut. No more funny business. We need to get to New Berk and if we are constantly being pranked it'll take us twice as – Oof!"

Suddenly, the boat swerved and tilted steeply to the left, and I was thrown down onto the deck. I rolled along it until my legs caught the deck railing on the other side of the ship – just in time for Sulpher and Puffnut to fall on top of me. There was a sickening crunching noise, and the boat started to level back out – while also sinking.

I looked up to see that a much larger ship's bow had smashed right into our boat and caved in the right side. Pushing Sulpher and Puffnut off me, I slung my Odin's Storm off my back, and used it to vault off our ship and onto the incoming boat. As soon as I landed aboard the attacking ship, I froze in a defensive stance and quickly looked around.

The funny thing was that all I could see was one boy (roughly my age) on the deck, and he was staring at me like I was a ghost.

"Who are you!" He yelled at me.

I didn't bother answering; I just attacked. However, Sulpher beat me to him. She had just swung on board as well and was already a few paces in front of me. Reaching the boy, she brought her hammer down on his helmet – full force.

"Owe!" he exclaimed, but instead of blacking out, he simply shook his head and swung his sword at Sulpher, who had to dodge out of the way and hit the deck.

"Look out!" Nuffnut yelled from behind me. This time, I obeyed immediately. Just as my arm hit the deck, two purple blasts rocketed out from the stern of the ship and incinerated whatever was left of our ship – barely missing Nuffnut and Puffnut who were clumsily trying to pull themselves onto the ship.

"Keep this guy busy," I instructed Sulpher, "I'll take care of whoever is below deck!"

I jumped up and dashed toward the stern of the boat while keeping close to the railing. The back of the ship had a covered cabin like most of the warships I had seen. From within, another set of purple blasts shot out. Instead of going inside right away, I scurried up the ladder and



onto the second desk. Then, I grabbed the steering wheel and swung off the balcony and into the cabin with some momentum, with my feet first.

Almost instantly, my feet collided into something that then moved. When I landed on the floor of the dimly-lit cabin, I saw that I had hit a girl (again about my age). Next to her on the ground was an ornate axe, and she was currently breathing heavy – it looked like the wind had been knocked out of her. Across the room from me were a set of glowing green and glowing blue eyes. I placed my foot on the girl's chest and placed my Odin's Storm at her throat.

"Don't try again stupid!" I growled.

"Get your hands off me!" the girl said – trying to squirm away.

"Lay off or you may end up with our boat!" I shot back.

"Your what?!" she questioned.

"Forget it. Who's over there? Show yourselves!" The girl squirmed some more, but I wrenched her left arm behind her back.

"Owe!" Immediately, the people on the other side of the room, advanced forward – but they were...*growling*?

I gasped when I saw that they were not people; they were dragons! One was mostly white, with some splotches of black while the other was mostly black with some white splotches.

Something funny annoyed me about them though – they looked vaguely familiar.

"What kind of dragons are those?" I asked the girl. Before she could answer, the white dragon shot a fireball at me. At the last millisecond, I ducked out of the way and the blast exploded into the wall – sending me and the girl flying through the air and out onto the deck. I quickly stood up, but so did the girl. Picking up her axe, she chopped at me, but I parried with my weapon and shoved her backward into the mast.

"Don't try anything tricky, or my dragon will tear you to pieces!" she told me.

"So will mine!" I grunted as the girl sliced at me with her axe again.

"Yeah right! Like you have a dragon!" the girl replied sarcastically – clearly not believing me.

Before I knew what was happening, a body flew through the air and hit me full on, rolling me across the deck and into a crate. It was Nuffnut. As I disentangled myself and pulled my shield off my back, I saw the boy fly across the deck and collide into the girl.

Nuffnut, Puffnut, Slizer, Sulpher, and I all formed an offensive line and advanced on the girl, boy, and two dragons who advanced on us menacingly as well.

"Wait a minute!" I exclaimed, putting my left hand into the air, "You aren't War Lord goons. Who are you?"

The boy looked at the girl, and she glared back at me.

"We'll tell you, if you tell us who *you*-." When the girl caught sight of Slizer she gasped, "Is that a *speedstinger*?"

"Deal," I replied – still keeping my shield at ready. Before, I could answer, though, Puffnut beat me to the chase.

"I'm Puffnut – prank extraordinaire!"

"I'm Nuffnut – even better prank extraordinaire!" (At this, Puffnut glared at Nuffnut)

An awkward silence followed as I tried to decide if I should really tell these people my name.

"Who you?" the boy said – pointing at Sulpher and I.

"I'm Sulpher – daughter of the great chief of Wing Maiden Island, Snotlout Jorgenson!"



“And I’m Kaizar, nephew of the chief of Berserker Island. He,” I said pointing to Slizer, “is Slizer – titan wing, leader speed stinger.”

The boy nodded.

“Me Nuffink,” the boy said, puffing out his chest, “I’m son of chief of Hooligan tribe.”

“I’m Zephyr, his sister. Those two,” Zephyr said pointing to the two dragons, “is Pouncer and Dart.”

Pouncer decided to follow that up with a purple blast at me. Luckily, I caught the blast on my shield; then launched a pair of bolas at him and caught Pouncer square on. He rolled backward and bumped down below deck into the cabin.

“If you touch one more of us,” Zephyr said at me through slit eyes, “My father will turn you and your friends into TOOTHPICKS!”

“If *you* touch Kaizar, I’ll turn *you* into toothpicks!” Sulpher shot back, anger rising in her voice. Zephyr took a step forward, waving her axe maliciously at Sulpher who smacked her hammer into her left hand for effect as well.

“Wait Zephyr!” Nuffink told his sister, “Kaizar’s shield has Dad’s dragons symbol on it!”

Zephyr paused for a moment and took a closer look, “Hey, that does look like Dad’s symbol. Where did you get that?”

“Uh oh,” I replied nervously – finally understanding who I was talking to, “your father wouldn’t be named Hiccup would he?”

“Only the greatest chieftain of all time!” Nuffink announced proudly.

“Oh,” Sulpher said my thoughts exactly.

“Heh, well it turns out, we’re coming to New Berk to see your father,” I told Zephyr and Nuffink, while smiling sheepishly.

“You here to see Dad?” Nuffink told me – shocked.

“Yeah, well, we’re trying to find ‘The Hidden Word’ so Slizer here can be safe.”

“Wait, so then why did you attack us?” Zephyr asked suspiciously.

“Because you guys rammed our boat, so I thought you were bad,” I replied; then thought to add, “Sorry!”

“You rammed their boat!” Zephyr exclaimed, looking pointedly at Nuffink.

Nuffink shrugged his shoulders. “Sorry,” he mumbled.

Zephyr clapped her face onto her face, “O Thor.”

“Soooo,” I replied awkwardly, “What are *you* guys doing here?”

“We wanted some adventu-,” began Nuffink before Zephyr clapped her hand over his mouth.

“We were just going back to New Berk,” Zephyr replied hastily – cutting Nuffink off.

Suddenly, to my left, I heard a strange noise. I looked over to see Puffnut and Nuffnut scratching Dart.

“Who’s the cute dragon? Huh?” Puffnut was saying.

“Get off my dragon!” Zephyr yelled at them.

“Awe, but she’s so cute!” Nuffnut replied – reluctantly standing back up.

“Hey, I’m willing to make peace. Do you agree to a truce? At least until we meet your father?” I offered Zephyr.

Zephyr looked from me to Slizer, then back.

“Well, okay. But you better not try anything tricky!” Zephyr replied, shaking my hand



"Thanks a ton, guys. I really appreciate it," I said, "Would you like to touch Slizer?"

"Yes please!" exclaimed Nuffink. Slizer trotted over, and I carefully placed Nuffink's hand on Slizer's head. Slizer looked warily at Nuffink, but didn't refuse his hand.

"He likes you!" I said for Nuffink's benefit.

"Hmph!" Zephyr snorted as she walked back into the cabin to check on Pouncer. As soon as Zephyr disappeared below deck, Puffnut and Nuffnut went back to playing with Dart. While Slizer showed Nuffink his spiky tail, I turned around to Sulpher.

"Do you think we really can trust them?" Sulpher whispered to me.

"I don't know, but I don't think we have a lot of choices. Their dragons appear to be nice now that they know us," I replied.

"Zephyr makes me nervous," Sulpher commented.

"We'll just have to play it out and see what happens," I told her.

Just then Pouncer came bounding out of the cabin and made a bee-line for Slizer. Pouncer playfully batted at Slizer and Slizer clawed back, accidentally knocking Nuffink out of the way with his tail. Pouncer growled and jumped on Slizer, but Slizer rolled away and ran off with Pouncer close behind. After a few cycles around the deck, Pouncer decided to pick on Dart and a mini dragon fight started amid the three dragons.

"Would you like any help with the ship or something, Nuffink?" I asked him.

"Man the steering wheel, would ya?" Zephyr interrupted.

"And you, Sulpher, go open up those two sails," Zephyr continued.

Sulpher rolled her eyes, but obeyed.

"Also, do you have a map around here, I want to get a bearing of where we were?" I told Zephyr.

"Whatever. Nuffink! Could you show Kaizar our map?" Zephyr called over to Nuffink who was talking with Puffnut and Nuffnut. Nuffink tried to walk over, but his shoelaces were tied together, and he fell onto the deck. Puffnut and Nuffnut laughed uproariously. I rolled my eyes and helped Nuffink to his feet.

"Puffnut is actually better with ships," I told Zephyr, "She should man the wheel."

"Let's go!" Zephyr motioned to Puffnut, then grabbed a rope and swung around to the stern of the boat. Puffnut did likewise with another rope hanging nearby, but swung straight into the side of the ship. Nuffnut laughed at Puffnut's folly, but didn't realize that the other end of Puffnut's rope was tied to Nuffnut's ankle.

Instantly, Nuffnut was yanked into the air and left hanging a few lengths up the mast. Pouncer, Dart, and Slizer - thinking this to be great fun - started patting her back and forth like a ball on a string.

"HEY!!!" Nuffnut cried.

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The next day (on my trip to New Berk) was hilarious as all of our unique characters clashed and meshed together. Slizer got along remarkably well with the rougher Pouncer, and the simple-minded Nuffink enjoyed the company of Puffnut and Tuffnut. Unfortunately, Zephyr and Sulpher didn't get along – they kept trying to outdo each other.

"*That* is not how you do a backflip!" Zephyr was telling Sulpher, "You do it like this!" Zephyr then proceeded to do a very nice backflip.



“Ha!” Sulpher scoffed, “I could do a backflip like that in my sleep! This is how you *really* do a backflip!” Sulpher then did an even better backflip.

“Not even close! Watch me do mine again so you get a better idea of how to do one!” Zephyr said. Before she could do it, though, I broke the argument up.

“Ladies, ladies. You both do a good backflip. You don’t need to fight over who does a better one. There will always be someone who can do it better than you!” I told them. Then, I proceeded to do a *double* backflip.

“Wow! That’s so cool!” Nuffnut exclaimed, clapping her hands, “Kaizar creams you guys!” Sulpher and Zephyr scowled, but stopped arguing and continued their lunch in silence.

“Well,” Nuffink began, trying to break the silence, “we should be getting close to New Berk!”

“Sweet!” Puffnut said while chomping down on some turkey, “Who are the best people to prank!”

“I don’t normally prank people, but I guess Gobber is a good target,” Nuffink answered.

“Great!” Nuffnut cut in, “I have this great idea involving fire and helmets!”

“And we don’t want to hear it,” I told Nuffnut.

“I’ll tell you later!” Nuffnut whispered over to Nuffink and Puffnut.

From up above, I heard Slizer give a loud warning growl.

“That’s Slizer!” I yelled, jumping up from the table. I sprinted out of the cabin and shot up to the second deck – scanning the horizon for anything. To my left, I could make out a ship.

“Looks like a War Lord ship,” Zephyr deduced, coming up from behind me.

“How do you know?” I asked.

“Can’t you see the emblem on the sails?!” Zephyr replied testily.

“Uh, no – you must have good eyesight. What should we do?”

“Blast it out of the water, duh!” Puffnut yelled from below.

“You realize that Puff and Nuff are just like their parents, right?” Zephyr told me.

“Yeah, I know.”

“I’ll take Nuffink with me, and we’ll just blast it to pieces with Pouncer and Dart,” Zephyr told everyone.

“What if they have something important though?” I replied, “The boat looks a little damaged.” Sure enough, the boat was slightly burnt and the upper deck had many gashes on its side.

“We can’t take the chance that it finds New Berk,” Zephyr replied.

“I know, but I think we should take a look first,” I replied insistently.

“How? That boat is probably crawling with goons!”

“I don’t think there are that many goons on it if it is that damaged and this far out.”

“Fine,” Zephyr replied, “You get over there magically, check it out, and then let me know when I can destroy it.”

“Ha, I *can* get over there – easily!” Sulpher challenged.

“How? Swimming?” Zephyr taunted.

“Watch and learn!” Sulpher replied as she jumped onto Slizer. With a gentle nudge, Slizer flew off the ship, hit the water in a full on sprint and was quickly covering ground towards the ship.

“What the-?!” Zephyr exclaimed.

Nuffink came over to me on Pouncer and offered his hand, “I’ll take you over there.”

“Thanks Nuffink,” I told him.



Pouncer jumped off the ship and started climbing, but Puffnut and Nuffnut called from below, "We want to go too!"

Nuffink sighed and banked sharply. In a quick motion, Pouncer grabbed Nuffnut in one paw and Puffnut in the other and soared off towards the War Lord ship.

I had never flown before in my life, so this was terribly scary, but Nuffnut and Puffnut seemed to be having the time of their lives.

"This is SO cool!" Puffnut was saying, waving her mace in the wind.

"Dibs on knocking out the first goon!" Nuffnut told us. Within two minutes, we reached the ship, and Pouncer dove sharply and landed perfectly on the ship's deck. Just as I had assumed, the ship had only a few men on board, and they were pretty shocked at that. Sulpher and Slizer were walking menacingly up to them – having gotten to the ship a little earlier.

"Stand back! All of you," the head goon yelled at us.

"You picked the wrong side!" I shouted back, "Puffnut, Nuffnut, Slizer – clear the decks. Sulpher and I will go below."

"With a crazed war cry, Puffnut and Nuffnut charged the few goons on the decks as Sulpher and I ran towards the back of the ship where the ladder to the hold was. Just as we reached the stern, a big soldier jumped into our path.

"And where do you think you're going?" he asked, pointing his long, curved sword at us.

Sulpher jumped him with her sword, and I kicked him hard in the knee. With a terrific blow, Sulpher smashed him into the side of the ship, and I threw him overboard with a Defender of the Wing hold-throw.

As we descended the stairs into the hold below, I looked behind me to see how Puffnut and Nuffnut were doing. I didn't even need to bother. With Slizer running around at insane speeds, the goons were falling left and right.

"Keep your eyes and ears open," Sulpher told me as she led the way into the hold. A few torches lit the way, but the lighting still wasn't terrific. After descending the ladder, we found ourselves in a preliminary room with several wooden boxes and a crate. In front was a large wooden door.

"Check out this sweet axe!" Sulpher told me, pulling an axe out of one of the crates, "Look! It even extends!" Sulpher proceeded to swing the axe apart and reveal a longer axe with super sharp blades at each end.

"That's my mom's!" I exclaimed to Sulpher, "What's it doing here!"

"Wait, your mom owns this?" Sulpher asked. I carefully inspected it and noted that it was indeed Mom's axe.

"You don't think, she...she...was killed?" I mumbled, fear rising in my voice.

"You know what? Let's check the rest of the hold," Sulpher quickly replied, grabbing the axe from my hand and putting it back in the crate. However, the door was locked. As I just stood there in the room in shock, Sulpher swung back her hammer and thrust it into the door with all her might which promptly fell apart. Sulpher, being the first to enter the next room, gasped in astonishment, "There are people locked in here!"

Quickly coming out of my daze, I dashed into the next room and looked around. There were a dozen or so cages, each with a single prisoner in them.

"Let's get them out of here!" I told Sulpher loudly.



“Kaizar?” The voice came from behind me and sounded awfully familiar.

“Kaizar? Is that you?” the voice said again.

“Dad?” I replied. I spun around and ran up to the cage directly behind me. Sure enough, Dad was standing there looking at me. He was in bad shape, and had a nasty black eye – but he was alive.

“DAD!”

“Kaizar!”

“I didn’t know what happened to you!” we both said at once.

“Honey! It’s Kaizar!” Dad said to the prisoner next door. Inside that cage was Mom. She looked even worse, but when she saw me, she brightened up noticeably.

“Mom! What is happening on the island? Are we still holding it?” I asked her.

“Um, Kaizar. I hate to break the conversation, but we need to get out of here and unlock all these prisoners. Here’s the key,” Sulpher interrupted, tossing me a key.

As I started unlocking the cells, Dad and Mom asked me questions.

“Who’s she?” Dad wanted to know, pointing to Sulpher who was helping an older man out of his cell.

“She’s Sulpher – Snotlout’s daughter!” I told him.

“No way! That’s crazy!” he said.

Standing in the middle of the room, I yelled to everyone, “Alright, people. We need to get off this ship. We have a bigger one close by. Let’s go!”

With Sulpher leading the way and I in the rear, we helped all the prisoners (who turned out to all be Berserkers that I knew) up the ladder and onto the top deck.

Puffnut and Nuffnut were chasing Slizer around the deck, taking care to not step on any unconscious soldiers.

“Where’s Zephyr and Nuffink?” I yelled to them.

“Over there!” Nuffnut said, pointing to right where Pouncer and Dart (with tails wrapped around the front of our ship) were pulling it towards us rapidly. Nuffink and Zephyr were standing on the deck urging them onward.

The crowd of Berserkers cheered a throaty cheer; then fell silent. I guess they hadn’t been fed very well.

As soon as our ship arrived, we boarded everyone onto our ship. Then, Dart and Pouncer were allowed to blast apart the War Lord ship. All of us watched in silence as the ship was annihilated and sank.

“Doesn’t pay to hurt others,” Nuffnut commented from behind me as he chewed on a yak stick.

“Where’d you get that?” a younger Berserker warrior asked her.

“Oh, I just found it down below. You’re welcome to one, if you’d like,” she offered generously. Before I could say “Stop!” there was a frantic stampede to the hold as all the hungry prisoners raced for something to eat and drink.

“Thanks a lot Nuffnut,” Zephyr sarcastically told her.

“You’re welcome! I mean, it was pretty easy to say,” Nuffnut replied, completely oblivious to the commotion she caused.



When everyone had gorged themselves on food and water, and we had corrected our course towards New Berk, Mom and Dad sat down to talk with me about all the crazy happenings of the last week or so.

“Are we still holding our island?” I asked Mom.

“Last I saw, we still were,” Mom told me, “The night you disappeared, the War Lords stopped pressing and stopped to regroup. This gave your Dad and I time to try to find you, but no one knew where you went. Neither did anyone know if you were killed. The next day, the warfare continued, but the goons destroyed the village and captured several of us in the process – even though I fought as hard as I could.”

“I think she took out at least a dozen goons by herself,” Dad whispered to me.

“So, what happened to you?” Mom asked.

“Well, that’s a very long story. I’ll tell you tonight – hopefully at New Berk when we meet Hiccup.”

“We’re going to New Berk?” Dad gasped.

“Yes. I’m trying to return Slizer to the Hidden World!” I replied.

“It’s been forever since I’ve seen Astrid,” Mom said.

“And I haven’t ‘nerded’ out with Hiccup in years!” Dad exclaimed.

As I introduced my parents to my friends, Dart emerged from the clouds overhead with Zephyr on her back.

“New Berk is only a few miles away!” Zephyr excitedly told us when she landed. Immediately, the crowd of Berserkers buzzed with excitement. It was a rare thing for a Berserker to meet a Berkian.

Two hours later, the island of New Berk came into sight. It was a massive island and incredibly tall. So tall, that it reached into the clouds. Nuffink directed us into a shallow harbor where all the rest of the Berk fleet was. The Berk ships were very majestic ships - tall and ornate – not a bit like the war machines that we Berserkers had turned ours into. On the shores was a large collection of people that had undoubtedly been alerted to our arrival. At the very front of the docks stood a tall, wiry man with a beard and next to him was a blonde lady. Right next to them, were *three* dragons – one of which I immediately recognized as the famous Toothless: Hiccup’s famed dragon. Nuffink told me the other two were the Light fury (Toothless’ wife) and Ruffrunner (who looked just like Dart, but had green eyes like Pouncer). The only thing about the two humans and three dragons that stood out was that they were all wearing big frowns and looking pointedly at Nuffink, Zephyr, Pouncer, and Dart. Perhaps Zephyr and Nuffink had been on an “unauthorized” adventure?

The good news is that they never got in trouble, because they were quickly overwhelmed by the mass of humanity and old friends.

“Astrid!”

“Heather!”

“Hiccup!”

“Fishlegs!”

“GROWL!” (Toothless)

“Whimper” (Dart)

“Fishlegs! I haven’t seen you for *years*,” exclaimed the man to Dad.



"Kaizar, this is Chief Hiccup!" Dad told me.

"Nice to meet you sir!" I told him.

"Where did all these people come from, and why do you guys look so bad?" Hiccup wanted to know.

"I think perhaps we should go somewhere a little warmer to talk," Dad replied with a shiver.

"Oh, yes. Right away!" Hiccup announced.

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"They have a *what?* And you saw a what? And you have a what?" Hiccup exclaimed as I talked to him at dinner later that night.

"A Deathgripper; a Flightmare; a titan wing, leader speedstinger" I told him for the third time while pointing at Slizer who was gulping down a massive pot of soup nearby.

Hiccup calmed down and added, "I'm surprised your generation can tell dragons apart. I guess that comes with your father being Fishlegs."

Dad chuckled, "I couldn't resist telling him all I know. Our generation should know of the wonderful things that the dragons did and were!"

"Right you are, Fishlegs!" Hiccup agreed.

From another part of the table, I listened to the other conversation going on.

"And then Kaizar said, 'But we don't have a shark disguise!'," Puffnut was saying to Astrid.

Astrid chuckled, "You aren't any different than your parents!"

"Figures," Sulpher mumbled under her breath next to me.

"And you remind me of Snotlout," Astrid continued.

"Gosh, it's almost like he could be my dad," Sulpher replied sarcastically. Hiccup laughed.

"What are we going to do about the dragons on Old Berk though, and Slizer?" I asked Hiccup.

"Did you say a lot of the War Lords' men are occupied over at your island," Hiccup asked me.

"Last I saw, they were. But I haven't been there for quite a few days now!" Heather replied.

"However, there weren't too many on Old Berk when I was captured there," I remind Hiccup.

"Well, then, that probably means that their island is not as well protected. We *could* try to take them by surprise, grab the dragons, and run off," Hiccup pondered out loud.

"Oh yes! Let's give them something they won't forget!" a large, one-legged Viking named Gobber said excitedly from behind us.

"Do we have enough manpower, though?" said Dad – always one to stay out of a fight.

"Probably not - though I haven't seen Old Berk for a decade at least so it's hard to make an estimate."

"Well, you know what your father always said," said Gobber, "When in doubt – counterattack!"

"Oh gods," Hiccup replied, but Astrid perked up, "If we strike really soon, we may have a chance!"

"Oh, oh! And we could contact my parents to bring the outcasts as well!" Nuffnut interrupted.

"Yes – great idea! This may just work," Gobber said – already excited about the prospect of giving an old nemesis a good kick.

"Then it's settled – we launch off as soon as possible. I'll send a message to Outcast Island for backup," Hiccup declared.

"Can our dragons fight with us?" Nuffink wanted to know.

This caught Hiccup off guard.



“Only if Toothless wants to. Honestly, I don’t want them getting hurt, but I’ll let Toothless decide that,” Hiccup told us, “For now, we had better get some good sleep. If we want to take on the War Lords, we are going to need to put things together really quick tomorrow!”



Chapter 9: Discovery

"Boats! Dead ahead!" the lookout yelled to all of us in the Berk fleet.

"Who are they?" Hiccup yelled back up next to me. I was on the lead ship of the Berk fleet along with my friends and the Berk elite. Behind us was an odd collection of thirty or so ships of various sizes, shapes, and with different numbers of weapons on their decks.

"You're sure it's not just Toothless?" I asked Hiccup.

"Nah, they're behind us," Hiccup told me, pointing to a small black cloud behind us where Toothless and his family were flying. I still couldn't believe that Toothless had decided to fight with us to rescue the Flightmare. War was never a safe occupation, but I guess after all the perilous dangers Toothless had been through before, he was used to it.

"Uhhh," the lookout said as he squinted through his telescope into the horizon, "It would appear to be outcasts!"

"Yes, I knew Ruffnut and Tuffnut would follow through!" Astrid exclaimed from behind us.

"We're going to cream those goons!" Nuffnut cheered from a ship that had come up beside us,

"We have multiple arrow launchers outfitted on several of our ships!"

"We'll see about that!" I shouted back to Nuffnut.

"Don't be such a downer," Sulpher said, coming over to me, "We'll teach them a lesson that they will *not* forget!"

"Full speed ahead!" Hiccup yelled to the ship's crew who quickly set about lowering the rest of the sails.

In about a half hour, we came up alongside a huge mass of warships that, although most of them were smaller than ours, were literally loaded down with weaponry. They also were decked out with massive skulls on the front and had spiky shields lining the sides of the ships.

"Welcome aboard, Berkians!" Eret vaulted over onto my boat, "We got ready to go as soon as we got your call!"

"Thanks Eret!" Hiccup called.

"What?! You didn't think we'd let you have *all* the fun!" Tuffnut yelled over to us from aboard his ship that had metal plating on the sides, "Massive chaos is an outcast's playground!"

"He's not kidding," Eret whispered over to me as Hiccup moved over to talk with Tuffnut.

"How did you even get to Outcast Island anyway?" Sulpher wanted to know.

"Well, as you know, after my dragon-trapping days, I moved in with the Berkians at New Berk," Eret announced to us (like he was retelling a tale of a great hero), "A few years later, the esteemed Alvin the Treacherous died so the outcasts turned to Tuffnut who readily agreed to be their chief. Since I am married to Ruffnut, who was more interested in me than I was in her, I naturally went along. When I first met the outcasts, I was thinking *'Who would want to lead this*





scraggy bunch!’ but as it turns out, these outcasts pack a lot of punch and soul into their massive frames!”

“Wow!” Sulpher exclaimed, slightly more expressive than normal to make Eret feel better.

“Well, now that storytime is over,” Eret continued, “We’re separated everyone into different waves to attack Berk. Are you guys better soldiers or artillery launchers?”

“I’m a better soldier,” Sulpher spoke up, “Though I can also work a catapult.”

“And I’m also a better soldier,” I told Eret, “But I’m also a decent archer.”

“Great! Sulpher, how about you go over to that boat over there to be part of one of the last waves so you can work the catapults for longer,” Eret told her pointing to an outcast ship that had two massive, metal catapults on the deck, “And you, Kaizar, should talk to Orion over there.”

“Alright, good luck, Kaizar!” Sulpher told me, giving me a side hug, “See you when we win!”

With a might leap, Sulpher jumped onto Tuffnut’s boat; then, she jumped over to another boat on her way to the catapult ship. It still amazed me how all these ships could sail in such close formation. I, meanwhile, made my way in the opposite direction to the man named Orion.

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Early in the morning the next day, the War Lords’ Scout Island came into view. There were considerably more boats docked there then when Sulpher and I had escaped a few days ago, but most of them were in pretty bad disrepair.

“Alright warriors!” Orion addressed us, “We’re in the third wave, so let’s man these spear launchers in the meantime.”

“For the Outcasts!” roared a large bearded man next to me, and the rest of us chimed in. Next to me, Slizer nudged me with his head and padded over to a particularly large spear launcher that we had been assigned to. Slizer had quickly become a favorite among the outcasts for his fierce appearance yet friendly demeanor. Having a very strong jaw, Slizer and I had been assigned to one of the bigger launchers, which was totally okay with me, because I loved launching projectiles almost as much as cutting down enemies with my Odin’s Storm.

“For Berk and Dragons!” Astrid yelled five boats away.

From the island, a loud horn sounded and dozens of War Lord goons swarmed from the village and manned the docks, their boats, and catapults. Within a matter of minutes, the air was filled with boulders and fiery arrows. As I had previously noted, the number of goons and warships had increased since I was last on Scout Island, but the ships were all in pretty bad condition and very few of them had working artillery. This gave us an advantage. Before we left, Mom told me that the War Lord’s boats had started to thin out, so she expected they were running out of boats. If the boats here had just come back from Berserker Island, it could mean that some of the goons had had to retreat; although it could also just be because they needed repairs. I quickly fitted a spear into the crossbow, and Slizer pulled back the rope with his teeth until it slotted into the end mark.

“Aim!” roared Orion who was posing majestically in the crow’s nest above my particular group. I scanned the ocean and docks in front of us for a good target and spied a War Lord warship that had lowered its sails and was turning out of the dock. Quickly rotating my launcher and aiming directly for where I thought the rudder would be, I yelled to Slizer to get ready to pull out the metal peg.



“FIRE!”

Without any hesitation, Slizer clamped his massive jaw onto the metal peg holding the rope in place and yanked it out. Instantly, the spear zipped out of the crossbow and across the bay, disappearing into the water right at the back of the warship’s stern. The other spears from my boat flew in differing directions, hitting some men on the docks and smashing into other boats. The warship I had launched at suddenly stopped turning and ran straight forward into the docks (what with his rudder being disabled as I had planned). The docks were consequently upturned and spilled a whole bunch of goons into the water.

“Load!” roared the Orion again, before we could revel in our success.

Slizer and I next chopped one of the docks’ supports in half, but the dock somehow managed to stay together. As we loaded our third spear into place, the first wave of our ships and men arrived at the damaged ships in the harbor. With a mighty roar, they jumped off their boats and swung at anything and everything within their reach. That’s when we piled on the pressure. From above, Toothless and his family steadily bombarded the front of the War Lord’s village with a barrage of plasma blasts – annihilating whatever fences or temporary defenses had been set up and setting some of the wooden buildings on fire. At the foot of the docks, the last segment of the first wave, squashed the goons’ opposition and began the climb up to the main village. Behind them, the second wave of men sailed into the docks.

“Kaizar! Are you in the third wave too?” asked a voice from behind me. I turned around to see Nuffink running up to me.

“Yeah! We should work together!” I told Nuffink.

“Absolutely!” Nuffink agreed, “I’ll watch behind you, if you take the front men!”

Although, at face value, this seemed like a “cop out” on Nuffink’s part, it was actually a good fit for both of us, as I had a good shield and was good at holding my position, while Nuffink was super strong and sturdy with a sword. By taking protection from behind me, Nuffink could be much more effective than if he had to watch *his* back.

“Alright men!” Orion yelled down to us, “We are in this next wave – so get ready. On my call we’ll move out.” With that, he jumped down from his position at the wheel and moved over to talk with the general from the catapult ship next to us. I looked around for any other familiar faces, but didn’t recognize anyone else.

“Toothless is just killing it!” Nuffink exclaimed, “He and his family are just pelting the War Lords’ buildings relentlessly.”

“Yeah, and our men are already disappearing from view into the ruins of the village!” I commented as the second wave of men reinforced the first wave half way up the docks.

“WAVE THREE!” roared the general from the catapult ship as Orion waved us onward.

In front of us was a collection of empty War Lords ships that we used as stepping stones to reach the docks that hadn’t been destroyed. Since Slizer was more surefooted than I was, I rode on his back to the docks; then waited for Nuffink to catch up with me before starting up. However, Slizer couldn’t wait any longer and took off without me.

“Let go show those goons we mean business!” Nuffink declared, when he caught up. Having waited for him meant that we were near the back of “Wave Three” but that gave us time to plan a course of action once we saw action.



When we rounded the top of the hill, I saw that the battle was raging full on. The main fortress at the far back recesses of the village had opened its front gates and tons of War Lord soldiers were streaming out – ready for battle. The War Lords were ferocious and were pushing as best as they could against the many Outcasts and Berkians, but the onslaught of plasma blasts and fiery arrows from portable catapults were just too effective. I kept my shield above my head preliminarily, even though there didn't appear to be many arrows coming from the War Lords' men. I guess most of those had already been used.

Nuffink lined up behind me as we slowly made our way through the village towards the main line of fighting.

"Hey! I think I just saw a few goons sneak into that cabin over there!" Nuffink told me, pointing with his sword at a small cabin nearby. Outcasts streamed by unharmed, but I knew that Nuffink and I had to at least check the cabin to make sure that no goons were in there. I didn't doubt Nuffink's eyesight anyway.

With a mighty heave, I bashed open the door with my Odin's Storm and scanned the room for enemies. A few paces away, a muscular goon jumped at me with a massive axe as two shorter soldiers jumped out from behind the door and attacked. I quickly swiped the smaller soldiers aside with my shield and parried a swing from the larger goon with my Odin's Storm. Then, I jammed his axe into the wall and slammed my shield into his head. The soldier staggered backward and ran into one of the other goons who had just dodged out of Nuffink's way. After raining down blows on the two goons, Nuffink and I ran back outside to join the main fight.

"That was smart of them to take cover in the cabin and then ambush our troop later on, your eyesight was just a little too good!" I told Nuffink.

"Yeah! And you should've seen the bigger goon's face when you parried his mighty swing. He was shocked!" Nuffink replied. From ahead, a swordsman maneuvered his way through some outcasts and tried to reach past me and stab Nuffink, but I caught his sword with my Odin's Storm and kicked him full on in the stomach – knocking him backward into another War Lord goon. Then I smashed him in the head with my shield. From behind me, another goon swiped at my leg, but Nuffink cut him down before he had a chance.

"We've got this," I yelled over my shoulder to Nuffink.

When the fourth wave of our men arrived, the Berkians and Outcasts were almost at the entrance to the great fortress which wasn't looking so great anymore thanks to Toothless and his family. As Nuffink and I advanced forward through the village, we took a quick break in an only slightly damaged house to catch our breath.

"Whew, I'm getting tired," I told Nuffink, when we collapsed into a one-story flat alongside some other Berkians.

"Me tired too," Nuffink replied, leaning against the wall, "Where's Slizer?"

"Don't know, but I think he's okay. I ran into at least a dozen or so paralyzed goons."

"Me too!" Nuffink added, "Slizer always gets you before you know he has even arrived!"

We watched outside through a hole in the wall as a few purple blasts rocketed through the air and incinerated a collection of portable catapults in front of the fortress.

"I think we win!" Nuffink declared as the line of Berkians and Outcasts pressed forward into the fortress. However, he spoke a little too soon. For, at that exact moment that our soldiers disappeared within the fortress, several hair-raising screams echoed across the land and our



line of men fell backward at an astonishing speed. Everyone resting in the house immediately sat up and rushed outside to see what the problem was. It wasn't too hard to see that directly in the middle of the Fortress' gates were three deathgrippers spewing their green acid all over the place. Anything that the acid touched was immediately melted, or killed.

"We have got to stop those dragons!" I yelled to Nuffink.

"Me with you!" Nuffink said falling in line with me as we charged forward amid the stream of everyone else retreating. Most of the other soldiers had been around and knew the danger of the Deathgripper, but Nuffink and I had never really seen one before (except the brief incident a few days ago) so we ran forward. Before we reached the Deathgrippers, however, we ran into a collection of War Lord goons. I swung at them with my Odin's storm and clanged at others with my shield – keeping low while Nuffink jabbed his sword about in rapid motion. Several goons hit the ground, but a particularly large fellow caught Nuffink by his shirt and slammed him into the ground. I tried to rescue him, but four goons converged on me, and it was all I could do to keep them at bay. Nuffink tried to roll away but was hit in the head by a goon with a spiked mace. Just as the large fellow swung his axe at Nuffink to finish him off, there was a flash of white and Pouncer slammed into the goon. He emitted several rapid-plasma blasts and took out at least a dozen or so men including the ones attacking me – but that was when I saw Lemmirg. Lemmirg was standing behind a stack of barrels on the side of the fortress and aiming at Pouncer. With the finesse of an expert archer, Lemmirg aimed and fired - releasing his trigger. I dove forward with my shield, but the arrow was quicker. It plowed into Pouncer, who collapsed to the ground.

"Pouncer!" Nuffink screamed, dropping to his knees to check if he was still alive. Meanwhile, I jammed the handle of my weapon into a goon's stomach and impaled two others with the spines. The third soldier, I swung through the air and launched at the barrels that Lemmirg was hiding behind.

"Oof!" Lemmirg was crushed by the barrels against the wall of the fortress, while the other soldier flopped motionless to the ground. I took the opportunity to attack Lemmirg.

"I thought you were with us!" I yelled at Lemmirg.

Lemmirg yanked a broadsword off his back and sliced at me, but I dodged out of the way and parried with my Odin's Storm.

"I am, but I have to appear to be fighting you guys!" Lemmirg fiercely whispered back. Jabbing at my head, Lemmirg tried to catch me off balance, but I foresaw the move and cut him down at his helmet. Lemmirg yelled in pain as his helmet split in half, but grabbed me around the waist and swung me into the wall.

"Don't actually hurt me, just pretend," he told me as I saw a few black stars. However, I was pretty sure that he wasn't on my side.

I managed to recover in time to nail him on his helmet-less head with my shield and launch a pair of bolas at him which caused him to trip over a barrel and face planted into the ground unconscious.

I turned around to see that the line of our men had paused now and were erecting Gronckle Iron defense plates. Up above, Toothless and the rest of his family were in the middle of a sky battle with the three Deathgrippers. As I watched, Dart was hit and plummeted to the ground –



colliding with a deathgripper in the process and bringing him down as well. They disappeared behind the line of Gronckle Iron defense shields.

Meanwhile, Nuffink was trying to help Pouncer up, but was having trouble since he was constantly under fire by the never-ending amount of War Lord goons.

“Arghh!” I yelled and ran up behind the pack of goons, striking them down before they even knew what hit them. I dashed up to Nuffink, breathing hard.

“Is Pouncer okay?” I breathlessly asked.

“Oh, he’s okay – but the arrow was dipped in Dragon root, and he can’t move very well.”

Suddenly, a fourth deathgripper emerged from the fortress and singled me out. With surprising speed, it converged on me and poised its tail to strike.

“Hi-ya!” I yelled, swinging my Odin’s Storm directly at its face. However, something plowed into the deathgripper and tipped it over. This caused my aim to be off, so I only ended chopping off the deathgripper’s horns. However, I quickly discovered that Slizer had come to my and Pouncer’s aid. He repeatedly pierced the deathgripper’s tough armor – speedily paralyzing the massive dragon. Seeing the majority of the Outcasts and Berkians retreating, the War Lord soldiers took new hope and pressed forward from the fortress. As much as I hated to retreat, I knew when I needed to regroup.

“Nuffink, we can take cover in a cave over there,” I said pointing across the bridge to where the cave housing the Nightmare was, “It’ll give us time to rest and tend to Pouncer.” Nuffink nodded and started helping Pouncer limp towards the bridge while Slizer and I held off more War Lord goons.

“It’s the other dragon!” the goons excitedly yelled to one another. They pushed and shoved forward - each trying to be the first to capture Slizer. However, this made them much easier to pick off. I was just knocking a few goons off the bridge when I ran into a War Lord general, and he caught me by surprise. He maintained a defensive position until I got close enough; then, he lashed out with his axe and sliced me in the arm. I screamed in pain and consequently dropped my shield. The general smiled evilly, and chopped at my other arm, but I parried that attack and kicked him hard in his right knee. He stumbled a bit, struggling to regain his balance. However, he never did because he suddenly went rigid and face planted into the ground. All around him, other goons did the same – Slizer wasn’t happy about me getting hurt.

“Thanks, boy,” I told him through gritted teeth (my sleeve was turning red and was really hurting). I knocked the last two goons off the bridge; then hurried after Nuffink and Pouncer towards the cave.

“Watch the entrance!” I told Slizer. Ever so carefully, I helped Nuffink carry Pouncer into the main cave and lay him on the floor.

“I think he be okay, but the dragon root is not nice!” Nuffink said – then he gasped, “Kaizar, you arm!”

“I know, I need to get back to the ships,” I told Nuffink.

“Me have some bandages and ointment,” Nuffink said, pulling out his little bag and rummaging around in it.

“Found...,” I heard Nuffink’s first word, but then I saw a whole field of black stars in front of me.

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I awoke groggily, Slizer licking my face.



“Ewe, Slizer,” I groaned, “Stop licking me.”

“Boom! Crash! Fghhhffrraor!” Outside, there was a ton of noise.

“How are we doing?” I asked Nuffink who was standing over me. Nuffink looked very nervous and stammered out an answer.

“We doing okay. I mean, we haven’t won... but we close!” Nuffink said. Then he sighed and spoke honestly, “There’s a maelstrom going on out there.”

“What?!” I exclaimed, sitting up. However, stars appeared again, so I quickly sagged back down, “Will our fleet be okay?”

“Oh, yes. They fine.”

“Wait, but how can they be fine? The boats will be smashed to pieces!”

“Well,” and Nuffink grew nervous again, “They, um; they aren’t at the island anymore.”

My eyes suddenly grew wide.

“Wait, th-th-they left? – without us?” I stammered. Nuffink slowly nodded his head.

“Maybe they think we die? I no know, but they leave to avoid maelstrom.”

Great! I’m stuck back in this cave surrounded by enemies again, and my arm is wounded, and I can’t get up



Chapter 10: Injured

I guess that I must have fallen asleep again, because I woke up again with a start. My left arm was hurting pretty badly, but I could move it somewhat okay, which meant it wasn't broken. I carefully propped myself up against one of the cave's walls and looked at my arm. It had been bandaged with several rolls of cloth.

"Me fix you all up!" Nuffink proudly announced, coming over.

"Thanks, man!" I replied gratefully.

"You been asleep for a while, but it no swelling bad anymore."

"Cool, how's our Nightmare?" I asked him.

"Not good, she not move much, but Slizer help out a lot."

I looked over to the Nightmare and, sure enough, Slizer was keeping careful watch over her. On the floor next to me, Pouncer was sleeping soundly.

"And how's your dragon?" I asked Nuffink.

"Doing better. A few hour ago he walk around a bit by himself. He's strong; just like me!" Nuffink declared.

"Well, I guess we best start thinking about getting out of here," I told Nuffink. He nodded his head.

"Yes, I believe we just sneak to dock and 'borrow' boat," he told me.

"Okay, well, let's hope my arm heals fast." I carefully maneuvered it about, trying to keep it from getting stiff.

I was just starting to stand up, when Nuffink and I heard men's voices and shuffling of feet near the cave's entrance.

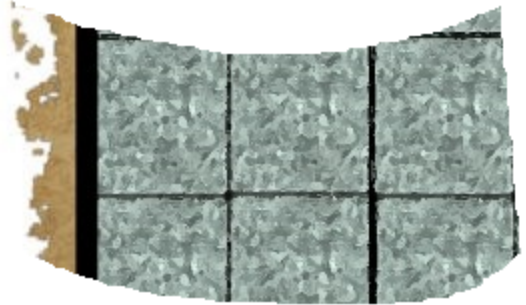
"Why do we have to feed the dragon," one of the War Lord goons whined, "It's not like we want to come out here during the storm, get soaked, and feed a dying dragon.

"Suck it up," replied another voice - Lemmirg's!

"There is a lot we can learn from this dragon," Lemmirg continued. The footsteps started coming closer, so I motioned to Nuffink, and he nodded back. Amazingly, my head didn't swim as I stood up, but it felt so heavy that I had to sit back down. Next to me, the soldiers' voices had woken up Pouncer who looked up with a start. Just at that moment, three soldiers walked into our room, one of whom was carrying a large wooden bucket of glowing algae and one who was Lemmirg.

"Wait! What's that – oof," even before I could get to them, Lemmirg knocked them out with his axe.

"Why do I keep meeting you like this?" Lemmirg asked me. I noticed he had a large cloth wrapped around his head where I had hit him some time before.





"What's your deal?" I told Lemmrig, "One minute you're attacking me, and the next minute you're helping me out!"

"I already told you, I'm spying for you guys. You just have to believe me!" Lemmrig replied defensively.

Meanwhile, Slizer had snatched the bucket of glowing algae and had brought it over to the flightmare who eagerly ate from it.

"Fine," I told him, "Go get a boat ready for our escape."

"No need to be so angry," Lemmrig told me while Nuffink looked at us confused, "Not only will I get you a boat, but I'll tell you that they caught Sulpher and are keeping her captive in a house down in the main village."

"Really?" I asked, incredulous, "and what about Dart?"

"You mean the other black and white dragon? They took her away," Lemmrig said.

"I'll meet you in the village in ten minutes," Lemmrig continued - then beat a hasty exit.

After Lemmrig left to go steal a boat for us, Nuffink said, "Your friend is really confusing."

"Tell me about it," I mumbled, "Let's go, now!"

However, a soft whimper in the corner caught my attention. Slizer was knelt over the Flightmare whose eyes were barely opened. It growled softly and looked straight at me.

"Oh my," Nuffink said softly. We gently stepped into the Flightmare's cell and knelt before it. I could tell it was having difficulty breathing. With a tremendous effort on its part and with Slizer helping, it rolled onto its side, lifted its wing off the ground and onto its body, quivered, and stopped breathing.

"No!" I yelled. I quickly put my hand on its upper chest, but there was no heartbeat.

"No," I cried softly. Nuffink removed his helmet, and bowed. Slizer whimpered and plopped down in the corner. I sat there for a while, just gazing at the magnificent dragon – regretting that I was not able to help it.

"Kaizar," Nuffink told me softly, "We must go soon."

I nodded standing up, "May you travel to Valhalla in peace."

I moved over to comfort Slizer, when I noticed something peculiar. The Flightmare's glow had reduced in intensity over the last day or so and was now completely gone, showing that the Flightmare had white scales. But right in front of its tail, was a glowing orb like object.

"What's that?" I asked Nuffink, pointing to the object. Nuffink bent over to take a closer look, and picked it off the floor. It was an egg-shaped object with a swirly sea-shell pattern, but was glowing and sparkling.

"It looks kind of like Slizer's egg," I said.

"Me thinks it looks like a Flightmare's egg," Nuffink told me. Then, understanding dawned upon us.

"Is that even possible?!" I exclaimed – looking at Slizer.

"A Flightmare – speed stinger hybrid," Nuffink said with big eyes.

"But how?" I asked, amazed.

"Speed stingers and Flightmares are both dragons," Nuffink told me.

"Yeah, but they are two different species," I argued.

Nuffink but his hands up in surrender, "Me no know, but that's what it looks like!"

After our initial shock, I finally managed to return to action.



“Alright, Slizer. You take care of this egg,” I said, shoving it towards him. Slizer gently picked it up in his mouth while Nuffink watched in amazement and shock. Slizer looked away uncomfortably.

“How long have we been here for?” I asked Nuffink.

“About two days. You sleep long!” Nuffink declared – coming out of his trance.

“Well, let’s go meet up with Lemming,” I said walking slowly toward the tunnel.

“Keep your head shut! We can’t chance Lemmirg seeing the egg,” I told Slizer while clamping his mouth shut.

My head was clearing up rapidly, and Pouncer appeared to be almost back to normal. So, with Nuffink leading the way, we cautiously crept out of the cave and down towards the bridge. The ground was very wet and muddy, but the sun was starting to break through the clouds. In front of us, I caught sight of the remains of the village. Not one building remained unscathed, and about eighty percent of the buildings had been reduced to burnt sticks. The main fortress was also in shambles, and I couldn’t see a single goon anywhere.

“We need make this quick!” Nuffink said, putting his arm around me and helping me along. It appeared that most of the goons had cleared a small walkway through the village over the past two days, so we followed the trail. We kept close to the ground, expecting a goon to jump out at us at any minute, but none did. Just as we neared the wooden walkway down the docks, I saw Lemmirg running up the main trail toward us. That’s when I heard a piercing scream.

“What was that?” Nuffink whispered to me, looking around for the source.

“Wait!” I whispered, “That’s not just anyone’s scream; that’s Sulpher’s!”

“They have her in that house!” Lemmirg told us when he arrived.

“Hurry, let’s rescue her!” Nuffink whispered back, heading towards the house.

“Wait! We shouldn’t both go!” I told him.

Nuffink stopped, and he, Lemmirg, and I crouched behind a stack of crates.

“What is plan?!” Nuffink said, disgusted with my indecision.

“It isn’t worth it for both of us to go. Nuffink, you should go with Slizer and Lemmirg to the dock and get ready in the boat. Pouncer can stay with me, and I’ll ride Pouncer with Sulpher and catch up with you guys later on. Okay?”

Nuffink shook his head, “No, you go.”

“No, I know Sulpher better than you do. Plus, do you know what your father would do to me if you were hurt or killed?!” Nuffink pondered this for a moment, then shook my hand and disappeared down the wooden ramps with Lemmirg and Slizer. I raced back into the village as best as I could with Pouncer and listened carefully for Sulpher’s voice.

“I will not!” I heard Sulpher say from somewhere nearby. Pouncer’s sensitive ears immediately picked up the sound and crept over to a heavily damaged building to my left that stood in the middle of some fire-scarred earth.

It was a fairly large hut, but after a quick scout, I realized there was only one door in the front. I took a deep breath and swung it open.

Across from where I stood were three soldiers with their backs to me. The taller one was yelling at what I assumed to be Sulpher. I quickly ducked beneath a nearby table, but none of them realized the door had been opened. Their voices drowned out the sound of the door’s creaking, and it was actually lighter in the house due to the many torches than it was outside.



“Tell me where New Berk is!” a particularly large War Lord general said to her..

“I don’t know! I did go there, but it was foggy, and it was Hiccup’s kids that actually got us there,” Sulpher was saying.

“I want answers!” the general roared, “And you are just lying. I can see it in your eyes!”

“Honestly!” Sulpher pleaded, “I don’t know. I can tell you where my island is.”

“I don’t care about the wing maidens. They don’t have any connections to dragons! I want Hiccup and the furies!” the general replied.

“I can’t tell you if I don’t know where it is!”

“Cut her in half!” the general roared to the soldiers nearby, “And send her pieces to Outcast Island. That’ll show Kaizar and Hiccup that I mean *business!*”

The pure violence of the general’s words scared me. I hadn’t realized that the War Lords could be so beast-like.

With a banshee like yell, I lunged out from beneath the table and charged the general. The general recovered from his surprise quickly and judged my path. He parried with a massive broadsword that he was carrying. When I was still out of his reach, the general swung at me, but I dodged out of the way. The general’s inertia carried his sword in a complete circle and right into a fellow soldier who was trying to come to the general’s assistance. The soldier keeled over onto the floor just as Pouncer’s tail swung through the air and wiped out the other War Lord soldier. With a quick swipe, I twisted the general’s sword out of his hand. Then, I followed that up with a kick. The general swiftly danced out of the way, pulled out a knife out of his sleeve, and threw it at me. However, Pouncer smacked him in the back and the knife flew harmless across the room and plunged into a wooden chair nearby.

“You never give up, do you?” the War Lord general grunted at me as he pulled another knife out of his sleeve and aimed at Pouncer.

“Don’t you dare threaten us,” I replied, jumping at him again. The general dodged the chop and wheeled around to stab me, but didn’t make it.

“Oh bother,” he mumbled as he fell to the ground. Sulpher stood over him triumphantly holding her massive hammer; then rushed over to me and gave me a big hug.

“I’m so glad you’re alive,” she sniffled.

“Me too. I didn’t even know you were here until ten minutes ago!” I replied, squeezing her back.

“Boy do I have a story for you!” Sulpher told me – finally giving me a chance to breathe.

“I do too, but right now we need to split.”

With Sulpher right behind me, we quickly left the shack, but outside we met another few goons who were shoveling away debris.

Having caught them by surprise, we had no choice but to attack before they sounded an alarm, but Pouncer had another idea. He just blasted them. Then, Sulpher and I jumped onto Pouncer who took off at a startlingly fast speed. Sulpher and I screamed in fear as we blasted off Scout Island and took to the sky. I had never gone this fast and this high up before in my life, and there wasn’t much to hold onto so I was pretty scared. Sulpher, who was screaming louder than me and in my ear, squeezed me tightly again – but not in an “I’m glad you’re alive and that you rescued me” sort of way. It was more like the type of hug that Uncle Dagur always gave me – halfway between a squeeze and suffocation.



No sooner had we reached a decent altitude, then I spotted a small War Lord ship below with Nuffink manning the wheel.

"There he is!" I told Pouncer. Pouncer, who was excited to meet back up with his favorite rider, took too sharp of a dive and sent Sulpher and I into another cascade of screams.

When we finally landed, Sulpher and I jumped off and flopped down onto the ground.

"What? You've never ridden a dragon before?" Nuffink kidded us.

"I – think – that – I'm – okay – with – not riding a dragon for a while," I breathed.

"Sorry we were late!" Sulpher said to Nuffink.

"Hey, where's Lemmirg?" I asked Nuffink.

Nuffink shrugged his shoulders, "I honestly don't know. We ran down to the docks together, but he disappeared somewhere - so I just grabbed the nearest boat and took off.

I groaned, "Figures."

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We reached Outcast Island late in the day, and as we drew nearer, several outcasts noticed us, but, thinking we were War Lord goons, sailed towards us – readying their catapults.

"Oh," Nuffink realized, "Maybe we should have taken down the War Lord flag."

"Yep, that might have been a good idea," Sulpher conceded.

"Who is there and what is your business?" the head warrior on the front-most boat called out to us.

"It is Kaizar, Sulpher, and Nuffink," I yelled back. There was some silence, followed by the noise of swishing water as the boat drew up alongside us.

"Well, I'll be darned. If it isn't the three people we thought were dead! Welcome aboard comrades!"

By the time our ship reached Outcast Island, the news of our arrival had already spread like wildfire, and I could pick out Hiccup and Astrid standing on the dock. As soon as a plank was thrown up onto our ship, they ran aboard and grabbed Nuffink.

"You don't know what this means to us," they cried, holding him tight. Slizer stood to the side, looking rather uncomfortable and Pouncer was trying to hide behind him so that Toothless and the light fury wouldn't make a big ordeal over him. Puffnut came running up and threw her arms around me.

"Good to see you Kaizar. We all thought that you had beaten us to Valhalla!" I pasted on a smile what with me not used to getting hugged as much as I had been lately. I was just starting to wonder why Puffnut was displaying so much emotion when I felt a cold, wet object slide down my back.

"Yeow! Puffnut!" I yelled – dancing around and trying to get the ice cube off my back.

Tuffnut, who had just gotten onboard, walked up to me and slapped me on the back.

"Welcome back, pal!"

I nodded at him; then ran over to Slizer and carefully popped the egg out of his mouth. It was covered in slime from Slizer's mouth, but unharmed thankfully.

"Hiccup, I need some help," I told him.

"Thanks for helping my son, Kaizar. You don't know how - ,", he was cut off as I laid the glowing egg in Hiccup's hands.

"Do you recognize this dragon egg?"



Chapter 11: Hatched

Later on in the main hall, Hiccup explained the history behind the egg, “The Dreadstrider was one of the rarest dragons alive, even more so than dragons such as the Screaming Death and Bewilderbeast.”

“In fact, I’ve only heard about it once in all my book reading,” Hiccup continued, “One year at Berk during Dreadfall, the usual Flightmare passed through, but with it was a strange sight – it looked sort of like a Flightmare, but had strong, long legs; an

unusually skinny head; and smaller wings than the Flightmare. Bork The Bold called it a Dreadstrider.”

“Oh, I remember reading about the Dreadstrider in Bork’s notes!” Dad interrupted, “Bork noticed that the Dreadstrider had a powerful mist spray. Unlike the Flightmare, it only sprayed once or twice, but its mist paralyzed the victim for more than a day!”

Meanwhile, Hiccup turned the egg around in his hands and inspected it closely.

“Now that we know better what the speed stinger looks like, I guess we can assume that Bork saw a Flightmare – Speed Stinger hybrid that night,” Hiccup continued, looking over at Slizer who was chasing Dart around the hall and bumping into the many Vikings milling about,

“Somehow that Flightmare must have mated with a Speed stinger and created this rare hybrid.”

“We had better get this egg and Slizer to the Hidden World then to keep it safe!” I replied.

Hiccup shook his head.

“You don’t understand, Kaizar. The reason the Dreadstrider is so rare is not because Flightmares and speed stingers rarely mate. It’s because the Dreadstrider gets killed off so quickly,” Hiccup explained, “Bork had a whole section about this in his papers.”

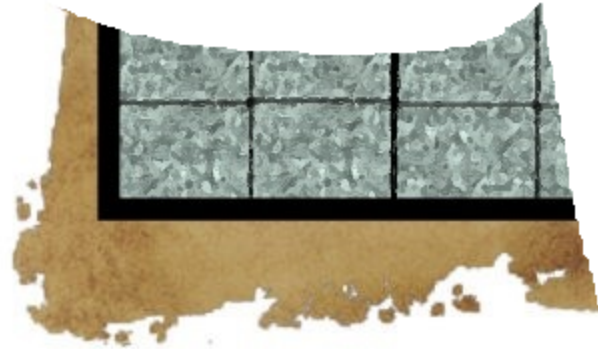
“Oh! And because of this, the Dreadstrider is super aggressive and grows at a startling rate,” Dad interrupted again.

“Well, if we took him to the Hidden World, we wouldn’t have to worry about humans killing it,” I replied – still not understanding Hiccup’s point. Slight exasperated, Hiccup began again.

“The Dreadstrider isn’t killed by humans; it’s killed by other dragons. Bork the Bold’s son researched the Dreadstrider when he saw it again many years later and found that only the Dreadstrider’s parents bond with the Dreadstrider. All other dragons hate the Dreadstrider. To this day, I don’t know why other dragons’ dislike the Dreadstrider. Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that the Dreadstrider is a freak hybrid.”

“Well, how do more aggressive dragons live in the Hidden World?” I asked, in hopes of there being an alternative solution.

“When I went with Astrid down there a long time ago, I saw that there was a whole separate part of the world where the aggressive dragons lived. That way, there wouldn’t be constant fighting.





However, if *all* dragons hate Dreadstriders as Bork and his son were so inclined, then this Dreadstrider isn't safe in the Hidden World."

"Even if Toothless took care of it?" I asked – knowing Toothless' sterling reputation.

"I know Toothless well, but I've never seen him interact with a Dreadstrider. I don't think we could take the risk."

"Wait, but I don't know how to take care of an egg! Can you just hatch it?" I exclaimed. Hiccup smiled.

"It's not that hard; just keep it warm. And no, I can't take care of it. It's much safer with Slizer," he replied.

"But Slizer is supposed to go to the Hidden World!" I insisted.

"I know. The problem is that there isn't much information about the Dreadstrider and I think it would be a good idea to have one of its natural parents nearby to keep an eye on it," Hiccup replied, "How about this. Let's ask Slizer and see what he has to say. Perhaps he thinks it'll be fine by itself." I didn't know if Slizer would understand me, but I decided to give it a shot anyway.

"Slizer! I yelled over to him as he was busily eating out of a tub of soup with Pouncer, Ruffrunner, and Dart. When he heard his name, he looked my way and came over to me.

"Slizer," I said slowly, articulating my words, "Do you want to stay here and take care of the egg or go to the Hidden World?" Slizer cocked his head and just looked at me. Hiccup groaned.

"Perhaps, we should just watch to see if Slizer follows the other dragons to the Hidden World tomorrow," Dad told Hiccup, "After all, Toothless is the Alpha dragon, so Slizer may follow. If he doesn't, then we know he is committed to hatching the egg."

"Good idea. Let's do that," Hiccup commented. From across the room, Gobber banged a large mace against a metal drum.

"Attention everyone! I wanted to thank all of you for your help in teaching the War Lords a lesson. They won't be able to launch an attack on us or our allies for a while now! Most of all, I want to give a large round of applause to our chief and the dragons!" Gobber boomed across the room.

"All hail the chief!" Vikings yelled, standing up. I stood up and clapped loudly. Puffnut and Nuffnut with Ruffnut and Tuffnut banged each other on their helmets with their eating utensils.

"Peace to dragons!" Gobber began after we had clapped a while for Hiccup who was looking terribly embarrassed. Once again the hall burst into applause for Toothless and his family and Slizer. Toothless and the light fury stood at attention and roared, but the nightlights and Slizer bounced around and flapped their wings in excitement – not quite understanding exactly what was going on.

After the applause died down, Dad, Mom, and I began the discussion about getting back to Berserker Island.

"Well, we probably should be getting back to our island as soon as possible. Who knows what is going on there!" Mom told us.

"But if the War Lords have captured the island, it wouldn't be safe to go back," Dad argued – trying to play safe.

"But we can't just leave our tribe for good!" Mom declared.

"How about we go to Wing Maiden Island first," I told my parents, "We can ask Snotlout the current news about our island; then we could make a plan from there."



"Will he know about our island though? We haven't heard from him for a while!" Mom reminded me.

"True, but I told him where the island was and remember that he sent a boat to the island to tell you guys that I was still alive and well."

"The message we didn't get," Dad mumbled.

Mom shrugged her shoulders, "We don't have much to lose with that plan."

As we sat talking, Sulpher broke away from some Berkians she was talking to and joined in on our conversation, "Hey, uh, you guys wouldn't happen to be able to go past Wing Maiden Island on your way back to Berserker Island would you?"

After a long laugh at her question which had to do directly with what we were talking about, Mom said, "Well, then, it's settled we'll leave for Wing Maiden Island tomorrow!"

"What?! So soon?" Astrid said from behind us, "I haven't even been able to catch up with you Heather!"

"We'll visit you again - I promise. Plus, now that we know where you are, we have no excuse," Mom told Astrid.

"You'd better!" With that, Dad, Mom, and I left the hall and headed for our guest house which was surprisingly comfortable. The rest of the Berserkers and Defenders of the Wing were occupying various rooms in other houses generously offered by various Berkians.

"Wait! Where's Slizer and the egg!" I remembered.

"I don't know, I kind of forgot about them!" Dad replied.

"Where's Hiccup's house? Maybe he has them!"

"I think it's this way," Mom said to me, taking off in a jog to the left.

"I'll follow Mom - you can go back to the house," I told Dad.

Within a few minutes, Mom and I arrived at a massive house with a large dragon face on the front top.

"Yep, this is definitely the chief's house!" Mom declared confidently. With that, she walked to the door and knocked on it, "It's Heather and Kaizar!"

Instantly the door swung open and Slizer ran out and slammed into Mom. They both fell to the ground and rolled over each other. Inside, Hiccup was just coming to the door with Toothless. Nested carefully in Hiccup's hands was the Dreadstrider egg.

"What's up Kaizar?" he asked.

"Oh, I just wanted to make sure that Slizer and the egg were safe," I told him.

"Well, then, yes they are! Slizer is free to stay here for the night with the rest of the Night Lights, and I'm working on a protective box for the egg on your way home."

"Hey, Hiccup!" Mom said, finally disentangling herself from Slizer, "Could we borrow a boat to get to Berserker Island and drop off Sulpher?"

"Absolutely, I already have my men preparing one for you. I remember your crazy coming and going habits!" Hiccup commented. I looked at Mom, who flushed a bit.

"Well, you know. I'm a little independent!" Mom said defensively.

"As independent as Astrid - and you know how independent *she* is!" Hiccup replied.

"Hey!" Astrid yelled from inside the house.

"See you later!" I told Hiccup, stepping down from the door.

That night I actually managed to get a good night's sleep.



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“I’ll see you guys later, okay?” I told Nuffink and Zephyr as I side-hugged both, “Thanks for helping my arm, Nuffink!”

“No problem, Kaizar. I see you again too!” he told me.

“Stay out of trouble,” Zephyr told me, her hand on Dart’s head. Dart was watching as Slizer and Pouncer ran around the beach.

Next, I said goodbye to Puffnut and Nuffnut.

“I’m definitely going to stop by and beat you at Boar Pit!” I told Puffnut and Nuffnut.

“Undoubtedly, sir!” Puffnut announced, “For we must prank you again, and soon.”

“I’ll miss you guys,” I said, then reached over and gave Nuffnut a big hug. Nuffnut was very surprised by the act and Sulpher, who was standing nearby, scowled. After I let go to shake Tuffnut’s and Ruffnut’s hands and slap Eret on the back, Nuffnut screamed and started dancing around.

“You’re not the only person who can stick ice cubes down backs!” I shouted to Puffnut and Nuffnut. Everyone nearby laughed heartily, and Nuffnut glared at me.

“ROARRR!” The dragon roar resounded off the water and beach and grew in intensity as a flash of black swooped out of the sky - Toothless had arrived. Immediately, all of the Furies and Slizer stood at attention. Toothless roared again and nuzzled Hiccup who hugged him affectionately.

“They have such a good relationship, don’t they,” Dad whispered quietly watching the painful goodbye.

Then, with a flip of his head, Toothless roared again and took to the sky, with his family following closely behind. Although Slizer watched intently, he made no move to leave. Toothless turned around and roared again, but Slizer just growled back and padded back to me.

“I guess he wants to be with you!” Hiccup told me.

“I just hope he’ll be safe,” I said, worried.

“Well, you know where we are, so you can drop him off any time,” Hiccup replied. As the Furies took off, Pouncer and Dart shot off several plasma blasts into the sky and waved their wings in a goodbye to Nuffink and Zephyr.

“Bye, Toothless. See you again, friend!” Hiccup called out after them.

“Alright! Time to go everyone!” Tuffnut yelled from aboard his Outcast ship, “We need to make it home in time for the great human catapult test!” Although Ruffnut, Nuffnut, and Puffnut quickly boarded their ships in great expectation, Eret put his head in his hands.

“See you!” I yelled after them.

After some last hugs on Dad and Mom’s part, we boarded our own Berk ship and were about to pull up the anchor when Hiccup came running up to me.

“Don’t forget the Dreadstrider egg!” he told me, handing me a medium-sized metal box, “I put the egg in here surrounded by a lot of cotton and wool. It’ll be safe in here.”

“Wow! Thanks Hiccup. I appreciate it,” I told him.

On that note, Mom pulled up the anchor, and we sailed off. On board were the dozen members of our tribe plus my family and Sulpher. Among all of us, we could probably manage to keep our boat on course and moving quickly.

As we sailed away from the dock, Nuffink yelled out to me, “Thanks for the adventure, friend!”



Zephyr also shouted, "Come again!"

Sulpher snorted.

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Six days later, our small band of boats were approaching Wing Maiden Island.

"Well, I'm going to miss you and our many adventures," I told Sulpher as we leaned over the side of our ship.

"Our adventures weren't always wonderful," Sulpher reminded me, "But they certainly put some action into my life. Sometimes it just gets so boring on this island!"

"Yeah, well. Keep in shape, because I'll be around again, and you'll have to meet the Dreadstrider!" I told Sulpher.

"That'll be so cool!" Sulpher exclaimed, "I wonder if it will have tail venom *and* a paralyzing mist."

"Well, obviously, I hope so!"

"Wing Maiden Island dead ahead!" boomed a voice from the crow's nest.

"I don't know about you, but I can't see anything!" I mentioned to Sulpher.

Sulpher giggled, "Yeah, I can't either. I guess those people must eat a whole lot of carrots."

"Actually, I just have a really good telescope!" yelled the soldier from above.

Laughing hard, we stared out into the ocean to see if we could the island. Then, I remembered my island again.

"I really hope my tribe was able to hold our island! I can't go back there if it's overrun by the War Lords!" I commented to Sulpher.

"Well, you're welcome here, obviously!" Sulpher told me, getting excited about that prospect.

"Don't get your hopes up," I said – laughing again.

"There are some nasty sand bars around here," Sulpher told the captain of our ship, "So you should just anchor here and we can take a small row boat to the island."

"Okay," the captain said. "Anchor and prepare the row boats!"

Several row boats were lowered and Sulpher and I climbed into one of them along with Mom and Dad and Slizer. Within a matter of minutes, we pulled up alongside what I called "Shipwreck Beach" in honor of me landing there with Slizer.

"Where is everyone?" Sulpher wondered out loud.

"Oh, they're probably running away now that you're back," I joked with her. Sulpher snorted and punched me again, but I dodged out of the way – finally being able to predict the punches.

"Well, I guess let's just head to the village," one of the Berserker sailors suggested.

With Sulpher leading the way and Slizer standing near me, we headed into the forest.

"This is actually a pretty nice island," one of the sailors said, looking at the lush, green forest, "It doesn't have too much foliage, or too little."

"Brings back memories," Dad told me.

"It's a great place for training!" Sulpher announced from up ahead. We had just crested the main hill, when Sulpher stopped short. I nearly ran into her, and stumbled forward a little bit, noticing the village down below.

"You can get out of the trees now, Dad," she said while gazing intently at a particularly dense oak tree standing nearby.

Snotlout crashed through the branches and landed on the forest floor, posing heroically. He slung his hammer over his shoulder, and walked towards Sulpher.



“Wow! You brought a whole bunch of people this time. We could use the new faces!” Snotlout announced.

“Uh, these are just Berserker and Defenders of the Wing warriors. They aren’t here to stay,” she quickly told Snotlout. Then, a bunch of other wing maidens gracefully jumped out of their trees and landed around our small group.

“Welcome to Wing Maiden Island!” Snotlout said grandly, gesturing to the village down below us. A few of the sailors, who had just recovered from the shock of people jumping out of trees, now noticed all the Wing Maidens standing around.

“Suddenly, I’m not as anxious to go back to New Berk,” one of the younger Berserker soldiers said – eyeing a Wing Maiden with a curved, shiny sword.

“I still can’t believe you’re the chief here, Snotlout,” Mom told Snotlout.

“Well, you know me – as smart as I am strong,” he bragged, “And is that old Fishface over there?”

“That’s Fishlegs, Snotlout,” Dad told him, “You can’t mess with me anymore! After all, my brother-in-law is the king of my tribe!”

“That’s just Dagur – he’s a funny one, that dude,” Snotlout replied, not at all taken aback.

“Snotlout, I got the-,” another Wing Maiden ran out of the bushes to my left and stopped short, noticing Sulpher and I – it was Laurel.

Sulpher and I gawked at her as she quickly calculated what to do and decided to take off back into the brush.

“It’s just Sulpher and Kaizar!” Snotlout yelled after her, confused as to why she left so suddenly.

“Get her,” I told everyone, pointing my Odin’s Storm after Laurel.

Slizer, Sulpher, and I ran after Laurel, but she was quick too. Having a small head start, it was hard to catch up, and she knew the forest much better than I did. However, Slizer had excellent ears and could hear her, so we never really lost her; even if she disappeared from sight.

Eventually, Laurel circled back around to the village.

“I know a shortcut,” Sulpher huffed beside me, “I’ll cut her off at the village.”

“Okay,” I puffed, “I’ll get her from behind.”

Sulpher disappeared to the right while Slizer and I kept up the chase directly after Laurel.

Suddenly, we emerged into a large green meadow, and I could see Laurel a good hundred paces in front of us. Quickly swinging onto Slizer’s back, we bore down upon her (I hadn’t allowed Slizer to catch her before by himself, in case she hurt him).

We had almost caught up, when Sulpher leapt out of some nearby bushes – right into Laurel’s path. Laurel skidded to a halt; then swung her sword at Sulpher. Sulpher foresaw the move and swung her hammer against the sword – smashing the light sword to pieces. Unfortunately, Sulpher didn’t foresee Laurel’s next move. Laurel grabbed a low branch and swung her feet into Sulpher’s head. Sulpher ducked at the last moment, but Laurel’s feet still caught Sulpher in her helmet and threw her head first backward into a tree. With a sickening crunch, Sulpher’s helmet and head hit the trunk of a thick evergreen, and she collapsed unconscious to the ground.

“Teaches you,” Laurel sneered – just before Slizer stung her. Laurel yelled and lashed out against Slizer, but I bashed her in the head with my Odin’s Storm, and, this time, *she* hit the ground.

“It doesn’t pay to hurt my friends!” I stated to Laurel as she laid on the ground - breathing heavy.



"Can anyone tell me what is going on?!" Snotlout yelled, finally catching up with us.

"Swoosh!" from out of the forest came another surprise - and one I didn't want to see! It was Lemmirg.

"Back off Kaizar!" He told me fiercely.

"What the-?" Snotlout said - completely confused.

"What are you doing *here*?" I asked Lemmirg.

"Making sure all of the loose ends are tied up. I'll be seeing ya!" He said. With that, Laurel stood up and they disappeared into the forest.

"Don't follow me!" Lemmirg yelled after them.

However, I didn't answer as I was busy checking to see if Sulpher was okay. Her pulse seemed to still be strong, but she was definitely knocked out. I gently removed her helmet.

"Snotlout, do you have a piece of cloth? We need to bandage her head," I told him.

Snotlout gasped when he saw Sulpher lying on the ground, "For the second time, what happened?!"

"I've got some clothes," Mom said, bursting through the underbrush. With experienced movements, Mom carefully bandaged Sulpher's head.

"We're going to need two people to hold her as we get to the village and another two to hold Laurel," Mom said to the Wing Maidens now standing nearby. As two Wing Maidens gently picked up Sulpher, Slizer whimpered and grabbed her hammer. As we quickly walked back to the village, Snotlout asked me again, "Can you *please* tell me what is going on?"

"Laurel betrayed us and got us captured by the War Lords," I told him.

"Really? She's always been super supportive of the Wing Maiden cause," Snotlout replied.

"I know, but she turned us in - and that's all I know."

"I can't imagine why!" By that time, we reached the main village and carefully put Sulpher in her bed at her house.

"Will she be okay?" I asked Mom.

"Oh, she'll be fine. We, however, should get back to the boat. We don't want to leave the rest of our friends waiting," Mom replied.

"I looked back at Sulpher lying still on her bed and wished that I could stay, but if my tribe needed me, it was my duty to help out - that is what Sulpher would want me to do.

"Let's go," I said leaving the house.

"Awe man; I wanted to catch up with you guys!" Snotlout told us as we left.

"We'll meet again. We just need to help our village. As Stoick The Vast said, 'The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few.'"

"I won't be going anywhere; so stop by soon!" Snotlout replied.

"Oh, and don't forget to find Lemmirg and Laurel!" I told Snotlout - after explaining to him about Laurel's betrayal and who Lemmirg was.

"He obviously purposely left without us so that he could pick up Laurel from here before we arrived. Too bad we didn't beat him," I commented.

"If he's still on Wing Maiden Island, we'll catch him!" Snotlout confidently replied.

On that note, the rest of us hurried back to our boat and set sail for Berserker Island.

It was almost night time but the time Berserker Island came within sight. Several columns of smoke rose into the night sky and many fires dotted the island's landscape. As we got closer to



the island, we saw the disaster that had unfolded. There was not a boat in sight, but there were plenty of masts of ships pointing out of the bay – creating a maze of obstacles in the water. The once beautiful and complex docks were completely nonexistent and the main part of the village higher up the island was completely decimated. The land was scarred, dirty, and muddy while a few soldiers scurried around tending to the many (yet controlled) bonfires burning through the island. In fact, no one noticed as our boat carefully sailed into the bay and ran aground on the beach. It appeared to all of us that we had, indeed, defended our island – but at the cost of more than just our beautiful island.

With heavy hearts, my parents and I with Slizer and the rest of the warriors with us climbed up into where our village used to stand. We had just reached the village when a lone Berserker soldier with a massive torch spotted us.

“Heather?” The soldier ran toward us and gaped at our small band of people. It was Magur.

“Magur!” Heather said, hugging him very hard. Although Magur was typically an emotionless sort of person, he did not refuse the hug.

“How in the world did you guys get back here?” Magur asked us all. Then, he pointed at me, “And *you*. How are you alive? After the goons knocked you out, I thought for sure you were going to be killed!”

“It’s kind of a long story, Magur,” Dad told him, “For now, what can we do to help?”

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“We are here to remember our fellow friends, family, and comrades who fell during this fight,” Mala announced with an emotional voice, “We remember their sacrifice and their commitment in keeping us safe. May they live forever and in peace in Valhalla.”

All of us in the large crowd of onlookers reverently bent our heads.

Mala continued, “We praise their strength, valor, and skill in protecting the island and our people. May they never be forgotten.”

With that, Mala lit the end of an arrow on fire and shot it into the water where dozens of masts protruded from the ocean depths. Those of us that had crossbows or bows followed suit. We all watched in silence as a few masts caught on fire and burned slowly.

“Well, we are also here today to celebrate the graduation of fifty members from the Warrior Training camp!” Dagur declared enthusiastically from somewhere behind me.

“There’s only twenty left,” Magur mumbled beside me.

“All of you graduates come on up here!” Dagur announced to us, directing the graduates to come onto the temporary wooden platform that had just been erected. When all of the graduates made their way to the platform, Dagur continued, “Everyone one of these graduates either successfully made their way through the treacherous Bewilderbeast Mountain to join the Berserk guard or have sufficiently fulfilled the Berserker and Defender of the Wing requirements to join the Defenders of the Wing army.”

Starved for something to be excited about, the crowd cheered and clapped, while Slizer roared and Dad whistled and Mom smiled proudly up at me.

“In addition,” Dagur carried on, “Two of these graduates have shown such remarkable aptitude, skills, and abilities that the Elders have decided to immediately promote them.”

“Magur, come on up here!” Dagur said proudly. Magur, being a very tall and muscular boy with a full head of red hair, walked confidently up to Dagur at the main podium.



“My son, of course!” Dagur announced to the crowd, who laughed heartily, “For his bravery in fighting, incredible accuracy with his crossbow, and perseverance in holding his own against all odds, Magur has been promoted to captain of group ‘4A’.” At this the crowd cheered very loudly since group ‘4A’ was one of the more prestigious groups of skilled combat warriors in the Berserk Guard.

“In addition, we have another warrior. Kaizar, come up here!” Dagur continued once Magur had returned to his position near the back of the platform.

Although slightly nervous, I forced myself forward to stand next to Dagur.

“In the face of grave danger and capture, Kaizar remained calm and resourceful. When surrounded by enemies, Kaizar fought them off single handedly. When with old allies and friends, Kaizar communicated effectively and saved many lives. Finally, when forced into difficult situations against his will, Kaizar held strong. I am proud to announce that Kaizar has successfully passed every difficult test put in his way. *And* with a body count of more than a hundred-,” Dagur was cut off as the crowd roared with applause and stamped their feet. However, I hung my head at the immense loss of life I was forced to commit.

“QUIET! I’m still talking!” Dagur finally roared. When the crowd fell silent, Dagur continued.

“Kaizar is being promoted to general of the group “Dragon!” The crowd, instead of giving me a standing ovation as I had selfishly hoped, stood about confused. There was no group of ‘Dragon.’

“In case you are not aware,” Dagur continued (as it was obvious the people *were* confused), “The Elders have decided to create a new subgroup in the Berserk Guard that is dedicated to exploration, excellence in fighting, dangerous missions, and diplomacy (Dagur said the last word like diplomacy was for wimps).” Then the crowd applauded for me, but Mom and Dad shouted.

“We wish all these graduates a long life and many adventures!” Dagur finished.

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A week later, I lay on my sleeping mat, looking up at the ceiling. I thought about my island – how it was covered in ashes and scorched from one side to the other. *How could we ever clean it all back up?!* I thought about Sulpher and hoped she was okay after getting the concussion from Laurel. I thought about Laurel and Lemmirg and whose side Lemmirg was really on. Most of all, I thought about the War Lords and if they would come after me again. I was just getting around to worrying about Slizer when I heard a funny noise emanating from somewhere beside me. I looked over to where Slizer was sleeping on a scarred chunk of rock, but he was sleeping soundly. Making sure to not wake him up, I carefully slid off my mat and over to where I kept the Dreadstrider egg box covertly nested among a pile of cloths. The egg box was shaking. *It’s hatching already?* With shaking hands, I slowly removed the lid of the box and peered inside. Sure enough, the Dreadstrider egg was shaking violently.

“DAD!” I yelled, “It’s gonna hatch!” I heard a loud groaning noise from the parents’ tent and then Fishlegs stumbled through the flap in my tent. He then accidentally stepped on Slizer’s tail and consequently woke Slizer up.

“Eggs only hatch around December,” Dad moaned, but when he saw the egg; he thought again. Mom came in and yawned, “Remember that Dreadstriders grow at a very fast rate – what with them needing to be able to defend themselves early on.”



"Honey, how in the world do you know that?" Dad asked, astonished.

"I studied Flightmares for a while, and read all about them and Dreadstriders in the book of dragons," Mom replied, "I'm not the only one who knows about dragons." On that note, the shell exploded. However, since the egg was in the box, only the top part of the shell flew out.

However, it did punch a hole through the ceiling of my make-shift tent. Slizer cautiously peered into the box, with Dad, Mom, and I all trying to get a good look too. Inside was what looked like a blue, glowing speed stinger upon first glance.

"But look!" Mom said, pointing to the body of the speed stinger, "There are tiny wings there."

The baby Dreadstrider growled fiercely and stood up. Ever so carefully, I stretched out my index finger towards it. The Dreadstrider looked up at me carefully, but when it saw Slizer nearby, it appeared to calm down. It stretched up its head and laid it against my finger, growling softly.

When Dad saw how successful that had been for me, he also reached his finger down.

Unfortunately, his finger was really large and the baby Dreadstrider realized too late that Dad wasn't a threat.

With a loud squawk, it sprayed a small cloud of mist on Dad's hand. Dad stumbled backward and reached out to steady himself, but found that his entire arm was completely paralyzed and couldn't budge. Thus, he landed hard on the left side of my tent and ripped a huge gash in it.

"And *that*," Mom announced, "Is a baby Dreadstrider!"



Character Relations:

Hiccup (Horrendous Haddock 3):

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

Weapon: Odin's Storm and Hiccup's Old Shield



Dagur (The Deranged):

Married to: Mala

Children: Magur

Weapon: Chieftain's axe

Mala ():

Married to: Dagur

Children: Magur

Weapon: Long curved sword

Magur ():

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 ():

Married to: Eret son of Eret

Children: Nuffnut

Weapon: Mace

Nuffnut ():

Child of: Ruffnut and Eret son of Eret

Sibling: None

Weapon: Mace

Lemmirg:

Child of: Grimmel and Liner

Sibling: None

Weapon: Crossbow



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