

Adventure. Peril. Lost Jewels.
And the Fearsome Toothy Cows of Skree.

On the
Edge
of the
Dark Sea
of Darkness



**ANDREW
PETERSON**

THE
WINGFEATHER SAGA
BOOK ONE

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Praise for
On the Edge of the Dark Sea of Darkness

“So good—smart, funny, as full of ideas as action.”

—JONATHAN ROGERS, author of *The Wilderking Trilogy*

“A wildly imaginative, wonderfully irreverent epic that shines with wit and wisdom—and features excellent instructions on how to cope with Thwaps, Fangs, and the occasional Toothy Cow.”

—ALLAN HEINBERG, writer/co-executive producer of ABC’s *Grey’s Anatomy*, and co-creator of Marvel Comics *Young Avengers*

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“Sometimes, in order to find out who we were supposed to be, we need to get lost in other worlds: Oz, Camelot, Narnia. In *On the Edge of the Dark Sea of Darkness*, Andrew Peterson provides new and needed places like Aerwiar, Skree, and Glipwood—places where we need to get lost and found.”

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“What a great story! I laughed, gasped, and learned more about Skreean culture than I ever thought possible. *On the Edge of the Dark Sea of Darkness* is equal parts adventure and whimsy—a real page turner that both accelerates the heart and warms it. I loved it.”

—CAROLYN ARENDS, singer/songwriter and author of *Wrestling with Angels*

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THE WINGFEATHER SAGA BOOK ONE



**WATERBROOK
PRESS**

ON THE EDGE OF THE DARK SEA OF DARKNESS

PUBLISHED BY WATERBROOK PRESS

12265 Oracle Boulevard, Suite 200

Colorado Springs, Colorado 80921

A division of Random House Inc.

ISBN 978-1-4000-7384-9

Copyright © 2008 by Andrew Peterson

Hand-drawn maps and toothy cow illustration © 2008 by Andrew Peterson

Illustrations © 2008 by Justin Gerard, Portland Studios

Published in association with the literary agency of Alive Communications, Colorado Springs, CO 80918.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Peterson, Andrew.

On the edge of the Dark Sea of Darkness : adventure, peril, lost jewels, and the fearsome toothy cows of Skree / Andrew Peterson.—1st ed.

p. cm.—(The Wingfeather saga ; bk. 1)

Summary: Three siblings experience many fantastic adventures while looking for a lost treasure.

ISBN 978-1-4000-7384-9

[1. Brothers and sisters—Fiction. 2. Fantasy.] I. Title.

PZ7.P4431On 2008

[Fic]—dc22

2007047702

Printed in the United States of America

2008—First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



For my brother

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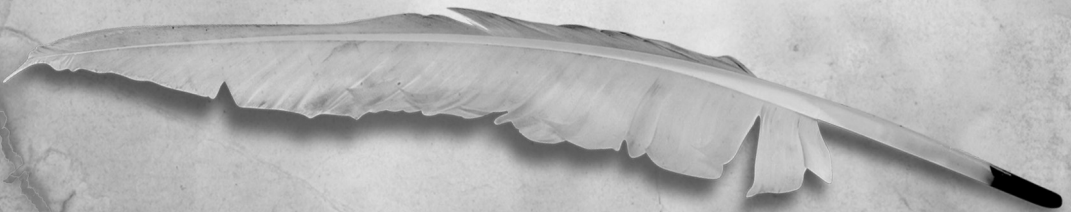
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THE GLIPWOOD TOWNSHIP

FORT LAVENDERON

DARK SEA OF DARKNESS

THE ONLY INN (GLIPWOODS ONLY INN)

FANG BARRACKS

SHAGGY'S TAVERN

THE GREAT TREE

THE ALLEY THE CHILDREN TOOK TO FIGHT THE FIRE DRAGONS

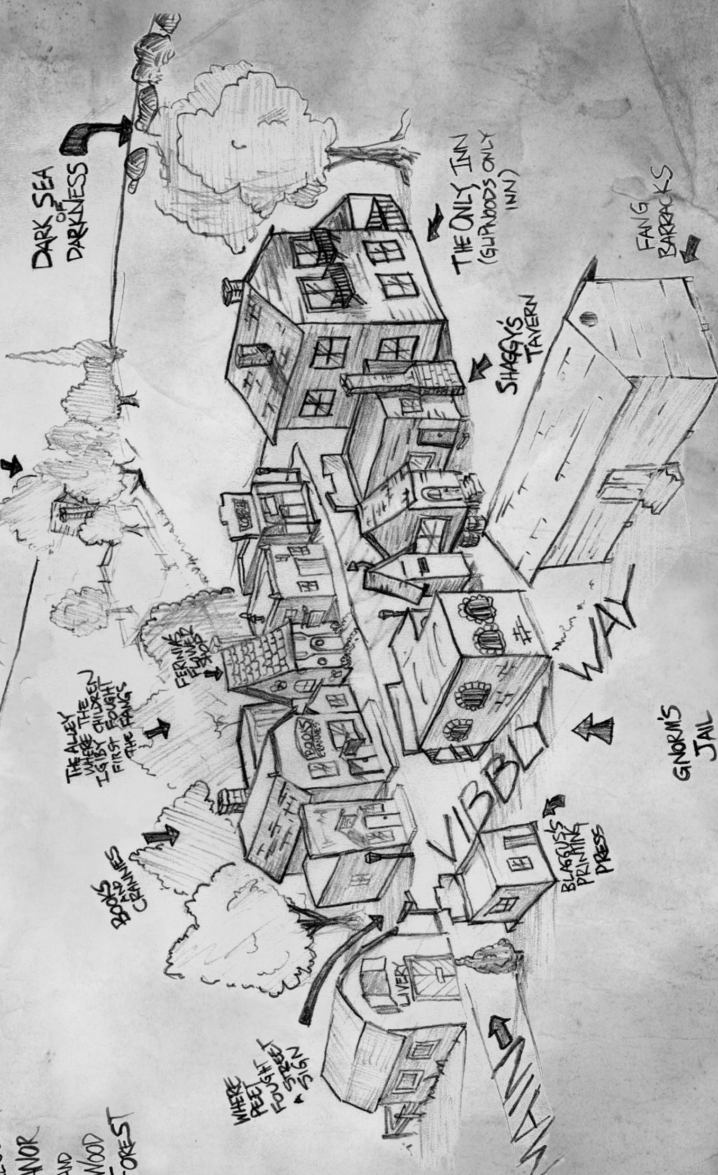
BOB'S GEMMINES

GIROD'S JAIL

BLAGGIE'S PLANTING PRESS

WHERE PEET FIRST FOUND THE SUN

ANKLEJELLY MANOR AND GLIPWOOD FOREST



DANG



THE ICE FRIGIES

SKRIFT

STONY MOUNTAINS

THE FRINGE ISLANDS

DARK SEA OF DARKNESS

THE SUNKEN MOUNTAINS

GLIMWOOD FOREST

WILDERNESS

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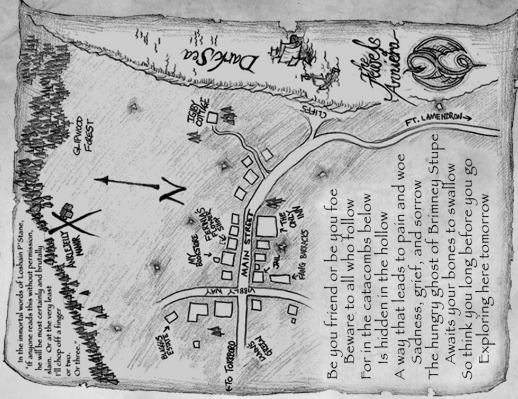
DIEMANN

TORREBORO

THE FIELDS OF FALEN CRIGHT

RIVER BLANK

OSKAR'S MAP



Be you friend or be you foe
Beware to all who follow
For in the catacombs below
Is hidden in the hollow
A way that leads to pain and woe
Sadness, grief, and sorrow
The hungry ghost of Brimney Stupe
Awaits your bones to swallow
So think you long before you go
Exploring here tomorrow

A Brief Introduction to the World of Aerwiar

The old stories tell that when the first person woke up on the first morning in the world where this tale takes place, he yawned, stretched, and said to the first thing he saw, “Well, here we are.” The man’s name was Dwayne, and the first thing he saw was a rock. Next to the rock, though, was a woman named Gladys, whom he would learn to get along with very well. In the many ages that followed, that first sentence was taught to children and their children’s children and their children’s parents’ cousins and so on until, quite by accident, all speaking creatures referred to the world around them as Aerwiar.

On Aerwiar there were two main continents divided by one main ocean called the Dark Sea of Darkness. By the Fourth Epoch, the harsh land east of the sea had come to be known as Dang and has little to do with this tale (except for the Great Evil that came to exist there and waged a Great War on pretty much everybody).

That evil was a nameless evil, an evil whose name was Gnag the Nameless. He ruled from high atop the Killridge Mountains in the Castle Throg, and of all the things Gnag despised in Aerwiar, he most hated the High King Wingfeather of the Isle of Anniera. For some reason no one could guess, Gnag and his wretched hordes had marched westward and gobbled up the Shining Isle of Anniera, where fell the good king, his house, and his noble people.

Unsatisfied, the Nameless Evil (named Gnag) built a fleet that bore his monstrous army westward across the Dark Sea of Darkness to the continent of Skree. And he ravaged that wide land, nine long years before our adventure begins.

A Slightly Less Brief Introduction to the Land of Skree

The whole land of Skree was green and flat. Except for the Stony Mountains in the north, which weren't flat at all. Nor were they green. They were rather white from all the snow, though if the snow melted, something green might eventually grow there.

Ah, but farther south, the Plains of Palen Jabh-J covered the rest of Skree with their rolling (and decidedly green) grasslands. Except, of course, for Glipwood Forest. Just south of the plains, the Linnard Woodlands rolled off the edges of all maps, except, one would suppose, those maps made by whatever people lived in those far lands.

But the people who made their homes on the plains, at the edges of the forest, high in the mountains, and along the great River Blapp, lived in a state of lasting, glorious peace. That is, except for the aforementioned Great War, which they lost quite pitifully and which destroyed life as they knew it.

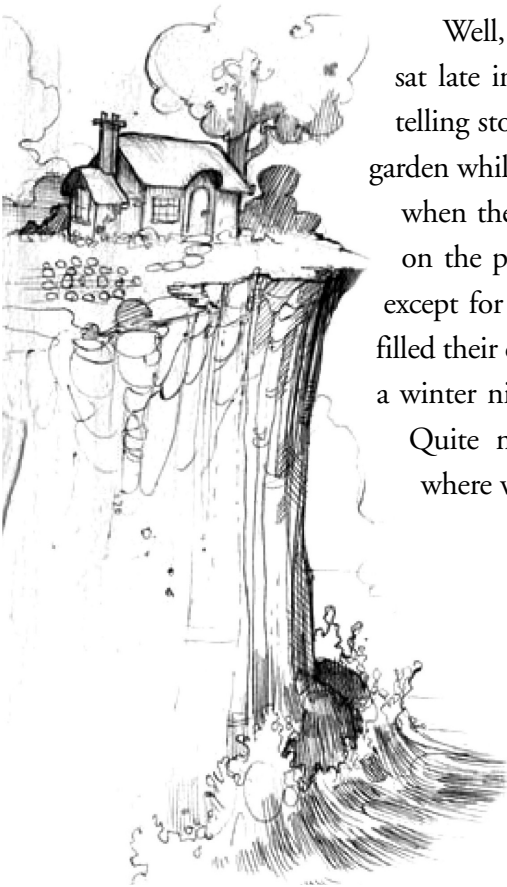
In the nine years after Skree's king and all his lords—in fact, everyone with a claim to the throne—had been executed, the people of Skree had learned to survive under the occupation of the Fangs of Dang. The Fangs walked about like humans, and in fact they looked exactly like humans, except for the greenish scales that covered their bodies and the lizard-like snout and the two long, venomous fangs that jutted downward from their snarling mouths. Also, they had tails. Since Gnag the Nameless had conquered the free lands of Skree, the Fangs had occupied all the towns, exacting taxes and being nasty to the free Skreeans. Oh, yes, the people of Skree were quite free, as long as they were in their homes by midnight. And as long as they bore no weapons, and they didn't complain when their fellow Skreeans were occasionally taken away across the sea, never to be seen again. But other than the cruel Fangs and the constant threat of death and

torture, there wasn't much to fear in Skree. Except in the Stony Mountains where hairy bomnubbles crept across the land with their long teeth and hungry bellies, and across the frozen wastes of the Ice Prairies where those few who made their home there battled snickbuzzards daily. Farther south, the Plains of Palen Jabh-J were as safe as they were beautiful, except for the ratbadgers that slithered through the tall grass (a farmer from South Torrboro claimed to have seen one as big as a young meep, which is about the size of a full-grown chorkney, an animal that stands about as high as a flabbit).

Before roaring over Fingap Falls, the River Blapp was wide and peaceful, clear as a spring, and the fish to be caught there were both delicious and docile, except for the many fish that were poisonous to the touch, and the daggerfish that were known to leap into boats and impale the stoutest fisherman.

An Introduction to the Igiby Cottage (Very Brief)

Just outside the town of Glipwood, perched near the edge of the cliffs above the Dark Sea, sat a little cottage where lived the Igiby family. The cottage was rather plain, except for how comfortable it was, and how nicely it had been built, and how neatly it was kept in spite of the three children who lived there, and except for the love that glowed from it like firelight from its windows at night.



As for the Igiby family?

Well, except for the way they always sat late into the night beside the hearth telling stories, and when they sang in the garden while they gathered the harvest, and when the grandfather, Podo Helmer, sat on the porch blowing smoke rings, and except for all the good, warm things that filled their days there like cider in a mug on a winter night, they were quite miserable. Quite miserable indeed, in that land where walked the Fangs of Dang.

The Carriage Comes, the Carriage Black

Janner Igiby lay trembling in his bed with his eyes shut tight, listening to the dreadful sound of the Black Carriage rattling along in the moonlight. His younger brother Tink was snoring in the bunk above him, and he could tell from his little sister Leeli's breathing that she was asleep too. Janner dared to open his eyes and saw the moon, as white as a skull, grinning down on him through the window. As hard as he tried not to think about it, the nursery rhyme that had terrified children in the land of Skree for years sang in his head, and he lay there in the pale moonlight, his lips barely moving.

Lo, beyond the River Blapp
The Carriage comes, the Carriage Black
By shadowed steed with shadowed tack
And shadowed driver driving

Child, pray the Maker let you sleep
When comes the Carriage down your street
Lest all your dreams be dreams of teeth
And Carriages arriving

To wrest you from your berth and bower
In deepest night and darkest hour

Across the sea to frozen tower
Where Gnag the Nameless pounds you

At Castle Throg across the span,
A world away from kith and clan
You'll weep at how your woes began
The night the shadows bound you

Away, beyond the River Blapp,
The Carriage came, the Carriage Black
By shadowed steed with shadowed tack
The night the Carriage found you

It's no wonder that Janner had a hard time sleeping once he heard the faint thud of hooves and the jangle of chains. He could see in his mind the forms of the crows circling the Carriage and perched atop it, hear the croaking beaks and the flapping of black wings. He told himself that the sounds were only his imagination. But he knew that somewhere in the countryside that very night, the Black Carriage would stop at some poor soul's house, and the children there would be taken away, never to be seen again.

Only last week he had overheard his mother crying about the taking of a girl from Torrboro. Sara Cobbler was the same age as Janner, and he remembered meeting her once when her family had passed through Glipwood. But now she was gone forever. One night she lay in bed just as he was now. She had probably kissed her parents good night and said a prayer. And the Black Carriage had come for her.

Had she been awake?

Did she hear the snort of the black horses outside her window or see the steam rising from their nostrils?

Did the Fangs of Dang tie her up?

Had she struggled when they put her into the Carriage, as if she were being fed into the mouth of a monster?

Whatever she had done, it was useless. She had been ripped away from her family, and that was the end of it. Sara's parents had held a funeral wake for her. Being carried off by the Black Carriage was like dying. It could happen to anyone, at any time, and there was nothing to be done about it but to hope the Carriage kept moving when it rattled down your lane.

The rattles and clinks and hoofbeats echoed through the night. Was the Black Carriage getting closer? Would it make the turn up the lane to the Igiby cottage? Janner prayed to the Maker that it would not.

Nugget, Leeli's dog, perked his head up at the foot of her bed and growled at the night beyond the window. Janner saw a crow alight on a bony branch outlined by the moon. Janner trembled, gripping his quilt and pulling it up to his chin. The crow turned its head and seemed to peer into Janner's window, sneering at the boy whose wide eyes reflected back the moonlight. Janner lay there in terror, wishing he could sink deeper into his bed where the crow's black eyes couldn't see him. But the bird flapped away. The moon clouded over, and the *thump-thump* of hoofbeats and the *creak-rattle* of the Carriage faded, faded, finally into silence.

Janner realized that he'd been holding his breath, and he let it out slowly. He heard Nugget's tail thump against the wall and felt much less alone knowing that the little dog was awake with him. Soon he was fast asleep, dreaming troubled dreams.

Nuggets, Hammers, and Totatoes

In the morning the dreams were gone.

The sun was shining, the cool of morning was losing ground to a hot summer sun, and Janner was imagining that he could fly. He was watching the dragonflies float across the pasture, putting his mind into a dragonfly's mind, to see what it saw and feel what it felt. He imagined the slight turn of a wing that sent it zipping across a meadow, whipping left and right, lifting on the wind up over the treetops, or scaling down the craggy drop to the Dark Sea. He imagined that if he were a dragonfly, he would smile while he flew (though he wasn't sure that dragonflies could smile), because he wouldn't have to worry about the ground tripping him up. It seemed to Janner that in the last few months he had lost control of his limbs; his fingers were longer, his feet were bigger, and his mother had recently said that he was all elbows and knees.

Janner reached into his pocket and, looking around to be sure no one was watching, pulled out a folded piece of old paper. His stomach fluttered as it had when he found the paper the week before while sweeping his mother's bedroom. He unfolded it now to brood upon a sketch of a boy standing at the prow of a small sailboat. The boy had dark hair and gangly limbs and looked undeniably like Janner. Big billowy clouds whitened the sky, and the spray of the waves burst up in splashes that looked so real and wet that it seemed to Janner that if he touched them,

he would smear the picture. Beneath the drawing was written “My twelfth birthday. Two hours alone on the open sea, and the best day of my life so far.”

There was no name on the picture, but Janner knew in his heart that the boy was his father.

No one ever talked of his father—not his mother, nor his grandfather; Janner knew little about him. But seeing this picture was like opening a window on a dark place deep inside. It confirmed his suspicion that there was more to life than living and dying in the Glipwood Township. Janner had never even seen a boat up close. He had watched them from the cliffs, specks cutting slow paths like ribbons through the distant waves, sailed by a crew on some adventurous errand or other. He imagined himself on his own ship, feeling the wind and the spray like the boy in the picture—

Janner snapped out of his daydream to find himself leaning on a pitchfork, up to his knees in itchy hay. Instead of feeling the ocean wind, he faced a cloud of chaff and dust shaken by Danny the carthorse, impatiently harnessed to a wagon half full of hay waiting to be carried across the field to the barn. Janner had been working since sunrise and had made three trips already, anxious to finish his chores.

Today was Dragon Day Festival and the only day of the year that Janner was glad to be in the quiet town of Glipwood.

The whole village waited all year for Dragon Day, when all of Skree seemed to descend on Glipwood. There would be games and food, strange-looking people from faraway cities, and the dragons themselves rising up out of the Dark Sea of Darkness.

As far as he knew, Janner had never left Glipwood in all his twelve years, so the festival was the closest he got to seeing the rest of the world—and a good reason to be quick about finishing up with the hay. He wiped sweat from his forehead and looked wistfully over his shoulder at a dragonfly zipping away. Then he dug into the straw with a grunt and pitched

it into the wagon. As he did so, his foot caught on a stone hidden beneath the hay and he lurched forward, toppling face first into a neat, fresh pile of Danny the carthorse's nuggets.

Janner leapt to his feet, sputtering and wiping his face with fistfuls of hay. Danny the carthorse looked at him, snorted, and tore up a mouthful of grass while Janner ran, quick as the dragonfly, to the water trough to clean his face.

Across the field and past the fence, Janner's brother Tink (whose given name was Kalmar) straddled the cottage roof, two nails between his lips and a hammer in one hand. Tink was trying to repair a loose shingle but having a hard time of it, so violent was his trembling. When he was younger, just riding on his grandfather's shoulders made him nervous, and though he laughed, his eyes were always wide with fear until he was placed firmly on the ground again.

Podo, his grandfather, always assigned the reparation of the roof to Tink because he thought it would do him good to face his fear. But Tink, now eleven years old, was still as frightened as ever. Shaking like a leaf, he removed a nail from between his lips and hammered it into the roof as timidly as if he were hammering his own face. He looked out across the field to see Janner trip headlong into the water trough, and he wished he were finished with his chores so he could play a game of Zibzy¹ with his big brother at the Dragon Day games.

Tink was useless on the roof, but when his feet were on the solid ground he could run like a stag.

With the first tap of the hammer, the nail slipped from between Tink's

1. Zibzy gained wide popularity in Skree in the year 356. A lawn game played with giant darts (hurled high into the air by the offensive team), a whacker (a flat board with a handle), and three rocks. Injuries abounded, however, and because of the public outcry the game was banned. In 372, it was discovered that a passable version of the game could be played by replacing the giant darts with brooms. For complete rules, and a deeper look into Zibzy's fascinating and bloody history, see *We Played, We Bled, We Swept* by Vintch Trizbeck (Three Forks Publishing, Valberg, 3/423).

fingers. He tried to catch it, missed, and threw himself down, hugging both sides of the hot roof. Nail and hammer clattered down the roof in opposite directions and over the edge. Tink groaned because it meant having to inch his way over the edge and down the ladder again. It also meant that it would be that much longer before they were able to go into town for the festival.

“Lose something?”

Tink’s fear turned to grumpiness. “Just throw it back up, will you?”

Tink heard laughter, then the hammer flew up, end over end, and landed a few feet from him. He gathered his courage to reach near the edge and grabbed the hammer with a trembling hand just before it slid back down.

“Thanks, Leeli,” he called, trying to sound a lot nicer.

Leeli sat back down on the steps at the back of the cottage and continued peeling potatoes, humming to herself. Nugget was at her feet, tail wagging, panting in the welcome shade. Soon Leeli worked her way to her feet with a small wooden crutch and brushed the potato peelings from the front of her dress. Carrying the bucket, she limped into the house, Nugget close behind.

Her right leg twisted inward at an unnatural angle below the knee, and the toes of her bad leg trailed lightly along the wooden floor. When she was little more than a baby, she had learned to walk with a tiny crutch under her arm, and every year her grandfather made her a bigger one, each more ornate and sturdy than the last. This one was made of yew and had little purple flowers etched along its length.

Leeli plopped the bucket of peeled potatoes onto the table behind Nia, her mother, who was tossing ingredients into a large pot of stew.

“Ah, thank you, dear.” Nia wiped her hands on her apron, then pushed a few stray hairs behind her ears. She was tall and graceful, and Leeli thought her mother was so beautiful that the plain dress she wore fit her like a royal gown. Nia’s hands were strong and callused from years of hard work, but gentle enough to braid Leeli’s hair or to stroke her boys’ faces when she kissed them good night.

“Would you fetch your grandfather for me?” she asked. “He’s been in the garden gathering herbs for at least an hour now, which can only mean one thing.”

Leeli laughed. “The thwaps are back?”

“I’m afraid so.” Nia turned back to her stew just as another clatter sounded above them. Her eyes followed the sound across the ceiling to the window, where she and Leeli saw Tink’s hammer fall to the grass. A muffled moan came from the roof.

“I’ll get it.” Leeli limped out the back door and tossed the hammer back up to Tink.

Janner loped up to the cottage, sopping wet from the waist up, bringing with him a terrible smell and a swarm of fat green flies buzzing about his head.

As Leeli limped around to the front of the cottage to find her grandfather, she heard her mother shriek and shoo Janner out of the house, where he was promptly bonked on the head by a falling hammer.

Thwaps in a Sack

Leeli's one-legged grandfather was on his knees, growling at something in the garden. Fat red potatoes hung from the vines; round heads of lettuce burst quietly from the ground in long rows; sprouts of greenions, carrots, and sugarberries—her favorite—were yet bright and dewy.

Like Leeli, Podo got along fine with only one leg, though instead of using a crutch, he strapped on a wooden stump below the knee. He never talked about how he had lost his leg, but it was no secret that he had been a pirate in his wild youth, and he entertained his grandchildren nightly with tales of his adventures at sea.

Like the time all eighteen of his crew fell ill from eating a batch of bad ponkfin they had looted from a fishing boat near the Phoob Islands. Podo was the only one who hadn't eaten any and was left to sail the ship alone through a storm while his crew sloshed about, moaning in the hull.

"And that's not the worst of it," Podo would say. "I tell ye! That was with the Skreean Navy hot on me stern, cannons firin' and arrows whizzin' through me hair. That's how come it parts in three places, see? Still can't catch a whiff of ponkfin what I don't get the urge to trim a sail and run for cover..."

The Igiby children would squeal with delight, and old Podo often got so worked up that he'd need to dab the sweat from his forehead with a handkerchief.

He was wiping his brow with the handkerchief now as he squinted through the greenion sprouts.

"Grandpa?" Leeli said from behind him.

Podo whipped his head round, waving a knotty wooden club at her. His long white hair was frazzled, and he looked like a mad old hag. “Eh? Watch yerself, lass. I like to have banged you on the head with me whopper.” His white, bushy eyebrows shot up and he held a gnarled finger to his lips. “Thwaps!” he hissed.

Suddenly, a small, hairy figure leapt out from beneath a totato plant and squealed.

Podo bounded after it.

Nugget, who had been whining happily, lost all restraint and pounced into the garden with a bark.

The common thwap was a little bigger than a skonk¹—not much more than a ball of fur with skinny arms and legs standing as high as the middle of Podo’s remaining shin. The old man’s club found its target and sent the little critter flying through the air, but not before another one darted out of the garden and bit Podo fiercely on his stump, with its long, yellow teeth. The first thwap crashed into the trunk of a nearby tree and dropped to the ground, where it immediately stood up and hurled a pebble at the old man. It struck Podo squarely in the forehead, and he staggered for a moment, shaking his head while he beat at the thwap whose teeth were stuck in his wooden leg.

The thwaps squealed and darted back into the garden. A moment later they reappeared, one with a totato in its furry paws, the other with an armful of carrots. They dodged another swipe from Podo’s club and shot into the garden again.

Podo roared and swung his club above his head. “Avast, foul rodents!”

A gust of wind moved the garden leaves in waves. Podo’s white hair flew out behind him, and he leaned into the breeze with a fierce set of his jaw. A thwap appeared from behind a sugarberry plant and threw another rock. Podo swung his club and sent the stone zipping back into the garden as the thwaps dove for cover.

1. Bip Thwainbly, *The Chomping of the Skonk* (Publisher and date unknown).

“Aha!”

A few moments passed as the thwaps squeaked and twittered among themselves.

Podo's face wrinkled even tighter. He lowered his club and cupped a hand over his ear, as if he could have understood them.

Suddenly, a fat, red totato whizzed through the air and burst on Podo's face.

“Not the totatoes!” Podo blinked the juice from his eyes and batted another totato away with his club. “Not my totatoes!”

Just as Leeli turned away she saw him dive into the garden, headfirst, howling all the while. She smiled and limped back to the cottage, which was thick with the smell of breakfast.

Nia tromped past her to the garden without a word, snatched two leaves from a rosepepper plant, and returned to the kitchen, ignoring Nugget's barking, Podo's howls of rage, and the thwaps sailing through the air.

Janner, who had finally managed to clean the manure from his face and hair, walked back to the house, dripping wet.

Tink, skinny as a rake, sat at the table beside Leeli. His eyes were fixed on the large pile of sausage sizzling on the stove, and the sound of his growling stomach filled the room.

“Well! That's better.” Nia folded her arms and tried not to smile at Janner. “I thought I'd see you with fresh grass growing on your face by now.”

Janner blushed and shook his head as he took his seat.

Leeli and Tink tried to hide their giggles, as Nia pulled up a chair and sat with her elbows on the table and her chin in her hands, watching her children eat. Janner stared out the window, deep in his thoughts; Tink hunched over his plate like a buzzard, eating the hotcakes and sausage as if they might try to escape; Leeli watched her brothers and fidgeted with the hem of her gown, humming and bobbing her head back and forth while she chewed.

“Eat well, my dears. It's going to be a busy day,” Nia said smiling.

The children's eyes widened. "The sea dragons!" they cried in unison.

Nia laughed and pushed herself up from the table. "*The summer dusk bath split in twain the gilded summer moon, and all who come shall hear again the dragons' golden tune,*" she sang.² "Coming just like they have for a thousand years. Finish up your breakfast and we'll go on to town. The chores will wait."

With a loud crash, the back door burst open and there stood Podo, drenched with sweat and out of breath. "THWAPS!" he bellowed, holding out a sack with something squirming and screeching inside. Podo smacked it with his club and the squealing promptly stopped.

Nugget yipped and danced at his feet, nipping at the sack.

"There are two more of the little stinkers out there, but these three"—he shook the sack—"won't be munching on any more of our vegetables, I can tell you that. Lousy, thievin' little thwaps..." He noticed his three grandchildren and his daughter watching him and cleared his throat. "Don't worry, now. I'll be tossin' 'em off the cliff straight into the Dark Sea after I eat a few of yer fine hotcakes, honey." He nodded to Nia, trying to sound less gruff.

Nia's mouth dropped open. "How could you throw them into the sea?"

Podo scratched his head. "Easy. See, I take this sack here, and I...dump it out. Over the cliff. Simple as that."

Leeli sat with her fork in her hand and a look of horror on her face. "Grandpa, you can't just kill them!" She pushed back from the table as the boys rolled their eyes. She hobbled on her crutch to her towering grandfather and looked up at him with a pitiful sweetness in her eyes.

Podo loved his little granddaughter like nothing else in Aerwiar, and she knew it.

"They're such *sweet* little things, Grandpa, and they never harm anyone."

2. From "The Legend of the Sunken Mountains," a traditional Skreean rhyme. A later version of the tale was printed in Eezak Fencher's *Comprehensive History of Sad, Sad Songs*. See page 283 in Appendices.

Podo sputtered and pointed to the scratches on his arms.

Leeli didn't seem to notice. "And all they take is a few of our vegetables each year to feed their baby thwaplings. I can't believe that you would do such a thing. Please, Grandpa, don't kill the little fuzzies." She grabbed his shirt, pulled his face to hers, and kissed him on a grizzled cheek. "Come on, Nugget," she said, and she left the kitchen.

The sack squealed and Podo smacked it again, but with less vigor. With a grunt, Podo plopped the sack on the floor beside the table and shoveled a hotcake into his mouth.

"Now Janner, lad," Podo said without looking up from his plate, "It can get rowdy out there with the festivities going on, and you know the Fangs get even meaner when it looks like we Skreeans are having a grand time of it."

"Yes sir." Janner looked down at his plate and clenched the sides of his chair, bracing himself for what he knew was coming.

"And you're the oldest, which bears a noble responsibility. It means—"

"It means that I have to keep an eye on Tink and Leeli and make sure they get home safely. I've heard the same thing every day of my life, and I'm not stupid." Janner surprised even himself. His cheeks reddened when he saw the look of shock on his mother's face. He knew he had gone too far, but it was too late to turn back. Years of frustration decided to explode over hotcakes that very morning. "What it means is that I'm a nanny, that I never get to do anything *I* want to do."

Tink snorted and tried to hide his laughter by shoving another large bite into his mouth. Janner kicked him under the table, which only made Tink snort again.

"I don't want to spend my life fretting over Tink and Leeli, following two little kids around, fussing over them like an old woman and wasting my life!"

"Son—" Podo started.

"I'm not your son! You're not my father, and if my father were alive, he'd understand." Janner already hated himself for what he had said. He

was breathing hard, staring at the stove, afraid to look at his grandfather's face. His chest felt hot, and tears were coming. He put a hand in his pocket and squeezed the folded drawing of his father. Like never before, he wished he were on that boat, out on the Dark Sea of Darkness, far away from Glipwood and from the way he felt right now.

Podo chewed and swallowed his hotcakes slowly, considering his grandson in a heavy silence. "Tink, clear yer plate and go get dressed, lad-die," he said without taking his eyes off of Janner.

Nia stood by the stove looking at the floor with her hands on her hips.

The grizzled old man wiped his mouth with a napkin and gripped the sides of the table with his big hands.

Janner was in trouble. He knew it.

A Stranger Named Esben

The door swung shut behind Tink as Nia pulled up a chair between Podo and Janner.

“Lad, do you know I love you?” said Podo.

Janner nodded, then added, “Yes sir.”

“I know I’m not your father. He was a good man. A brave man. He fought well and died well in the Great War, and it’s my duty to raise you children as near as I can to what your father would want.”

Janner stole a glance at his mother. She fought back tears as she stood and busied herself with clearing the plates from the table.

“Now lad, you’re getting long of leg and yer voice is getting thicker. I expect you figure you’re nearing manhood, do ye?” Podo looked at Janner with one white bushy eyebrow cocked up and the other eye squinting at him. “Speak up, lad.”

“Well, I’m twelve! I know that’s not old, but...” He broke off, unable to think of what to say.

“Sometimes ye feel like yer brother and sister might weigh ye down like an anchor, is that it? Sometimes ye feel like this little town’s too small for the notions in yer head?”

Janner stared at his hands. With a deep breath, he pulled the picture from his pocket. Nia stopped her cleaning as Janner unfolded the picture and spread it flat on the table. He could hold his tears back no longer; they dripped from the end of his nose onto the picture, mingling with the spray of the sea.

Nia hugged Janner's head to her chest and smoothed his hair for a long time. "I wondered where that picture had gotten to."

"It's him?"

Nia nodded slowly. "Yes."

"And he drew it?"

"Yes." Nia dabbed the tears from the picture with her apron. "That was a different time. A different world." She was quiet a long moment. "Before the Fangs. Your father would want nothing more than for you to sail your own seas, and one day you will. But if he were here he would tell you the same thing your grandfather is telling you. There's a time to sail and a time to stay put."

"Laddie, I understand more than ye might know." Podo's voice was softer. "But hear me: I was there when your pa died. I didn't see it, but I was there all the same."

Janner looked up sharply. "You were there? What happened?"

"Aye."

"Papa, no—" Nia said.

"It's time he knew something of where he's from, lass." Podo pointed at the drawing, then at Janner. "Look at 'im. He's the spitting image—"

"I don't see what that has to do with anything. Raising Esben's memory from the dead will do no good. *No* good." Nia's voice trembled.

Janner hated seeing his mother so upset but desperately wanted to hear more. "His name was Esben?" Janner hoped to keep Podo talking.

Podo and Nia looked at him with sad eyes.

Nia kissed Janner's hair. "No more. Please," she said to Podo and left the room.

Janner was silent.

Podo was silent.

The thwaps in the bag were silent.

Finally, Podo cleared his throat. "Well, you must trust me. I see your father in you. He was a great man. He fought for us. *Died* fighting for us. Your wee sister and brother are treasures, same as you, and we wouldn't

have our treasures lost.” The old man leaned forward and lowered his voice. “Blood was shed that you three might breathe the good air of life, and if that means you have to miss out on a Zibzy game, then so be it. Part of being a man is putting others’ needs before your own.”

Janner thought of Tink and Leeli. The idea of always having to look out for them still galled him, but he did love them. He wanted to be a good, brave man like his father—whose name he had just heard for the first time. “Yes sir. I’ll try,” he said, not quite able to meet Podo’s eyes. Janner folded up the picture and looked at Podo questioningly. Podo gave his permission with a nod, and Janner placed the picture back in his pocket with care.

“So, lad, since you’re so old now, why don’t you and your brother and sister head over to the festival without yer mother and me for a while. We still have some chores to mind. You’re in charge.”

“But, mama said that Leeli couldn’t—”

“Hee,” Podo laughed. “I’ll see to yer mother. Just keep yer sister close. Your mother and I’ll be along directly. Can you handle that?”

“Yes sir,” Janner said, suddenly unsure that he could.

Podo clapped his hand on the table. “Right, then. Now. There’s something I need you to do for me before you three head out to the festival.” He handed the sack of thwaps to Janner and lowered his voice. “Would you mind dumping these stinkers over the cliff for yer dear Podo?”

Janner’s eyes widened. “What?”

“Aw, I’m foolin’,” Podo said with disappointment. “I couldn’t do that after Leeli’s little performance.” Podo reached into his pocket and handed Janner three grayish coins. He took another bite of hotcakes, swallowed and burped. “Buy yerselves some munches.”

The Bookseller, the Sock Man, and the Glipwood Township

The Igiby children raced across the cottage lawn, though that was only as fast as Leeli could hobble. Janner resisted the urge to offer her his help. He had learned long ago that his little sister was capable of getting around on her own and that if she wanted help, she'd ask for it. He also knew that while she was fiercely independent, she fiercely wanted them to wait up for her.

Even with a crippled leg, Leeli was remarkably fast, and her brothers moved at a trot as they wound down the shady lane that led to the town of Glipwood. Nugget padded along beside Leeli, wagging his tail, and if the Igiby children had had tails they would have wagged too. They could already hear the uncommon sound of laughter from the direction of town, and wisps of happy music lifted over the tops of the oaks.

Janner suddenly felt pleased to be entrusted with the care of both of his younger siblings. He laughed at how quickly his feelings had changed. Only minutes ago he felt chained down by his responsibility—now he was proud of it. Going to town alone with Tink and Leeli was a far song from sailing alone in the open sea like his father had done, but it would have to do.

Janner wondered what his friend, old Oskar N. Reteep at the bookstore, would say when he saw the Igibys with no parents in sight. Would Oskar give him more work in the store or let him take home more books?

Maybe he'd finally allow Janner to read the books reserved only for older folks, the thick ones on the top shelves with the ancient binding. He smiled to himself. *Responsibility might not be so bad after all.*

"So what happened back there?" Tink asked as they jogged down the lane.

"Nothing."

"What do you mean, nothing?" Tink sounded disappointed. "No spanking?"

"No. No spanking."

"So when you're twelve you can be a stinker and not get whomped?"

"It's complicated," Janner said, thinking again of his father. He wondered when he'd show Tink and Leeli the picture.

"I can't wait to be twelve." Tink grinned deviously, and they rounded the corner onto Main Street.

Janner smiled back at his brother, but inside, he was troubled. *Esben. Esben Igiby*, he thought. Knowing his father's name made Janner think of him as a real person, not just a happy shadow from his dreams. Many days he didn't think much about him, but whenever the other children in Glipwood spoke of their fathers, or when they asked Janner why he lived with his old grandfather, he felt like an oddity. He knew that Leeli and Tink felt it too. Everyone else in Glipwood had grown up there, or somewhere nearby. But whenever Janner asked Podo or Nia where they had come from, the answer was always silence. All he knew was that Podo had grown up in the cottage, and that his great-great-great-great-grandparents (Janner's great-great-great-great-great-grandparents), Edd and Yamsa Helmer, had built the cottage two hundred years earlier, when Glipwood was little more than a cluster of buildings.¹

1. Glipwood had prospered greatly over the years and was now a slightly larger cluster of buildings, thanks in part to the tourism generated by the Dragon Day Festival. Willibur Smalls, *It Happened in Skree* (Torrboro, Skree: Blapp River Press, 3/402).

Now Glipwood had one main street with several buildings on either side. Shaggy's Tavern stood on the left, its dark green shingle bearing a picture of a dog with a pipe hanging from its mouth. Beside it was the biggest building in town, Glipwood's only inn. Its sign read, THE ONLY INN at the top and below that, in smaller letters, "Glipwood's Only Inn." The Shoosters, a kindly old couple, kept the inn warm and clean, and the smells that floated out of the kitchen made the whole township hungry. Across the street was a barbershop called J. Bird's, where Mr. Bird usually could be seen sleeping in one of his chairs. Next to the barbershop squatted the town jail, where Fangs lounged on the stoop and hurled insults at passersby.

Wide, mossy oak trees stretched their boughs over the streets, offering welcome shade from the summer sun. Children with sticky faces straddled high limbs, munching on various desserts. Everywhere Janner looked were men and women of different shapes and sizes. The women wore long, flowing, brightly colored gowns, and the men who strolled beside them puffed pipes and sported silly round-topped hats. Occasionally a horse-drawn carriage would squeak by, its occupants peeking smugly out the window.

Janner, Tink, and Leeli, with Nugget by her side, made their way through town, past the inn (always full this time of year, being Glipwood's only inn), past Ferinia's Flower Shop and the old rickety building that housed Books and Crannies. A sign hung in the window:

OSKAR N. RETEEP

PROPRIETOR / BOOKSELLER / INTELLECTUAL / APPRECIATOR

OF THE NEAT, THE STRANGE, AND/OR THE YUMMY

Oskar N. Reteep, a round man with a short, white beard and very little hair on top of his head, waved at them from his front porch where he sat in a rocking chair puffing on a long pipe. He had combed long wisps of hair over his freckled brown egg of a head in a vain attempt to hide the fact that he was bald. The breeze was stirring a long tendril of hair about as if it were waving at the children too.

“Ho there, Janner!” he called, smiling and beckoning to the children.

“Hello, Mister Reteep,” Janner hollered over the noise of the crowd.

From the window behind Oskar, a little man with pointed ears watched them. Zouzab Koit was a ridgerunner,² whom Oskar had adopted six years earlier upon opening a crate that was supposed to have been full of books from Torrboro. Instead, Oskar had been shocked to find a starving, frightened Zouzab cowering inside.

Ridgerunners were a little people, and little known in Skree, but Oskar, a self-proclaimed Appreciator of the Neat, the Strange, and/or the Yummy, decided that Zouzab most certainly qualified. Zouzab’s descriptions of his homeland and harrowing life in the Killridge Mountains were very Neat, as were his stubbly hair and pointed features. His dress and behavior were quite Strange. He wore leather breeches and a patchwork shirt of many colors that billowed around him like a hundred tiny flags. Strangest of all, he couldn’t help climbing on everything taller than himself, which was most things. As for his being Yummy, Oskar didn’t care to speculate.

Janner thought how they looked rather silly together—Oskar round as a pumpkin and Zouzab short and thin as a shorn weed.

Leeli waved at Zouzab. His beady eyes widened and he ducked out of sight.

“Where’s Podo?” Oskar asked wiping his glasses on his vest.

Janner tried to sound nonchalant. “Back at the cottage. Said we could come alone today.”

“Ah-ho.” Oskar eyed Janner through the spectacles perched back on the end of his nose. Janner beamed. “Come bright and early day after

2. Ridgerunners are a reclusive race that dwell primarily in the mountains of Dang. Their great weakness is fruit of any kind, in any form, whether plucked from the tree or baked in a crispy pie. Because of this, ridgerunners are the chief enemy of the people of the Green Hollows, who grow fruit of many kinds. Each year, swarms of ridgerunners descend the northern slopes of the Killridges and steal fruit from the Hollows. It’s said that as long as you are not a fruit, a ridgerunner won’t eat you. Since there was no fruit directly involved in the Great War, the ridgerunners of course remained neutral. Padovan A’Mally, *The Scourge of the Hollows* (Ban Rona, Green Hollows: The Iphreny Group, 3/111).

tomorrow, eh? I found an absolute trove of books on my last trip to Dugtown. I'll need help loading them in."

"Yes sir, I'll be there." Janner began to think of all the books he would read next.

Oskar squinted one eye at Tink and looked him up and down. "And bring that skin and bones brother of yours too. We could use the extra hand, and by the look of it, he could use the exercise."

Tink's eyes widened. "Really, Mister Reteep?"

"That's right, lad." Oskar smiled down at Leeli. "What do you think of all this fuss, lass? Glipwood is a different town for a day, isn't it?"

Leeli looked around at the folk milling past them, taking in the sights, sounds, and smells that were so foreign to the sleepy little township. She smiled. "I like it. But after a day of it, I'll be glad when things are back to normal."

Janner rolled his eyes. "Well, I wish Glipwood was like this every day. I wish The Only Inn was always full of travelers and merchants with news from Torrboro and Fort Lamendron or tales from explorers who've gone beyond the edges of the maps. Did you ever think about the fact that there might be whole continents that no one from Skree has ever seen? That no one *anywhere* has ever seen? We've never even been to Fort Lamendron, and Podo says it's only a day's ride from here. All these rich people from Dugtown and Torrboro get to really *see* Aerwiar, not just shovel hay all day..."

Oskar raised his eyebrows at Janner, whose speech trailed off at the quizzical reaction of his friend. Oskar then wiped his brow and pressed the single waving lock of Reteep hair back to his forehead. "So. Glipwood is too small for Janner. What say you, young Tink?"

Tink sniffed the air. "I want some sugarberry pie."

"Janner," Oskar said, "there's more to the world than just seeing it. If you can't find peace here in Glipwood, you won't find it anywhere." Oskar gestured at a carriage rolling by. "These folks may appear wealthy, but no one really is anymore. If you look close enough, you'll see the suits and dresses these so-called rich folk are wearing are tattered and patched.

No earrings or necklaces adorn the women. No rings sparkle on the men's fingers."

Janner saw that it was true. *Why hadn't he ever noticed that before?* Annoyed, he nodded to Oskar and toed at the dirt. *It was his day to be corrected by the grownups*, he thought.

"Lad, it's one thing to be poor in pocket—nothing wrong with that. But poor in heart—that's no good. Look at them. They're sad in the eyes, and it's a sadness no amount of money could repair. Why, they hardly remember what it's like to laugh from the belly anymore."

"But they seem to be happy, Mister Reteep, don't they? We could hear the laughter and music from up the lane," Leeli said.

"People come to Glipwood to see the dragons because it's one of the only freedoms they have left. Sure, they sleep under their own roofs with their own families, and broken though it is, this is still their own land. But this is a far fling from freedom, young Igibys. Some of us still remember what it was like to stroll through town after dark or to ride a horse through the forest without fear." Oskar's voice grew angry, and it seemed to Janner that he was no longer talking to them but to himself. "It's beginning to feel like the Fangs have always been here, that Gnag the Nameless has always ruled us, taxed us, and stolen our young."

Janner looked at the half smiles on the people's faces. He saw the way the people cowered away from the sneering Fangs on the jail stoop. There was sorrow underneath all the merriment, and for the first time Janner was old enough to feel it.

Oskar came back to himself and smiled at the children. "Ah. But it's a fine day, is it not, Igiby children? There's a time to think hard and there's a time to ease up. Now you run along. As the great Thumb of the Honkmeadow wisely wrote, 'The games are starting soon enough.'" Oskar waved them on with a wink while he puffed his pipe and palmed his hair back to his bald pate.

With somber hearts, the children made their way down the crowded street. Janner was deep in thought, staring hard at Commander Gnorn,

the fattest and meanest Fang in Glipwood. Gnorm's feet were propped on an old stump, and he was gnawing the meat from a hen bone, his long purple tongue slurping noisily. Gnorm hurled the bone at an old man walking by and the Fang soldiers hissed and laughed as the man bowed and wiped the grease from his face. Janner found it hard to believe that there was a day when no one in Skree had ever heard of the Fangs of Dang.

Past the jail, in front of the little building that housed the printing press, a cluster of people stood in a circle laughing at something. Above the heads of the onlookers, two ragged boots were kicking around in the air.

Janner and Tink grinned at one another.

"Peet the Sock Man!" Tink pointed and took off running. "Come on, Leeli! Let's see what he's up to."

They pushed through the crowd and saw the strange fellow walking on his hands in the middle of the circle. He was chanting the phrase "wings and dings and purple things" over and over, kicking his feet to the rhythm. His cheeks were sunken, his eyes were shadowed, and the creases around them gave him the look of having just finished crying. He wore ragged clothes and was filthy, as were the dingy knitted stockings he wore on his arms up past his elbows.

Onlookers tossed coins, but to the residents of Glipwood, this was normal behavior for Peet. Earlier that summer, in fact, Peet crashed into the street sign at the corner of Main and Vibbly Way (which was quite innocent, as it was standing still and in plain sight). After insulting the sign's mother, Peet challenged it to a contest, though it quite stoically showed no sign of retaliation. He took a hard swipe at it, missed, spun in a circle like a circus dancer from Dugtown, and collapsed into the dirt where he snored noisily all that night.

Janner applauded with the crowd as Peet flipped back onto his feet, adjusted his hair with a flourish, and skipped away with one eye closed and a socked hand in his mouth, leaving the coins in the dust. Janner grinned after Peet, whose bushy head bounced up the dusty side street and around the corner.



“And he’s gone,” Janner said.

“Do you think it’s true that he lives up near the old forest?” Tink asked.

Janner shrugged. “He’d have to be crazy to live there.” In the years before the war, rangers and trappers braved the forest and tamed the deadly beasts that prowled within it. But the Fangs had taken every weapon in the land. Every sword and shield, every bow and arrow, every dagger and spear, every farm tool that could be used as a weapon was locked away and guarded.³

“Well if anybody’s crazy enough to go near the forest, it’s Peet.” Tink paused. “The Blaggus boys said they saw him riding a toothy cow like it was a horse up by the forest, whipping its rear with a switch and singing a ballad.”

Janner snorted. “No way. Nobody could survive a toothy cow. Besides, the Blaggus boys are too jumpy to go anywhere near the forest. They’re pulling your strings.” Janner turned to go. “Come on.”

But he stopped in his tracks and grabbed his brother’s arm. He couldn’t see Leeli. His head whipped to and fro, scanning the crowded street.

“Where’s Leeli?” he cried. “Leeli!”

Tink tapped him on the shoulder. Janner whirled around to find his brother pointing to the ground at Janner’s feet. Leeli was sitting there scratching Nugget’s belly, looking up at him innocently. He sighed and felt his insides quiver with relief. In the space of a few seconds, he had envisioned Leeli lost or hurt, and he felt a tinge of the painful guilt he’d bear if something ever actually happened to her. *But nothing ever does*, he thought bitterly. *Here we are at the Dragon Day Festival, and I’m a nervous mess since the minute we arrived. Over nothing at all.*

What could possibly happen in just a few seconds?

3. In order for Podo to hoe the garden, he had to fill out the Permission to Hoe Garden Form, then the Permission to Use Hoe Form to borrow the hoe. If the tool wasn’t returned by sundown, the penalty was much too severe to be mentioned in this happy part of the story. See pages 285–286 in Appendices.

A Bard at Dunn's Green

Come on," Janner grumbled, relieved but annoyed at himself for panicking.

Tink reached down to help Leeli to her feet, but she ignored him and got up with the help of her crutch.

Suddenly, the blast of a horn pealed through the summer air and the crowd cheered. The games were beginning. All day long, games would be played on Dunn's Green, the wide lawn on the east side of town. Participants and spectators would stay there for most of the afternoon watching sack races, handyball,¹ Zibzy, and wiggle the chicken. Everyone lay on quilts in the soft grass and watched the sports, nibbling treats purchased in town.

And that was exactly what Janner had in mind to do, if they could ever get there.

Janner pulled Leeli along by her free hand and urged Tink to keep up. "Could you two walk any slower?"

Tink was far more interested in the delicious smells wafting from the kitchens and makeshift stands where merchants were selling baked butter-dough pastries and fire-cooked swisher fins.

"Hang on, I want a berry bun." Tink dug into his pocket with the hand Janner wasn't tugging.

1. A delightful sport in which each team tries to get the ball into a goal without using their feet in any capacity, even to move. B'funerous Hwerq, *Ready, Set, Chube! A Life in Gamery* (Three Forks, Skree: Vanntz-Delue Publishers, 3/400).

Janner was losing his patience. "I'll buy you a berry dumpling later if you want. Come on," he grumbled.

Tink relented, casting a long, regretful glance over his shoulder at a plump man in an apron basting a platter of buns with bright red jam.

When they finally arrived at Dunn's Green, the Igiby children sat on the lawn and watched the festivities all morning and into the hot afternoon. When the sun slipped westward and the shadows began to lengthen, the people chattered more and more. At dusk the sea dragons would come, and the people would perch on the cliffs to watch them dance by the light of the moon. Janner could feel the anticipation in the air.

To his delight, Tink had spotted a merchant selling blueberry gooey-balls just behind them. He had spent the few coins Nia had given him, so Janner had begrudgingly shared some of his own just to quiet Tink's stomach (and his mouth). Tink had no idea that his face was now smeared with dark purple. Leeli was content to passively watch the games while she tickled Nugget's belly or threw a stick for him to fetch. The onlookers had tolerated this until she'd accidentally thrown the stick onto the playing field. When Nugget chased it, one of the handyball players (who was rolling awkwardly across the field, careful not to let his feet touch the grass) missed a pass from another player because Nugget got in his way. All eyes had turned angrily toward Leeli, whose cheeks burned as red as Tink's were purple, but when the onlookers saw Leeli's crutch, they softened their glares and the game continued. Janner was glad that Leeli was too busy scolding Nugget to notice the crowd's pity, or she would have been even more upset.

Janner was as excited about all the unfamiliar faces around him as he was about the games. He wondered where all these people had come from, though the attire gave some folks away. The Torrboro citizens, for example, all dressed alike: The men wore little black hats, coats with long tails (in spite of the summer heat), and pants pulled up to a shocking height. The buckles of their belts sat just a little below their chins. The fashionable women wore frilly dresses with patterns that depicted the noses of various

animals; their black shoes were pointy and oversized, as if their toes were as long as feet themselves, which made the women lurch forward when they walked. To Janner, it was like watching circus clowns (which he'd only read about) desperately trying not to be funny. Most of them wore white gloves, so when a handyball player scored a goal the sound of their applause was more like thopping than clapping, and they'd say things like "Good show!" or "Ho-lo, mommy-crack-a-whip!" or "Boozie!" or "Indibnibly fine shot!"

The long-haired folk from Dugtown weren't so odd in their dress, but their manner was shocking. Men and women alike were loud and their laughter sounded more like howling. Janner could tell that certain words they used were unacceptable to the Torrboro folk standing nearby, but the Dugtowners were oblivious. They growled and guzzled and made such a jolly racket that it was hard not to like them in spite of themselves.

Each stranger in Glipwood that day was a reminder to Janner that he had never, *never* left the town. They lit up his imagination and filled him with an ache to see the world. But then he would hear Leeli giggle or Tink burp and remember again that for now he would have to watch after his sister and brother in this dreadfully quiet little town—quiet, that is, except on the day the sea dragons came. He resolved to enjoy himself and pushed all unpleasant thoughts out of his mind.

Suddenly a commotion across the field interrupted Janner's thoughts—and the handyball game. Onlookers near the opposite goal had turned around, trying to make room for something or someone. Excited whispers circulated through the multitude, but Janner couldn't make out what anyone was saying. Voices rose up from the crowd, and even the players, sweating and covered with grass stains and dirt (though their feet were quite clean), stopped and focused on the fuss.

Janner and Tink stood up to try and see what was the matter, but there was nothing to see but agitated spectators shuffling out of the way while someone pushed in from behind them. The Fang sentries growled and hissed their irritation at the disturbance. They were charged with keeping the people under control, and something unusual was happening. As much

as they hated the Skreeans, they weren't interested in doing any extra work on a hot day like this one.

Then the rumor finally reached Janner's ears. A portly woman to his far right gasped and said breathlessly to her portly husband that Armulyn the Bard had come unannounced and had been asked to sing by the honorable Mayor Blaggus of Glipwood.²

Tink and Janner looked at one another in disbelief. Armulyn the Bard was there, in Glipwood? Could it be that the very man who claimed to have visited the Shining Isle of Anniera,³ the same Armulyn who wandered the captive lands and sang of the legends of Aerwiar,⁴ of great deeds and great loves, was even now in Glipwood in his regal garb upon his majestic horse?

All thoughts of the handyball game vanished. The players were greatly relieved about this fact and stood up, moaning and stretching. Two burly men rolled an empty wagon to the center of the playing field. Mayor Blaggus mounted the makeshift platform with a grunt and it creaked

2. Blaggus's duties as mayor included running the town press, which now printed Commander Gnorm's various permission forms for tool usage. Being a person obsessed with paperwork and rules of order, this suited Blaggus well. He also organized which Glipfolk would prepare meals for the Fangs each week, who would clean the barracks, and made formal requests to Commander Gnorm on behalf of Glipfolk who wished to travel to Torrboro. Blaggus had lost his youngest daughter to the Black Carriage six years earlier, and Gnorm kept him in his employ under the threat of taking his two remaining sons as well. Understandably, because of this the people of Glipwood bore the mayor no ill will.

3. Many Skreeans doubted that the legendary Isle of Anniera existed at all. It is a sad truth that some people only believe something exists if they can see it with their own eyes. Bandy Impstead, for example, had argued for hours in Shaggy's Tavern one evening that there was no such thing as Wind for this very reason. His roof was torn off in a storm that very winter. Bandy's mind, however, remained unchanged.

4. The Legends of Aerwiar are a collection of stories about the Maker and the Beginnings of Things. The greeting of Dwayne and Gladys, the First Fellows, for example, is well known in all the lands of Aerwiar. The legends also include the tragedy of "Will and the Lost Recipe," "The Deep Holoré" (healing stones the Maker buried in the earth), and an early version of "The Fall of Yurgen." The legends were once contained in old books said to have been written by the Maker himself and given to Dwayne for safekeeping, but the old books—along with the Holoré, Will's famous cream of hen soup recipe, and Yurgen's mountains—are lost.

beneath his weight (he had eaten a few too many sugarbutter pastries in his day). He wore dark leggings and a bright red shirt. A gaudy yellow feather sprouted out of his hat, and he curled his moustache self-importantly. Blaggus held his hands out to silence the audience, then he turned to address the Fangs.

"With our all-wise and stunningly handsome and powerful and swift soldiers' permission," he said, bowing deeply so that his belly touched his knees, "we would like to hear a song or two from the bard Armulyn. We beseech your lordships this trite pleasure, for which we will give you our eternal thanks and servitude."

"Speak for yourself," Tink muttered with a sideways glance at the Fangs, whose scaly smirks showed how much they were enjoying the mayor's groveling. One of the Fangs nodded and let out a slithery growl that polluted the air like smoke.

"We thank you, kind masters." Mayor Blaggus cleared his throat. His tone changed abruptly to the regal, inflated voice he had used for many years before the Great War. "My dear friends and neighbors, an honor rarely bestowed has risen on us like a warm sun," he announced. "Armulyn the Bard, tale-spinner of the imaginary Shining Isle of Anniera, has chanced to join us in Glipwood on this fine day. He has accepted my invitation to perform for us. Please welcome this son of Skree to Glipwood by the Sea. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you Armulyn the Bard!"

A bedraggled man stepped up to the wagon with a worn whistleharp⁵ under one arm. The smile on his leathery face reminded Janner of a mischief-minded little boy about to disobey. Armulyn winked at the crowd and belatedly, "Hello, dear Skreecans! Fangs are ugly!"

The applause ceased abruptly, and the four Fangs standing at the edge of the crowd roared a chilling roar and rushed, hissing, toward the bard.

5. It is unclear where the whistleharp originated. Each culture on Aerwiar claims to have invented the instrument, and each culture has good evidence to support its claims. Whistleharp tunes are referenced in the writings of Hzyknah, which date to the end of the First Epoch.



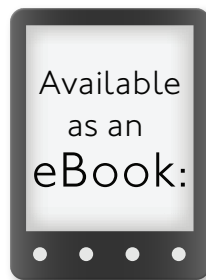
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