The Franknorth Adventures

Book Two:

Atlantis Ascending

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## Introduction by Richard Tipper

Then they parted from each other, and Cúchulainn went and looked forth on the great sea. As he was there he beheld a great assembly on the strand nearest to him, to wit, a hundred men and a hundred women seated in the bosom of the haven and the shore, and among them a maiden shapely, dear and beautiful, the most distinguished damsel of the world's women, and they a-weeping and lamenting around the damsel. Cúchulainn came to the place and saluted them. “What is this sorrow or the misery upon you?” says Cúchulainn. The damsel answered and this she said: “A royal tribute which the tribe of Fomorians carry out of this country every seventh year, namely, the first-born of the king's children. And at this time it has come to me to go as that tribute, for to the king I am the dearest of his children.” “What number comes to lift that tribute?” asks Cúchulainn. “Three sons of Alatrom of the Fomorians, she answers, “and Dub, Mell and Dubros are their names.” Not long had they been at those talks when they saw the well-manned, full-great vessel approaching them over the furious waves of the sea. And when the damsel's people saw the ship coming, they all fled from her, and not a single person remained in her company save only Cúchulainn. And thus was that vessel: a single warrior, dark, gloomy, devilish, on the stern of that good ship, and he was laughing roughly, ill-fatedly, so that everyone saw his entrails and his bowels through the body of his gullet. “What is that mirthfulness on the big man?” asks Cúchulainn. “Because,” says the damsel, “he deems it excellent that thou shouldst be an addition to his tribute in this year rather than in any other year.” “By my conscience,” says Cúchulainn, “it would not be right for him to brag thus regarding me if he knew what would come of it.” Then the big man came ashore to them into the strand, and stretched forth his long, sinewy, hideous arm to seize Cúchulainn in the very front of his royal tribute. Straightway Cúchulainn raised his right hand, and bared his sword, and gave a blow to the big man and struck off his head, so that he was the first that fell by Cúchulainn after having completed his training. And thereafter the other two fell by him, and he left them thus, neck to neck.

# Book I

The Delinquent

Nelson

*“For death!” I screamed. “For life,” corrected Mrs. Maurine. I picked up my sword and slashed down two more telchines.*

## Prologue

 “Hello, Toby,” I snickered, watching the pitiful boy cross the hall. He’s only a year younger than me but he’s convinced there’s “monsters” in the woods. I had stolen his lunch money after studying him unravel his locker. I stood up tall with my chest out as my gang started chanting, “Fight! Fight! Fight!” Toby growled at me and I shouted across the hall, “You’re as retarded as your Dad!” Then he broke, and charged me, which I was not expecting. I kicked his knee but I threw me back after grabbing my leg. I landed on the table hard as the cafeteria workers pulled Toby away from another blow. We were both sent to detention at the same time, and we had to learn coping skills. I mean, it was Toby’s fault anyway! What’s so wrong about telling the truth? At that time I didn’t know what truth was, but the real thing was worse than I could ever imagine.

## The Secrets Unfurled

 This journey was not my idea. Period. I did not ask to risk my life other than that time Mr. Nogard took out his shotgun. He was a terrible man even for me, a juvenile delinquent, and a teenage criminal. That’s right, technically I’m a criminal since I’ve gone to jail twice, escaped once, but that was an accident. My mom died by cancer before I could speak, and my dad went broke so he sent me to an orphanage, which shut down so I went into foster care, which I despise. The first time I went to jail it was for punching someone half my age. The second time was for stumbling into Mr. Nogard’s yard and he made me pay, but instead my evil foster parents sent me to, as they would call it, “big boy jail”. When I first went to Solihull school (nice place, but a bit medieval) I was a really nice guy. Then I ran right into Toby Adam Franknorth, the boy that was way too gangly, too goofy-looking, and too goody-two-shoed. He lived in a relatively rich family with two awesome parents (one too dreamy) and then he asked if I was a boy or a girl! My hair was a bit long at the time, and I was too mad to even think before I punched him. I was ten at the time, so my foster parents thought I was too young then, but when I punched Joshua, his stocky little brother, it was too much and off to “big boy jail” I go. Then I started picking on Colby, after my week of pure torture. He’s scrawny, old enough for me to pick on, and young enough that he can’t fight back. That was not a good idea when I landed flat on my belly in the halls of school. “Kill him!” I screamed to my stupid gang of zombies. They obeyed, after my command, but Mr. Nogard got in the way, as usual. I’m fifteen, but back then I was fourteen. Then one day, two days after the Franknorths’ disappearance, I was going home from school with my friends and then we played an intense game like hide and go seek. With our pocketknives. I cut through the woods, giggling all the way, running for the Franknorhs’ house so I could investigate. However, I forgot I had to pass through Nogard territory. I tripped over a one-brick tall wall and landed hard on bricks in a circular garden, with Mr. Nogard watering his flowers right above me.

 “I sue you,” Mr. Nogard growled above me. “For threatening me!” He lifted my pocketknife and tossed it in the air, still open. It cut his finger and I noticed black blood, not red. I didn’t think long on that before he dragged me to my feet and led me to my temporary home, where I was sent to court, then tried for jail, not an inestimable price. The next day I was out, thankfully. When I continued going to school, the whole area was full of people chattering about the Franknorths getting a break. One of my schoolmates asked the teacher and had come back disappointed. How come? I was stuck in jail and they got to go on vacation! When they returned next week, I had to pummel old Colby, but he seemed a lot…wimpier. When I picked a fight he would snarl like a cougar and if I called him a name he would threaten to wash my mouth out with soap.

 Toby, on the other hand, got to have an awesome battle scar from a gang! I mean, how cool is that? He kept telling me it was a wound from a jet ski, however, but the rest of the school was raving about his perilous escape. Next year I was feeling naughty so I stole his locker money. In the café, we actually got in a proper fight, one I was not expecting, despite his slurred behavior in the last few days. Then a couple days later, poosh! Gone again. This time apparently they were taking a ride to Portugal for another vacation. They stayed gone for weeks on end, and when they returned Toby was in crutches and Colby had a stab wound as well. Apparently the gang had chased them, but I knew better. They were following the trouble. Then I discovered my lousy foster parents were giving me to another family, which I knew to be my uncle, the taxi driver Maxine. I was devastated that he had moved, and was now neighbors with…the Franknorths!

 “Hi, Nelson!” Colby said, wincing with the words. “Come on, go play!” Uncle Maxine said. “I’m fifteen,” I growled, squinting into anger at Toby, who was running from a hummingbird and was younger than me, but still also fifteen. “Beetlesprit, behave!” he screamed. What kind of person names a hummingbird Beetlesprit? “Come inside!” laughed their Mom, who is also great. They had a stupid gargoyle on their porch banister that had his tongue out and a feather in his mouth. I walked up to the back door and entered their modernized house. Inside, my eyes were drawn to a terrarium with a lizard in it. “Awesome!” I laughed. “A Bearded Lizard!” “Pliny’s…” started Jonathan. “Tiger salamander,” Colby choked. I opened up the cage and reached in. “No, he’s poisonous!” Colby gasped. But it was too late.

 I singed my fingers on the salamander’s slimy skin, and drew back. “Ouch! Why didn’t you tell me earlier?” I hissed, tired of playing nice. Colby gulped and looked sick. I restrained sucking my fingers like a baby. My fingers were blistering and crimson red. “What other life-threatening pets would you like to show me?” I growled. I heard a thump from upstairs. Wait…they didn’t have an upstairs, it was in the attic. “What was that?” I groaned. “Nothing at all,” Colby whistled. “Yeah, nothing,” Joshua snickered. I shoved past them and ran for the stairs to the attic. “No!” Toby lunged in my way like a football player as hot air blew in my face. Were all attics so hot? “Stand back!” Toby said, though I was already on the floor. I stood up and brushed grass off me from Toby. “What are you thinking?” I roared. “You’re all a bunch of wackos!” Then I ascended up the spiral stairs.

 “See, nothing,” gulped Toby. “What’s the heat rock for?” I questioned. “Pyromander?” excused Colby. “Their warm-blooded!” I laughed. “Cold-blooded, actually.” Colby whimpered. “Aha!” I caught movement out of the corner of my eye. “Do you have an affinity for mice?” asked Toby. “Because you can sense their presence, it seems.” “You’re insane!” I pushed him off the stairs too hard and he landed on the wooden floor. “Ouch,” he cringed. But I might have even cried by that fall! What were they, samurai?

 That was my first day at the Franknorths. My uncle, Maxine, was now living in Mr. Nogard’s old house. Apparently he had moved back to Portugal. I was glad. Mr. Nogard’s house, or now my Uncle’s house was a huge mansion with a terrace and a good-sized garden with koi and plenty of frogs. He has a slate wall in the back and a fountain in the middle. Now that you know my past life in the law, this is where the excitement begins. I woke up in the middle of the night, hearing a roar from downstairs. I walked down the stairs, past the dining room, the kitchen, the china room, and plenty of other unnecessary compartments. I heard heavy footsteps from outside and a window was smashed. Now this was what I was waiting for! I could be a hero for saving my house from a burglar. Until I gazed right into the eyes of a huge giant, standing there times my size, staring through the window. “Nelson!” Maxine ran to my side as I felt sick. “What…is that?” I questioned. “That’s a Fomorian,” Uncle Maxine introduced, like it would help. “To the back!” A monstrous hand swiped through the wall. “Run!” Maxine yelled. We both ran through the hall as the beast broke through into the house. He hit his head on the ceiling and roared as it fell down onto his head, smothering him under shrapnel. “Phew, now…” “Run!” Maxine screamed. Two more giants burst into the yard and trampled our garden. I ran with Maxine into the back, where the walls were made of slate, not sheetrock. Suddenly I heard a crack and one of the stones was missing. It lay imbedded in the sheetrock behind me, halfway in. I gulped and stood back as two more stones went flying. “Duck!” shouted Maxine. I obeyed as a rock flew over my head. The whole wall gave away as two more giants stood in our path. One reached out and snatched Maxine and the other growled. Then I collapsed.

 Once I regained consciousness, it was daylight and I was still in the same spot. A mound of slate lay before me, some covering my legs. I brushed them aside and wondered if I had been dreaming, but chided myself when I studied the stone. “Uncle Maxine?” I called, coughing up some dust. I stood up when I heard no answer. It was time to pay the Franknorths a visit.

 “Anybody here?” I whimpered in the empty house. I looked around as Toby walked down the stairs and probably inwardly rolled his eyes. “What…are you doing here?” He asked. My eyes were probably red from fear. “What on earth were those things that took my uncle?” I shouted. “Fomorians?” Toby asked. “Yeah, how did you know?” “It’s a long story. If you come up in the attic, don’t get surprised, he’s friendly.” I slowly walked up into the attic, feeling sick again. How could this possibly be real? And my uncle knew about it? Toby opened up the door and I stepped inside. What I saw was a dragon. “Ahh,” I fell back but Toby caught me. “What is he doing here?” asked the dragon. “He’s just seen Fomorians. I think Maxine got taken,” Toby said, helping me to my feet. “Explain to me, what is happening?” I gulped. “You encountered a creature without u.” Mr. Thomas began. Glamour can be broken by this mixture of hawthorn, amaranth, and St. John’s wort. You can also see faeries through a natural hole in a tree or a stone with a hole in it. When one touches a landvaettir or enters a fairy ring the sight I broken for the moment, or it can be passed by one gaining the approval of a faerie and gifted with the second sight my saliva or something of the sort. In that case it is genetic. My mother had held a four-leafed clover to see it, but then she left me this mixture,” He walked to a corner and held up a glass of brown liquid. “This was the first mixture I talked to you about. Since, apparently you’re the school bully, I doubt Beetlesprit will find favor in you.” I heard about all the truth, about how despite the dragon’s monstrous size he was a hatchling, and how I had to apply the mixture to my eyes. I don’t know why I agreed. I would tell you the whole story if you hadn’t read about the effects in the first book. “What do I do now?” I asked. “It seems we have no choice,” Windsplitter the dragon sighed. “We’re going to have to be your foster parents until we rescue Maxine,” Mrs. Franknorth finished. “Oh, no,” Colby moaned.

I nearly fainted once more. “Now what?” I gulped. “Now we find Atlantis.” Mr. Franknorth sighed. “Off to Moscow,” “Why there?” I asked. *“What lies beneath Basil’s tombs, under hall and spire, doom and fire? You hold the key to the ashes of many, are you ready to begin your journey of memories?”*  “So…” I started. “We got that riddle a couple months ago.” Mrs. Franknorth informed. “I don’t like the sound of doom and fire,” I noted. Windsplitter growled and I stepped back. “Probably has a guardian,” Mrs. Maurine noted. “You know, creatures can tell when there’s someone who has the Mist lifted. It’s why all our journeys were perilous.” “I can’t do this,” I moaned, stepping back. “Goodbye.” I walked down the stairs, and then hiked towards Mr. Nogard’s house about a kilometer away. When I got there was shocked at how damaged it was. The whole roof had caved in on the front side and the wall was gone. I gulped and saw a red falcon alight on the rooftop and warble. “Rarog[[1]](#footnote-1),” Mr. Franknorth stood by my side, watching the bird fly away, spreading its beautiful, fiery wings. “You’re not safe anymore,” Mr. Franknorth warned. “None of us are. You’ll see soon enough.” I stood up and walked back inside the house through the open wall, leaving Mr. Franknorth to stand watching me. A skeletal hand was half-way crumbled underneath the rubble, where the Fomorian had suffocated. I felt sick in the stomach as I continued into the house. I climbed up my stairs and noticed my bedroom was gone. Below me was my bed half-buried in a pile of debris. I sat down on a chair and closed my eyes. I heard fast breathing below me and looked off the collapsed outcrop. An ugly creature like a raccoon was opening the refrigerator and wolfing down cold pizza and chugging Gatorade bottles. When he saw me he burped and stared at me for a moment, then chugged another bottle. “Boo!” I shouted. He screamed and ran into a glass sliding door. I laughed cruelly as it staggered out the portal. I could survive here.

 I sat up as an intruder walked into my base two days later. I had already faced off a big cat-thing with a quilled tail and a man face. I scared him off by turning the lights on and off. This time it was much smaller, but more like my size. I took out my wooden baseball bat and looked off the stairway. “Colby!” I shone my torch into his eyes and he fell back. “Get out of here!” I hissed. “It’s not safe,” Colby objected. “You have to come back to the house. We’re leaving next week.” “Come to Moscow where an evil guardian lurks? No thanks.” I shone the torch again but he stayed put. “Mortimer, come on!” “Who’s Mortimer?” I asked. The gargoyle from the deck leaped down next to me and I screamed less manly than ever. “What are you?” “Four-horned gargoyle, obviously!” laughed the creature, pointing to his horns. “Okay…” I gulped. “Apologies if I render you unconscious, if you do not agree.” “Mortimer!” Colby scolded. “It was just a threat!” “Which is very bad!” he chided. “I accept,” I gave in. “Just as long as you show me your dad’s encyclopedia. I’ve seen four creatures that I can’t identify!” Colby laughed and we walked home. I looked through their Dad’s typed-out encyclopedia and discovered the thing I had faced was a manticore and the Gatorade chugger was a hobgoblin. I had also seen a fairy, but I knew that already, and a trow, which the Franknorths had apparently encountered before on less friendly terms.

 I took the bedroom downstairs reserved for guests, but I could no longer sing, *“Joshi thought up the battle of Vatnajokull, Vatnajokull, Vatnajojkull! Joshi thought up the battle of Vatnajokull, and he comes crumbling down!”* They prayed, which I wasn’t used to, though Maxine had done the same and my mom would have if she was still alive. I still went to school but I didn’t stop bullying…not yet, at least. It was a better life than my old foster parents, but I missed Maxine. I still shivered sometimes when I thought of the truth. We still were not friends, more like more-or-less allies. I looked through the pages of Mr. Franknorth’s encyclopedia. I had heard them talk about facing dark elves, so I felt curiosity pull me towards the page. I read it twice, absorbing it. My foster family had faced an army of these brutes. The king had an awesome thorny crown with a black gem in the middle. “What is that?” I asked. “That’s what we’re going to Atlantis for,” Mr. Franknorth answered. “The Black Diamond, or Svartrmen as the proper name is.” “That’s what the war was about?” I questioned. “Yes. The War of the Black Diamond will continue, though, if we don’t take it back and destroy it.”

 “Greetings, stranger,” a strange creature walked up to the door like the mix of a midget and an owl. “That’s a bauchan,” Colby identified. I had heard lots about them but never knew they were so ugly and smelly. “We’re coming with you,” said the second one with a mechanical arm. “I am Asiar. This is Pert, the medic, and this is Footsies,” he pointed to a bauchan lying on the grass with a silver globe on his back. They smelled of some kind of bug, kind of like a centipede, or millipede, can’t tell the difference. “Move aside!” The first bauchan said, pushing me out of the way.

“Pack up,” Mrs. Franknorth commanded gently on the first of February, a Sunday. We had decided Windsplitter would guard Jonathan and Joshua. Mortimer the gargoyle was swinging on some monkey bars in the attic and Windsplitter was taking his daily trot around the area. The hummingbird that chased Toby my first day turned out to be a pixie, and Pyromander was a species of salamander you couldn’t see without glamour revealed. “Great,” I complained, studying the long list. I packed two bags full of supplies and still both weighed a ton. “Mortimer’s coming with us,” clarified Mr. Thomas. “What about Windsplitter?” I asked. “He wouldn’t fit in most places, plus I don’t want to haul the horse trailer.” “We’re going to Russia by car?” I gulped. “Well, we go from ferry to Calais,” compromised Mr. Franknorth. “And you get to visit France, Belgium, Germany, Poland, Belarus and Russia!” “What a joy,” I grumbled. “Well, get on the car,” “Yes sir,” I grumbled reluctantly. I climbed into their red SUV and sat in the back, far away from the four stinky bauchans. Mortimer was in the trunk, like a normal gargoyle. When we started driving the smell lessened, thankfully. We drove on for about three hours, and we ate potato chips on the way across the English Strait on hovercraft. It was my first time going on one. Asiar, the bauchan with crutches was tapping on his chips so they would split until it got annoying. Backbreaker, the lead bauchan leaned over, scrutinizing his food, and then pretended to split his tuna fish sandwich with his finger, digging it into the bread. “If I was still leader,” Asiar reprimanded. “Welcome to France,” Mr. Franknorth introduced as the hovercraft landed and we drove off the ramp.

In just about an hour, we reached Belgium. “What is that?” I gaped at a quilled wolf with horns. “Alphyn!” cried Colby. “No, that would be a colopus[[2]](#footnote-2),” Mr. Franknorth corrected. “A close relative.” We rode on and on for around three hours, then we entered Germany. We passed a billboard advertising grouse heats that I read, “Be adventurous” on it. No thanks. I can’t say that much for the other two hours, but after those two we ate dinner and found a hotel to settle in for the night in Frankfurt. I went to sleep carsick and confused. How could this happen? That was my last thought before I fell asleep.

Moscow was amazing. That’s the first thing I thought two days later, after driving each day. I was sick and tired when we drove over a bridge that crossed a wide river. When I stepped out of the car in Red Square, my feet were killing me, but the cathedral made up for it. The cathedral seemed bigger up close, and more beautiful. The spire towered high in the sky, but it was night, and the rain was pouring hard. Mortimer stayed in the car, for good reason. Mr. Franknorth tossed me my bat. “Come on,” he led us up through the open gate and past a statue. We walked up a fleet of stairs and entered a room with a box on the side with intricate details and a censor dangling over it. I traced my finger along the designs. “St. Basil the Great’s tomb,” Mr. Franknorth identified. “Looks like his cradle,” I noted, blowing dust off my finger. “I can’t open this, I don’t know how, and no breaking it.” “Sewer system?” I suggested. “St. Basil’s tombs,” repeated Mrs. Franknorth. I could imagine a lightbulb appear above Mr. Franknorth’s head. “Tomb*s*! Come,” he walked out the door. I saw some teens snicker at the bauchans, probably thinking they were midgets. We followed Mr. Thomas out into the courtyard and he climbed some stairs to a circle slab of stone. “What is this place?” I asked. “Several were executed here,” “Were they burned?” asked Mrs. Franknorth. “Some, I would suppose,” “Get the cog,” Mrs. Maurine said. “I know how to get in.” Mr. Franknorth and I carried the heavy four-foot long cog towards the stone platform. “Mortimer, you may need to come,” Mrs. Franknorth decided. The gargoyle took my side and carried the cog to the stone. “Right in there,” Mrs. Franknorth pointed to the middle, where there was a hole. Mr. Thomas and Mortimer maneuvered the key into the hole and I did the rest. Mr. Franknorth and I both started spinning the wheel as the ground shook. “Step off,” ordered Mr. Franknorth. The family stepped of the platform as the bricks descended into stairs, all leading into the center of the execution stone. There were four bridges leading to the center, allowing the grinder to have a foothold as the steps were lowered. Brilliant!

We walked down into the dusty chamber as the rain made a waterfall into the center. Three passages forked in the midpoint, one to three of the bridges, the fourth being the entrance. I was glad nobody had seen the grand opening of the secret tunnel. “How can we see?” asked Colby. “Torch,” Mr. Franknorth showed his torch so we could all see. “Flashlight,” corrected Mrs. Maurine. “Torch,” I reinforced. “Flashlight,” all the others chorused. “Three to two,” Toby ruled out. “Quickly, I don’t know how long this will stay this way,” Mr. Franknorth led us down the middle chamber. I heard a grating sound and a slam. “That would answer your warning,” I recognized. “We’re trapped.”

We followed Mr. Franknorth into the depths of the damp tunnel lit only by the fading flashlight. “Whoa,” I stopped and clung to the walls as I looked down into murky water. A yellowed skull stared back at me, and I stumbled back. “There’s something wrong with the water!” I noted. “Or something in it,” Asiar groaned. “It’s a bukavac; I smelled its putrid scent when we first came in! Stand back, lest you be strangled!”

“How do we get across, then?” I asked. “These walls may be close enough for us to creep across with our arms and legs,” suggested Footsies. “I’ll go first,” volunteered Mortimer. He spread out his limbs and lifted his feet from the ground, then quickly made his way across the trough. There was no sign of movement in the still water. “Are you sure it’s in there?” asked Pert. “I can’t smell anything. Of course, I have a runny nose.” He sniffled roughly. “Footsies, you’re next!” called Mortimer. “Oh, great,” the bauchan groaned. He tediously made his way across the gap, and then went Asiar, then Backbreaker, with no signs of movement. “Thomas, I’m afraid the ones with the longest arms goes next.” “Alright, I accept,” sighed the man. He slowly crossed the waters, but made it to the other side without harm done. “Maurine, come, my lady,” “I’m not queen,” joked Mrs. Franknorth. She made her way slowly to the other side, dipping her foot in the water once. “Nelson, chop-chop!” I gulped and touched each side of the cold, damp walls with my hands, then raised myself above the ground and affixed my feet on the wall, then started moving. I looked down into the water and saw a pale shape pass by. I felt sick and terrified together as I released.

“Nelson!” I heard cries as I rose to the surface, but two scaled hands gripped my throat and dragged me back under. I blew out bubbles from my nostrils and struggled to reach the top of the waters, but the hands clinging to my neck prevented me from doing anything *but* struggle. I felt something jerk the hands away and pull me up to the water’s break, where I was dragged onto cold, hard stone. “Nelson!” shouted the voice of Mortimer. “Nelson!” “Stop shouting in my ear, I’m awake!” I moaned. “Good, ‘cause we got company!” I looked back to the pool of water where a serpent with six legs, twisted horns and jagged teeth rose from the water. It was like a dragon with extra legs instead of feet. I saw an arrow clatter against its scales as Colby nocked another arrow. The beast only continued and hissed deeply. Asiar drew out two short copper swords and lunged into the fight while Mortimer ushered me up. I stood on my feet as the head of the beast was hewed off cleanly by Mr. Thomas and then Mortimer led me down the dark hall.

Mr. Thomas turned on his flashlight as we clambered down the gallery. Faded banners hung to the walls, bearing Russian coats of arms. “Dead end,” grumbled Pert as we entered a circular room lined with different tapestries of the same sort. “Where is that?” asked Toby, pointing to a display of a tower with a glass globe on top with four bridges leading to another fort. “Well, I’d guess it’s underwater,” I said while studying the bubbles strung into it. “Atlantis,” Mrs. Franknorth awed. “Turn it around!” Mr. Franknorth and I raised it, but Mrs. Maurine ordered us to tear it down. We tugged at the embroidery until the silver pole that held it up slid off its post. “Head south to the Euxine Sea, and then find the island of Aretias,” read Footsies, who happens to read most languages. “Where is the Euxine Sea and where is Aretias?” I questioned. “The old Greeks called the Black Sea the Euxine and the Island of Giresun Aretias. So that takes us to the island of Giresun, home of the…Stympahalides[[3]](#footnote-3).” “Take this tapestry with us; it’s time to head back home.”

“But which way?” I asked. “Here,” Mortimer scrabbled over to a tapestry of the Basilica, and then pulled it aside and opened a door. “Phew,” I sighed. “Let’s go, then.” Mortimer held the cloth as we passed under it, then he unfurled it again and we ascended the steps to where we reached a dead end once more. “I smell air coming from these cracks,” noticed Mortimer. “Push, everybody!” we all heaved at the slab of stone, and it slowly gave away. “This is the tomb,” I noticed, rising into the fresh air. “It must be midnight.” “Then hurry up, I smell guards nearby,” whispered Backbreaker.

“If we drive from Moscow to Giresun, Turkey, it will take…” Mrs. Franknorth said, looking it up on the internet. “Thirty-seven hours?” We all groaned. “Don’t fret,” Mr. Franknorth sighed on the soft mattress in the hotel. “I myself am sick of driving as well, thus, Footsies, you must drive the car to Giresun and we will go by air.” Footsies slapped his hand to his face in agony. We drove off to the airport in a matter of minutes, then Footsies and Dad exchanged seats and we left the car and took our packs out from the trunk. “Mortimer, you must go with Footsies, give him company, and protect the house.” Mr. Franknorth said to the effigy sitting in the trunk. “Alright. I ain’t…am not going to disobey you for a second after you rescued me from those dungeons.” “Thank you,” Mr. Franknorth acknowledged. We waited until our plane arrived after handing over the ticket. We saw no gremlins, though Mr. Franknorth did inform me that they were real. He encouraged me not to talk about mythical creatures, mostly because it was a full plane because we may panic somebody. In around six more hours, at about 3:00 A.M., we landed in Kutlugun. We hailed a taxi off towards Giresun, then paid him and set off again. I’m sorry; I’m not good with details. We saw Giresun island in the distance, and rode a sailboat to the small island, less than a kilometer from land. We could see a temple in the distance, and on the way the sailor that took us across was telling us about how Amazons built it. When we landed, we quickly hefted our packs upon our shoulders and made our way towards the temple. We took the tapestry in case it might aid us. We hiked along the rocky shores of the island, and then entered the temple, which was devoid of tourists. The walls of the temple were high but crumbling, and a banner still was raised high. “Look!” Mrs. Franknorth pointed out something on the temple floor. “It’s Greek. We need Footsies.” “It’s not Greek, it’s old Gornash!” laughed Backbreaker. “Must have been left by…” “Spriggans!” yelled Mr. Franknorth. Two small creatures like toads jumped off the wall and pointed rough copper scimitars at us. “We can face them,” I encouraged, taking out my bat. “Uh…oh…” Mrs. Maurine stuttered. The spriggans looked up and fled. I stared at a flock of black birds drawing close. “Stymphalian birds!” she screamed. “Backbreaker, read it fast!” “Retch, rak, bozak, barick, brac, brun, birk.” The ground creaked and cracked and then the floor rose up like a pyramid, the opposite of what it did in Moscow. “Make noise, scare them off!” shouted Asiar as the onslaught of birds approached. Toby and all who had swords smashed their weapons together, but that was not enough and the horde grew closer. “Here, this will teach them a lesson,” growled Backbreaker. “One bullet should do!” He shot a bird dead with an old fashioned pistol he drew out from his satchel, and then the birds retreated. “Read the slab up there before they return!” suggested Pert. “XXV° XXX’ towards Zephyrus in the New World,” read Footsies. “XXXVII° L’ towards Boreas the Cold.” “What does that mean?” “Latitude and longitude,” identified Mr. Thomas. “Come, we must be quick before the next attack.”

“Where are we off to?” I asked as we rode home. “First, the hotel, then we need to see a friend of mine.” We rode on for four days, each having nothing but a couple sprites and birds. I was interested in the sprite that fluttered onto our rear-view mirror; it looked like a man and insect mixed together with wings like those maple tree petals. Mr. Thomas referred me to the maple-winged monarch, and then he pointed out the Lilium Spiritus[[4]](#footnote-4) and Zygoptera Spiritus[[5]](#footnote-5). Those were both like lily pads and dragonflies, or as Toby would probably correct, damselflies. “Here we are,” Mr. Franknorth said in Southern UK. A sign read, “You buy gold? We make gold!” “Alchemy?” I asked. “Science,” Mr. Franknorth answered. We opened the door, which was apparently wired. A cup of water slipped off the doorframe and landed in a bucket, which released water into a miniature waterwheel and released a clay ball, which rolled down a track and was lowered down a hole on a conveyer belt, which powered the blinds, which slowly fell and left us in darkness, but then I heard the bell hit a gong way below the earth and a chain contraption started working. The lights flashed on. “Gremlin?” I asked. “Dwarf,” said a crackly voice as a throne was raised to the room and dumped him up on the ground. He landed on his feet perfectly. “Thomas! We’ve gone through plenty already! Want another battle?” The “dwarf” was only a tad bit smaller than me and had a frazzled beard of salt and pepper and a technical eye that zoomed in on us. “The ring of Andvaranaut! Limited time only. I found how he did it; it’s all a matter of science, bismuth to gold!” “That’s what we need you for. I know who to ask for a boat, but I’m not sure he’ll give us a sub without a good sum of money. Can you make us at least one coin of gold?” “After all the stuff you’ve done for me? Anything.” He turned the gears on his black ring and then pulled an odd stone from a bucket. The stone I recognized it as bismuth from its square-like shapes and watched in fascination as the ring blazed up and he pressured the ring onto the stone like somebody imprinting a stamp. When he pulled up, I noticed the ridges on the sides of the ring were like a cookie-cutter, for now the ring was in a perfect round shape. “Thanks,” Mr. Franknorth acknowledged. “Aren’t you lonely here, away from your people?” “No, they were nothing like me, except the few that submitted to go help in the war. You can call me on the number placed on the front of my front door if you need assistance. I was glad I could help you,” “Goodbye, Ravor,” Mr. Franknorth saluted.

“Mom, Dad!” shouted Jonathan, running from the front door. “Fomorians raided the house! They took Windsplitter!” “What? Why didn’t you tell me!” shouted Mrs. Maurine. “Gremlins also chewed through our wires,” Joshua sighed. “I know you probably know this already, but it’s got to be a trap. Why would they set up so many clues?” Jonathan asked. “I know it’s a trap, but we have to save Windsplitter and Maxine.” “Nobody told me it was a trap,” I grumbled. “I’d leave if I had anywhere to go. Maybe even back to my old foster parents.” “I’m sorry we had to put you through this, but when this task is over, you can go back to living with Maxine.” “But even he was just keeping things from me, trying to act normal!” “That’s the way everything is, we live in a cruel world.” “Maxine is the only one that even considered letting you drive,” suggested Joshua. “For good reason, too,” grumbled Backbreaker. “And he’s your first foster parent that cared for you,” offered Mrs. Maurine. “If you drop out, can I take your place?” asked Joshua, who actually enjoyed these adventures. “Maxine needs to be saved. No telling what they’re doing to him now,” Mr. Thomas sighed. “I need to call Mr. Talbot,” “Who?” I asked. “We met him in Portugal. Since then we’ve been texting about buying a submarine.” “Great!” I laughed. “So you’re in?” “Yeah…well…” “Come on,” encouraged Colby. “Leave us!” moaned Backbreaker. “Alright, just because Backbreaker’s so excited,” I accepted. “No telling what I got myself into.”

“Here’s the coordinates,” Mr. Franknorth eyed the map pinned to the wall. “…Sao Miguel Island,” he read with a magnifying glass. “Yes, we’ll drive to France, right where it’s most convenient for both of us, then make our way all the way over to this tiny island.” “I doubt this is our last clue,” I guessed. “I mean, if Atlantis is an island, I’ll be real disappointed.” “It actually was an island,” Mr. Franknorth sighed. “It’s possible that the tide brought them down. Mortimer, you’ll have to stay and guard Joshua and Jonathan.” “Yes, sir,” Mortimer submitted without a fight.

“Greetings, lad!” a man with a Portuguese accent met up with us on the Western tip of France. “I wish this could be my literal Portuguese Man-o-war ship, here,” the man explained. “But it’s a research vessel. I’ll sell it to you for around 700,000 pounds. You can bargain with me, but still it will be a high price.” “Here,” Mr. Franknorth handed him the golden coin. “What...” “Don’t ask,” suggested Mr. Franknorth. “One catch,” sighed Mr. Talbot. “Only two people can fit in the sub at a time. You’re going to have to take two at a time, on whatever you’re off to see.” “Thank you,” Mrs. Maurine said. “We’re off, I guess.” We boarded the research vessel and raised the anchor. About four kilometers out in the sea, we checked the map. According to the coordinates, we were heading for the center of the Atlantic Ocean. It was late in the night, so I made my way to the bunk alone. My feet clattered across the metal-wrung flooring; nonetheless I heard something else follow me. When I looked behind, I saw nothing, but I heard soft breaths. I was definitely being watched.

I quickly clattered down the hall as I heard footsteps rapidly follow me. I swung my door open where Pert and Footsies also were assigned to sleep. Just as I closed the door I heard the breathing right down my neck. When I turned around a small hominid, maybe three feet tall with long, hairy ears and a funny bat-like nose, long arms with clawed fingers, a yellow jerkin, and a mischievous if not jolly grin. “Wha…” I gasped. “Hello, chap! You’ve got the sight, I see! But how can you see me?” “What are you?” I stuttered, releasing my firm grip on my baseball bat that was tucked away in my day pack. “A klabautermann, pleased to meet you.” The klabautermann shook my hand without me holding it out. “I’ll call you Klab,” I recommended. “No, my name is Sandflea!” laughed the gremlin. “Oh, well, hello…” “You really don’t know how to appease a Klabautermann, do you?” asked Sandflea. “Not really.” “Give me work, then! Clean the deck, sweep the hold, adjust the sails, straighten the railings,” “Clean my room!” I suggested. “Well, first things first. Where are you off to?” “The coordinates…I really just forgot them. But Mr. Franknorth says it’s at Sao Miguel Island, wherever that is.” “37° 30’ west, 37° 50’ north,” recited the klab. “How did you…” “Oh, we klabs know the seas like the back of our claw.” “I’ve heard of people knowing the sea, but that’s ridiculous!” I awed.

“What is this?” asked Pert. “A klabautermann!” laughed Footsies. I went to sleep restlessly with the tilt of the ship, and when I did go to sleep, my slumber was plagued by nightmares, one that I woke up in the night from. I sat up and opened the door to walk around the deck. The moon was reflecting on the dark waters and I leaned over the rail as the waves battered the ship. “It isn’t safe!” the klabautermann jumped in my way. “We’re quite close to Sao Miguel.” “I just wanted some fresh air; you don’t have to loom around me all the time!” I shouted, but he didn’t wince. “Inside, if I must treat you like an infant!” he hissed, no longer too jolly or helpful. I lay back on my cot, and let the snoring bauchans lull me to sleep.

 “Whoa, that is pretty,” I awed at the island ahead of us. “You’ll love the crater,” Mrs. Franknorth said. “I went here once on a cruise. It’s amazing.” “I’m glad to take a break from the fighting,” I sighed. We rode into a harbor, where we were met by a man with a nice suit that told us where to land. We landed on the side of a housed jetty and left the vessel. Sandflea stayed aboard, which I was glad of. “There are nereids in the Lagoa do Fogo crater, and we believe they could assist us with the riddle, so we know exactly where to look.” “What are nereids?” I questioned. “A species of mermaid,” assisted Mr. Franknorth. “The helpful kind.” We walked down an asphalt street that was on the jetty. “Welcome to Ponta Delgada,” Mr. Franknorth identified. “What are the types of mermaids?” I inquired. “Well, naiads aren’t really mermaids, and the only kinds I know are the siren, the undine, selkie, encantado, melusine, and merrow.” “You’ve already made me feel monster-illiterate,” I groaned. We hiked along a worn-down cobbled road up a hill with spiky plants and briars at each side. The place was like a jungle, with tropical plants and ferns sprouting up from the wet ground. “There it is,” Mrs. Franknorth said when my breath was strained. “Amazing,” I gasped. “But I’ll have to enjoy it when I cool down.” The lake was steaming up far above the water’s surface. The water was sparkling below the roots of emerald mountains. “This…looks like a place for mermaids,” I gasped. “Come, along, then!” Mrs. Franknorth motivated. I stood up and staggered down the slope of greenery, then started to sprint. I jumped into the cool water to cool down while my clothes got soaked. A pale, slimy and reached out from the water and held my head. *“This one bleeds,”* a melodious voice hummed. *“Not in bleed as bled in blood, but bled like the blood in the blemish!”* I knew instantly this task would be harder than I thought as the giggles echoed across the crater.

A dolphin-like tail splashed in front of me and a hominid shape rose from the water with a fin on her back, eyes the color of the lagoon, and thick, flowing hair. I’ll admit, she was pretty. “Are you only going to speak in riddles?” I asked. “No,” responded the nereid. “I am Lila, daughter of Nila. My father was the sea lord Anasthen.” “I have no idea who that is,” I noted. “We need to find Atlantis,” Mrs. Franknorth informed. *“There once were ten, but now there’s nine, one rose tall, now mine,”* hummed the mermaid. “My natives live in the Aegean and Mediterranean sea. I am roughly three-thousand years old.” “Three-thousand!” I gasped, stepping out of the water. “I was trapped in here, after these islands rose and Atlantis sunk. Now I have heard from my friends that Fomorians riddle the area.” “Where is it?” “Here is the key!” She dove underwater and when she rose handed Mrs. Maurine an old globe. “It’s under the ‘s’ in Atlantic, expose it to heat and you will see!” “There is no ‘s’ in Atlantic!” Mr. Franknorth shouted, but she had already descended.

We boarded our boat again afterward going hoarse after calling for the nereid. “How could this be the key?” I pondered in the room where the globe was held. “Under the ‘s’ in Atlantic,” I murmured. Atlantic, Atlantis. That has to be purposeful. But still, how could it be an ‘s’ on this old map? But suddenly I understood slightly. I took out a magnifying glass from a drawer and ran outside into the blistering heat. I raised the magnifying glass and could see the globe smoke. I directed the rays of sunlight right onto the “c” in Atlantic. “Got something?” questioned the klabautermann. “Yeah,” I grumbled. “Look!” Where the charred spot had started growing on the “c”, a golden ‘s’ showed. “There!” I pointed to a green island labeled, “Atlantis.” “I’ll get the others!” Sandflea shouted as I tucked the magnifying glass in my pocket. Mr. Franknorth ran out from the hold. “According to this we’re right above it.” “Wait!” I saw another shimmer of gold and ripped through the charred globe, then pulled out a key. “The key to Atlantis,” I gasped. “After so many years!” “There’s one problem,” Sandflea stated. “Whoever sees a klabautermann is said to have a doomed ship”

“Why didn’t you tell me this earlier?” I shouted. “I hoped there was some other explanation!” cried the nix. “You’re a traitor to us!” I shouted. “And you’re just a waste of time!” “Stop, Nelson!” yelled Toby. I swung around and punched him in the face, but Mr. Franknorth clutched onto my arm to hold me back from doing more harm. Toby shook his head and stood up with a busted lip. “We have to stay together on this,” Mr. Franknorth moaned. “I predict they have some air pocket down there, so we’ll go two at a time. Only I don’t know how to drive one.” “I do,” growled the klabautermann. “Thomas, you should go last to make sure everyone is off. Footsies, you’re up.” “Great,” he grumbled. “I’m claustrophobic, and I have to go on the sub first.” “Well, chop-chop, we don’t have all day!” They lowered themselves down into the hatch to the submersible, then we pulled the lever to lower them into the water.

##  Atlantis is Found

“What is that?” asked Asiar when the sub had descended. “Iku-Turso,” Mr. Franknorth gulped. “Icky-Torso?” asked Pert. “No, that!” a grotesque sea monster rose above the surface of the water with tentacles surrounding its mouth and a pale, whale-like body. “Fire at will!” Asiar commanded as a stream of fire blew from the monster’s mouth. A cloud of steam blew up from the water and it roared as explosions boomed around the whale of a beast. It rose its brightly colored frill and shot another stream of fire to feign. “It gets its power from the sun!” shouted Mr. Thomas. “If we could hold it off till the sun sets, then we can defeat it!” “Curse the night! Blow off its frill!” screamed Asiar. The beast rose up higher and sent a large wave our way. “Hold on!” screamed Mrs. Maurine. The wave bashed against our ship and we had to hold onto the railing to prevent drowning in the cold water. “Fire again!” “We can’t, our fuses are damp!” “Well then wait for the next blast!” at that moment another stream of fire blew our way, and the puddles on deck were vaporized. “Fire!” the arrows went sailing and dashed the frill to splinters. The monster roared as some of its tentacles were now deformed and tiny with the blast. “It’s blind now!” whispered Mr. Thomas. “Fire at will, but quietly!” the bauchans silently loaded and fired normal arrows, and the monster roared, wriggling its malformed tentacles. It tried to breathe fire apparently, but it failed. Its pale skin was leaking red blood and was scarred with explosion marks. Even a few harpoons stuck to its skin, I supposed its glamour was a fin whale. Smoke bellowed from its mouth and nostrils, and its blowhole was steaming. I guessed they really were whales. “They must be a kind of cetacean,” whispered Toby. Yeah, whatever. “Watch out!” a tail reached up from the water and delved a hole into our ship, trying to find us. The feelers from the whale’s mouth grew uncomfortably close, but suddenly two other feelers reached out and clutched onto my chest. “Help!” I screamed, bashing it with my baseball bat. Toby slashed off one of the tentacles while Mr. Thomas did the other. The beast roared, revealing a gaping mouth with row upon row of orca-like teeth. Asiar closed one eye and fired, just as a tentacle knocked him onto the railing. He slumped over, lifeless, but, however, a flash erupted in the beast’s throat and we heard a bang as the monster collapsed onto our deck. “Hold on!” shouted Backbreaker, who grabbed Asiar’s arm. The weight from the beast tilted our ship, but the monster slipped off the deck and the boat crashed back into its right place. I didn’t stop clutching the rail, though. “He needs help, he’s alive, but those holes in the ship will cost us a lot of time!” screamed Backbreaker.

“He’s unconscious!” “Obviously!” I shouted in the hold, which was a foot deep in water. We lowered him onto a cot and then started examining him. “Ugh, a broken rail must have pierced his…lung,” gasped Mrs. Maurine, pointing to the blood staining his short fur. “We need bandages!” “Obviously!” I repeated. “Here!” “Those are wet!” “What’s wrong with them being wet?” “Stop arguing and put them on, he, nor we will last long in this tub!” The water rose up to my knee. “Add pressure!” Mrs. Maurine pressed down on the damp, bloody bandages and closed her eyes, praying. “Replace the bandages!” “No, add onto them!” Mr. Franknorth searched the cabinets and cupboards for more cloths while Asiar breathed shallowly. “He won’t make it!” Backbreaker cried. “But he saved us!” wept Colby. “Even good men must die,” Mr. Franknorth sighed. “I can’t do this,” I groaned, falling on my knees. “God, heal him! We can’t go on without him!” “We have to turn around and take him to the hospital!” Mrs. Maurine cried. “But what about the sub…” “They can wait! We’ve been through too much to see him die now, without seeing the city. I’ll go take him to the hospital with Pert, while you go back to the sub.” “If you remember correctly we have a leak!” yelled Backbreaker. “This ship ain’t going nowhere!” “Get him in a life raft, then! “They can only hold two people, plus there’s only one,” sighed the leader of the hunt. “Then Pert, you’ll be the one to take him. You’ll be the survivor. The ship can stand until the next shift of the submarine.”

We pulled the cog as Pert situated Asiar. “Good luck, mates,” he said with tears in his eyes. “I can’t die here!” I cried. “Take me instead! Take me!” “Nelson!” Mr. Franknorth squeezed my shoulders. “Pull yourself together!” “Why did I come?” I questioned as the raft hit the water. “Look!” the sub rose from the water next to the raft. “Take me!” I screamed, insane with fear. “Send the youngest, the one who has the longest life ahead of him,” moaned Backbreaker. “Colby, up lad.” The submersible hatch opened up. “Watch out!” screamed the klab. The hull creaked and cracked as four huge giants scaled the hull. One leaped onto the sub and pulled the klabautermann out. “They have Footsies!” he cried before his captor put a mask on him and leaped into the water. I whacked a Fomorian’s leg but my bat broke and he lifted me by my shirt collar. “Row, Pert, row!” screamed Mrs. Maurine, who was bashing the legs of the beasts with her quarterstaff. Colby and Backbreaker shot the same giant at the same time in the face and he slumped over on the ground, but my captor smelled of rotten fish and gagged me with a metal mask with goggles. I could hear my breath under it as he leaped off the deck and we were plunged underwater. I was impressed with how I could breathe. I felt the Fomorian land on soft ground and he started to trot. I faintly heard a gate open and sand sprayed my face. The monster waited until I felt my hair out of the water, turned around as the water was as low as my mouth. We were in a room with a drain under stirring water, and a large metal door stood at either side of us. “Don’t think of escaping,” growled the Fomorian with its animalistic voice. I looked around and noticed Toby was there too with his guard, and Mrs. Maurine, who was still bashing her guard’s stomach with her staff as he continued holding her. The second gate opened and I was taken down a hall dangling with gibbets and spikes with human and fish skeletons hanging from them. I looked down in disgust. “Whoa,” Toby awed, and I looked up at a whale shark fossil pierced through a log above my head. The wooden gates ahead of us opened and I was thrown inside. I stood up and stared at an octopus-like shape, but I recognized it as an Iku-Turso. It was fashioned around a marble throne, and sitting on it was a king with a Megalodon tooth crown and implanted in the Iku-Turso’s head was a shining black jewel. The Svartrmen, or Black Diamond.

“Ahh, the first one to be captured is new,” laughed the giant king. “I should write this date down, Monday the ninth, February, 2015.” “I know what day it is,” I lied, speaking through my mask. The guard behind me laughed. The doors opened and the rest of the company marched in, followed my two other guards. Only Pert and Asiar had escaped. “Oh no,” gulped Thomas. “I have a science lesson on the Black Diamond,” informed the king. “Hundreds of years ago, the Black Diamond was found. There are others, as you may know, but none as large and valuable as *the* Black Diamond. It was found at the North Pole, buried deep in the Earth. The Dark elves found it…” Colby collapsed onto his knees and laughed insanely. Toby was grinning ear to ear. “What? What’s so funny?” “Inside joke,” confirmed Toby. “Well, anyway, it was formed by volcanic ash forming into pure carbon. I think,” “You think,” I questioned. “Well I wasn’t exactly there! Well, anyways, we plan to dig into the mantle, and create a volcano to raise Atlantis again!” “You’re smarter than I thought,” I blurted out. “Not that that’s *smart*, just smarter.” “So you plan war,” Mr. Franknorth groaned. “Not war, genocide! A massacre, a slaughter! Kill all life on Earth! The tide starts with Ireland, our home country, then the tide will raise high to the mainland, to the mountains, and eventually we will reign!”

“The puzzles we set up for you all were created by Fomorians. The tunnel under St. Basil’s…we made it for before St. Basil the Great even was born! We reigned at Giresun Island, and made a temple to serve our god. Even the supposed Carthaginian Temples of Sao Miguel were once part of Atlantis. There are four more parts, one in the Bermuda triangle, another in the Mediterranean, and the last off the Outer Banks. Take them down to the dungeon until they starve to death,” laughed the cruel tyrant. “March!” two guards stepped in front and behind us and pinioned our hands. I shook my fetters to threaten a guard, but he simply grinned with shark-like teeth. We followed the leading giant out back to where the water had drained. We were thrown in with only one guard. “How did you enjoy your visit with Lord Amagon?” asked the guard. “Stinky,” grumbled the klabautermann, who sat in a corner, adjusting his mask. “Hold your breath,” laughed the guard as the second gate started to open. Water rushed into the room and covered us in seconds, and then on we swam.

The Fomorian held onto the chain as we swam behind in the cold water, looking behind at a brilliant stone house, the King’s chamber. I turned back around and noticed we were in a reef graveyard. I had read about this before, it was created by the COTS, or Crown of Thorns starfish. I gaped like a fish when I looked to the side. A huge tower with a glass dome on top had four bridges leading to another fort. The glass dome had copper arms leading off each side. I recognized it as the city posted on the flag in Moscow, but it was much bigger than I imagined. We were forced to swim in its direction. When I got closer I noticed the walls were covered in dead coral. We followed the guard until we reached a smaller tower, which we were forced into by the guard’s chain. The Fomorian climbed a metal wrung ladder up to one of the four bridges of the main tower. We crossed the bridge…or swam over it, watching the fish, including a barracuda, pass by. I felt a jerk on my shackles and was dragged into the open gate of the main tower, then swam upwards freely, surprisingly finding an air pocket. Several stairs led up to the glass dome, which I realized had gears and gadgets of all sorts. I felt another tug and was pulled deep down some monstrous stairs into what once was the blacksmith shop, lined with furnaces and billows. We were led even deeper into the dungeons, and once again went through the draining process. The door behind us shut, the water drained, the door in front of us opened. Then we were led down the damp hall and thrown into separate cells, but we were not shackled to the wall. The bars were cross-hatched and impossible for even the bauchans to squeeze through. The guard yanked off our masks and shut the gates. “Windsplitter!” Toby laughed. I looked at the cell in front of us, which bore Windsplitter, strapped down with iron cuffs and a muzzle that was blackened. “TERBY! CERBY! NERSERN!” “You sound ridiculous,” I said, but probably shouldn’t have said that to a dragon. “I gert curfs on, and merfers!” “Alright, I understand,” I embellished.
“You have a dragon?” questioned Sandflea. “He’s a good one,” informed Mr. Thomas. “Uncle Maxine!” I looked to the cage next to him. “Nelson! I’m so sorry.” “You should be,” I blurted out. “Nelson!” Mr. Thomas warned. “He put me through all this, now I’m going to die slowly and painfully.” “They give you water, at least,” Maxine croaked. “I haven’t had any food since I was captured, but I’m still alive.” “It takes months for prisoners to die,” laughed the guard. “But they’re worse off that way.”

I don’t know how long we stayed down there, maybe a week or a couple days, I don’t know for sure. We got weaker and weaker, until one day I passed out. Our plan was working slowly but surely. Every hour Sandflea would pull strings from his yellow shirt and wind them up impossibly fast into a rope, but when I awoke he said he was only halfway done. Eventually I was so lethargic that I didn’t know whether I was sleeping or awake, but the klabautermann never complained nor grew weary. The bauchans were probably the hungriest, for they talked about how it would be nice if this prison had rats to eat.

“Nerson, it’s dern!” said Toby. “What?” I mumbled. “It’s dern! Ther rerp is dern!” “Okay,” I slurred. “Burt we neerd to wertch ther gerd!” the guard said, staring down at me. “What?” I asked. “Nersern, it’s term!” I jerked awake, and my stomach rumbled. “It’s dern,” Windsplitter mumbled. “Yer were aslerp.” “You…aren’t Toby,” I gasped. I looked over to the guard, who was asleep. What weird dreams. There were holes in the klabautermann’s shabby clothes, but he held a long yellow rope.

“Hey, guard, wakey wakey!” shouted Footsies, whom Sandflea had given the rope to. “Wha? What is it?” asked the guard. “Come over here and I’ll tell you a secret!” whispered the bauchan. “No, fool! He stood up and waltzed over to the cell and clutched the bar. “I’ll cut you up into fish bait!” “Not today!” Footsies leaped onto the guard and pulled the rope taught across his broad neck, then tied it to the bars. “Never!” the guard pushed him against the wall but the keys snapped from their chain. The keys went flying and were scattered across the hall or in the cell. “There’s four keys,” noted Backbreaker. “One must be for the cells, the other for the dungeon gate, the other for Windsplitter’s shackles, and the last I cannot tell. I’ll hope that one is not for the cells.” He pointed to the key just out of reach. “It is,” laughed the giant hoarsely, who had stopped struggling because of the pain. “Why would we believe him?” argued Backbreaker. “Guys, look!” Mrs. Franknorth pointed to Footsies cell, and he lay on the floor, breathing shallowly. “Oh, no,” I gulped.

“Try every key before the last one!” decided Mr. Thomas. “Then we treat Footsies.” I reached for the key right outside of my crossed bars, then tried unlocking my cell, but the key would not fit. Sandflea desperately tried his, but to no avail. Finally, Mrs. Maurine tried hers and the key was way too big. “We are finished, then,” moaned Backbreaker. But Sandflea reached over to the Fomorian and yanked out a spear from his belt. “Hand it to me, lad,” Mr. Franknorth compromised as the nix almost fell backwards with its weight. He dropped it and it rolled towards Mr. Franknorth, who stomped on it before it rolled past his cell. “No!” roared the Fomorian, who broke free of his rope. The strings fell to the floor and the Fomorian’s neck was red from rope burns. Mr. Franknorth thrust out the spear and hit the giant in the belly. He fell back against the strong bars and toppled over, motionless. Mr. Thomas yanked the spear from the giant’s blue skin and reached for the last set of keys, then hooked them to the spear and dragged them over to his cell, then unlocked it. The door creaked open and we all rejoiced. Mr. Thomas walked out the door and unlocked the cages one by one. “Free,” I murmured. “I suggest we find food first,” I struggled to my feet. “Fish and chips.” Mr. Franknorth pulled out the regular British menu from the Fomorian’s satchel. “What?” I questioned. We ate the roasted fish and crispy chips without another word.

I sat up when I had had my fill, and only Backbreaker kept eating. “More,” grunted Backbreaker greedily when all the food was gone. Mrs. Maurine inspected Footsies and discovered a large bump on his forehead, then speculated he had a concussion. “Here,” she pulled a flaming torch from the wall and dipped it in a water barrel. “Make a stretcher from the Fomorian’s cape,” she commanded, feeling the heat of the dampened torch. Sandflea and Colby rolled up the ends of the cape and I slipped in a puddle of blue blood. I stood up and wrung out my shirt, disgusted. Maxine stood up and staggered, though he had his fill. “I’m sterl herr,” grumbled Windsplitter. “Sorry, lad!” Maxine unlocked each pair of cuffs and Windsplitter reared up on two legs and blew steaming air from his nostrils, or, as I called when I was little, “invisible smoke”. “We claim back the Black Diamond, and then get out of this pigpen!” I shouted. “Not yet!” laughed a sinister voice. I felt a sword across my throat. “We have had many human allies, but the reason you do not see them today is simply because they die of old age. Join us, for I see much hate in your heart. I gulped, remembering all the people that had hurt me. My dad could have kept me; he had the money, but he just threw me away. In the orphanage nobody treated me as an equal. But then it got worse. I spent six years with foster parent-after-foster parent; some cared for me, but I ended up leaving that one to go to another one that despised me. Then again, both Maxine and the Franknorths cared for me. They might have led me down the mouth of a dragon, but they cared for me nonetheless. “Alright,” I choked, feeling some blood trickle down my neck. The blade was released from my throat, but I fled quickly to the other side. “Fools! You have no weapons!” the Fomorian growled. “We have the best weapon!” Mr. Franknorth grinned. “Duck!” We all collapsed as Windsplitter leaped over us and breathed steaming air at the Fomorian. His skin blistered and he roared in pain, his eyes whitened now. Mr. Franknorth led the chase as Toby, Colby and I clutched the giant spear and thrust the spear through his body. “How do we get out, the masks were taken!” asked Backbreaker. “Here,” Uncle Maxine pulled a bundle of masks out from the dead Fomorian’s satchel and handed one to each of us. “What of this…Footsies?” asked Sandflea. “Put a mask on him, and we can take him by hand.” “No, it’s best that he stays here,” Sandflea sighed. “I will guard him.” “Well, stay safe, then,” Mr. Thomas sighed. “I hope Asiar is alright.”

We all put on the masks and walked down the long and dripping hall to the first door, which remained shut when we approached. “Use the key,” suggested Toby. Mr. Thomas pressed the key into the keyhole and turned it. The door opened slowly and we passed through. “It seems like yesterday,” I growled. “But it must have been a week. Mr. Rudolph will kill me.” The first door closed and the second door opened and water flooded the room. I rose to the ceiling and swam out into the familiar reef graveyard, but there was unwelcome company.

## The Battle Under the Atlantic

“What are those?” I questioned, the sound of my outbreak echoing through the waters from my mask. “Adaros,” gulped Mr. Thomas. I stared at around fifty different merfolk, each having a shark-fin tail and a bald head. They each had their share of weapons, whether it was a sawfish or a swordfish’s snout or a whip made from jellyfish tentacles. One pointed to us and the rest advanced, shaking their weapons menacingly. Each adaro had its scars, whether it had a scrape in the eye or half a tail. “Swim!” shouted Mr. Franknorth, but they were too fast. Windsplitter shot a blast at one and he shriveled up like a spider, then Mr. Franknorth took up his hammer and bashed another’s head, and then tossed me a swordfish spike. I ran one through before he whipped me with his shark tooth-studded whip. “Head for the king’s chamber!” shouted Maxine. We swam in the direction, but a school of shark men swarmed over the pass. “If only we still had the pearl horn,” groaned Colby. “Look!” another swarm approached: dozens of merfolk with more dolphin-like appearances. “The nereids!” laughed Toby. “We’re saved!” But then a beast arose greater than anything I had faced yet.

“Sea serpent!” screamed Mrs. Maurine as a serpent rose from one of the holes in the reef bed. It was not a serpent or an oarfish like the scientists say, but a dark gray, oily eel. Its eyes were red and it had teeth the size of my hand. I would estimate its body was about forty feet long, much longer than any eel should be. “Windsplitter, can you hold off the snake while we get to safety?” asked Mr. Franknorth. “Of course,” growled Windsplitter, his voice barely audible with no mask. We all started fleeing from the huge eel, but Windsplitter was half the size of the beast. The eel had two lights on the end of membranes coming from its chin, and they glowed with an orange-like light. Windsplitter was caught in between the mighty jaws of the leviathan and shaken back and forth like a predator might do to its prey. The adaros took up enough courage to chase us again, and they were blocking off our pass. “Fight for all good things on this earth!” yelled Mr. Franknorth. We hacked through the school of shark men until an opening was made. Their hewn bodies floated up towards the surface of the water. “Quickly!” Mr. Thomas ordered. We followed him to the brilliant stone house as the adaros started to return. The water was tainted red with blood.

Mr. Franknorth twisted the key we had gotten from the nereid and the door opened. “Windsplitter,” choked Colby when the water had drained. The second door opened and we solemnly walked into the hall with all the dead shapes waning over us. “Look out!” yelled Mr. Franknorth as a huge figure swung an axe over our ducked heads. I lashed out with my swordfish snout and stabbed it through his foot. He groaned and stumbled back, but then swung his axe down on me. I leaped backwards and fell over Colby with a bloodied shirt. Colby stood up and swung a whip, then tangled the beast’s legs together with the jellyfish stingers. He fell over as his legs blistered blue. “To the hall!” screamed Mrs. Maurine, helping me up. The troll snapped his bonds and struggled to stand, but by the time he was up we had opened the gates to the throne room.

“Ahh, I was hoping you could come now!” laughed the giant king. Two guards stood beside him with Pert and Asiar with knives to their hearts. Asiar lay strewn across the floor as if he had been thrown to the ground in his injured condition. “No!!!” cried Mrs. Maurine. “We found them fleeing us, heading for the nearest island, but we got there first. Now they will die if you do not surrender!” “And die anyway? You wouldn’t do it nonetheless!” I screamed unintentionally. “Kill the first one,” laughed the king. I looked away as I heard knife against flesh and someone crumple to the floor.

“No,” I choked. “No!” I looked back to see our friend lying motionless on the blue carpet now stained red. “Would you like me to ease his passing?” asked the king, pointing to Asiar. “For Pert!” screamed Mr. Franknorth, pulling a throwing axe that looked like a battle axe from the wall. “Kill them all!” laughed the king. The guard lowered his blade to Asiar’s chest, and then swung back his arm to finish him, but I felt adrenaline pulse through my veins and I tossed my swordfish snout so hard it went straight through the Fomorian’s neck. He collapsed backwards and I drew a sword-sized dagger from the wall. My eyes watered with tears as we all charged for the king. The king threw Toby across the room and fled through the door as the last guard continued fighting us. “For the medic!” screamed Backbreaker. Backbreaker and Colby gave the giant guard one last volley before he fell dead. “Now, we are due respect for our friend,” sighed Mr. Thomas. “He wasn’t just a dark horse, he was pitch-black. I have a feeling he saved Asiar’s life, though he never would have admitted it. Asiar would be dead right now if it wasn’t for his extensive care.” “He would have gone with us to the Leviathan,” Backbreaker moaned, trying to keep his tears in. “I’ve lived too short to see so much death.” He fell onto his knees and wept over the bleeding body. “Look, it’s all for not!” gasped Backbreaker, still drying tears from his eyes, “The Black Diamond is gone. That filthy vermin must have taken us while we were fighting the guards. We have no idea where he’s going now.” “I do,” Mr. Franknorth said. “We have three choices, one to the Bermuda Triangle. The other choice is the Mediterranean, then the Outer Banks of USA. We must go gather all of our allies from the battle of Vatnajokull, Vaskr, Silversong and Eldervale!” “One question,” said a voice, hoarse and choked. “I always pronounced what you call USA you-sa. So which one is right?” “Asiar!” laughed Colby, whirling around. “Don’t hug me; the breath from my lungs is already taken out.” “Two lungs are always a blessing,” laughed Mr. Franknorth. “Let’s help Windsplitter,” I suggested, straightening my mask. “Be careful of what you may find,” suggested Backbreaker. “Oh, no.” Asiar leaned over and stared at his fallen comrade. “We can’t go on like this,” he sighed, a tear running off his cheek. “The Fomorians will pay! We hold them off at Portugal, on land. There we face them, until we die honorably!” “But how do we get there?” “Sandflea! Footsies!” laughed Mrs. Maurine. Footsies was walking on crutches with a band around his forehead. “No!” cried the bauchan, looking into the sunken face of the corpse that lay dead on the floor. “The life raft should still be above us.” Toby cried. “I will take him on the life raft and bury him,” Maxine said. “And I will get the submarine,” Sandflea decided. “We klabautermanner can breathe underwater for quite a while. But I will warn you, when I step off the sub, you will never see me again. The ship had been doomed already. It has sunk. So now I speculate, unless you have another doomed ship, that this is our last goodbye.”

“I will go get a boat with Sandflea,” I decided. “What? You?” asked Colby. Toby elbowed him in the chest. “Yes, we’ve had some disagreements in the past, but I want to get to know him better now.” “Buy a small boat, but large enough to fit us all,” Mr. Franknorth sighed. “Trade the submarine or it, if you must.” “Alright, then. Come and we will tell all of the shipwrecks I’ve been in,” Sandflea giggled. “Mostly because when I’m noticed it’s always because I’ll be in a shipwreck!” We said our goodbyes to get ready for the war at Portugal.

“Here we go,” I sighed as the metal gates slid open. Merfolk danced around in the water in a great battle with the adaros. I wanted to stay and watch, but Sandflea ushered me upwards. We saw no sign of Windsplitter anywhere. We swam up to the surface, and when we reached the top it was nightfall. It had been so long that I had breathed wholesome air that I had forgotten what wind had felt like. “There!” gasped the klabautermann. He pointed to the sub, covered in gulls, swaying in the sea next to floating debris, our sunken ship. I was always a strong swimmer, so we made it to the submarine safely. I climbed onto the top and spat up sea water, and then the klabautermann popped up out of the water beside me and unscrewed the porthole quickly, then swung it open. We leaped inside, away from the frothing waves.

## The Battle of Ancantilados De Barbete

Water rushed into the porthole of the submersible before Sandflea slammed it shut. “I’m sorry this task was put onto you,” Sandflea sighed. “No, it’s okay. I think I’m starting to see the difference between good and bad, God and Satan, all that stuff.” “There is no comparison between God and Satan,” corrected Sandflea. “If you believe that you have no knowledge of how great our God is.” “Yeah, I guess so. But tell me about your sailing stories.” I took off my mask as he began. “Well, I guess I’ll start with the Bermuda Triangle story. One day I was following this ship off the coast of Guatemala, and they happened to recognize me. So I didn’t explain anything about our ‘bad luck’ side, since they were still questioning how I could be real, and then this monstrous whirlpool, I think it was a Charybdis[[6]](#footnote-6), it sucked them all in! Thankfully I was able to swim away before I was swallowed alive. That’s probably my greatest failure.” “Don’t get all sentimental yet, go to the next story!” I prodded. “There were more times of natural disasters than there were of monsters, but one time a mighty Eastern dragon, a rogue one, blasted our ship to pieces after the captain had stolen its pearl, which was actually its egg. And a Cetus once split our ship in two, and though some survived the blow, all died of hypothermia while clinging to driftwood in the Arctic Ocean. And once, a mighty storm blew in, and a twister scattered our ship so far apart that it was out of shooting range!” “Alright, I’ve lost interest,” I sighed, staring through the rounded window in the front of the sub. Two saltwater bass passed in front of us, and eventually I fell asleep, watching the life under the Atlantic.

“We’re almost there!” laughed Sandflea, shaking me awake. “Didn’t you sleep?” I murmured. “Nah, klabautermanner never sleep.” “Well, what time is it?” I asked. “Hmm,” the klab checked his pocket and pulled out a circular item, which he opened to reveal a timer, a clock, and a compass. “Four in the morning!” he informed jollily. “What!” I sputtered. “Well you’ve only been asleep for like, ten minutes,” chuckled the midget. “Up you go, get ready to buy a boat on your own.” “Well, farewell,” I sighed. I looked out the window as we rose from the water. It was still night, but there were cars passing on the street adjoining the harbor. “Go to sleep,” commanded the nix. He maneuvered the ship under the pier and I quickly faded back into a shallow sleep.

When I awoke, Sandflea had opened the hatch and was peering outside. We were out in the open, not under the deck. “Come on, it’s time to buy your boat,” he goaded. “Hey, you can’t land there, kid!” shouted a man as the klabautermann disappeared in a corner. “I need to trade this sub for a pontoon boat!” I shouted past the sound of cars and waves. “Fine then, this will pay a pretty price,” the salesman decided. “Where’s the boat?” I asked, climbing aboard the deck. “Here,” the man pointed to a shabby but suitable pontoon boat. “Thank you.” “Wait, kid, how old are you?” “I got permission from my foster parents.” I promised truthfully. “Alright, then.” The man got me to fill out some papers, and then he taught me how to ride it, which I’m quite proud of. “You can ride it whenever you’re ready now. But I should come with you.” “Okay…” I gulped. “Let me say bye to my friend first.”
I chose my words carefully. “Sure, but how many people are down there?” “Just me and my imaginary friend,” I said, accidentally going too far. “O…kay.” The man sighed. I descended down into the submarine and saw the klab working on a loose screw. “Goodbye,” I said. “You know, you’re the first one that ever saw me and lived to tell the tale,” grinned the nix. “I wish you the fairest time, and I hope you will grow in the likeness of our Savior.” “Why can’t you follow us?” I cried. “I live on the sea and will die at the sea,” he responded. “May this battle go pleasing to God’s sight.” “Are you ready?” questioned the salesperson. “Yes,” I said with tears in my eyes, knowing I may never see him again. I climbed out of the sub and entered the boat. We untied the rope and started the motor. I looked behind us and saw the klabautermann…no, my friend, step onto the pier. When I blinked he had vanished.

I sat down outside on the couch as Mr. Stuff, as he introduced himself, drove the boat. “Where are your parents?” he asked.
“That’s who I’m coming to get,” I mumbled, working out how this would occur. I planned putting on my mask and diving underwater before he could see me, but most likely that would end up in more questions. “Whoa, what happened here?” the man questioned, as we drove past a piece of floating debris. “Must have been a wreck,” I said casually. “Hey, kid. I know what you’re up to. You’re running away, aren’t you?” “No!” “Show your proof, then!” “How would I get the sub?” “You stole it!” “Definitely not, I admit, I’m a troubled child.” “How many times have you gone to jail, then?” “Twice,” I admitted. “I’m calling the police if you don’t come willingly,” “You don’t have to,” said a voice. A life raft paddled by. “I’m his foster parent.” “Maxine!” I laughed. “I’ll take him from here; you can ride the raft.” He lifted a sack, which contained the ashes of Pert. They had explained to me about the quick decomposition of these Glamourous creatures. “Well, alright, I guess. This is confusing for me, you know.” Maxine boarded the ship and Mr. Stuff took his place. Odd name, by the way. “Let’s find the others,” Maxine decided when the raft was out of sight. He put on the mask and I did the same, then we both leaped under the water. The water was littered with corpses. Some were adaros and others were nereids and what Maxine called tritons, or male nereids. “There!” I pointed to the house right below us, and we swam under to it. We went through the short course of the water draining, and then ran down the hall beleaguered with dead Fomorians. “What happened here?” asked Maxine. I pointed and gaped at Colby, lying motionless under a Fomorian. “Move him aside!” yelled Maxine. We pulled the boy out and noticed his body was bruised all over. “Broken ribs, internal bleeding,” speculated Maxine. “Where are the others, we need to get him to a hospital.”

The throne room was worse. We had to climb over two Fomorian corpses and I slipped in a puddle of blue blood. The throne was cloven in two and the Iku-Turso head had arrows sticking out from it like a pincushion. “There,” a mass of bodies lay in a pool of Fomorian blood. We checked each one and none were severely injured. “This is awful,” I gasped, covering my mouth. “What happened,” mumbled Toby, sitting up and inspecting his shattered sword. “We found you like this, and Colby needs help before he bleeds to death,” I said after Maxine went to help Colby. “Oh, it’s coming back to me. They kept coming, wave upon wave. Finally they gave up, or thought we were dead. Colby went out first to shoot them down with Backbreaker…where’s Backbreaker?” “Here!” Maxine shouted. “He doesn’t look good. Broken neck.” I felt like vomiting. “How is he still alive?” I questioned. “Broken necks aren’t always instakill. We can get him help if we could find a way to get him to a sub.” Mrs. Maurine groaned and sat up. “Oh, no,” she cried, staring at the aftermath. “Thomas was reconciling with them, telling them to meet us at Portugal, but they wouldn’t listen,” continued Toby. “We thought Colby and Backbreaker were surely dead.” “Help him up, we’ll carry him out.” “What of Windsplitter?” I asked. “Oh, he came!” laughed Toby. “He killed most of them. Now he must be…” “Here,” Windsplitter groaned. A pile of corpses fell onto the bloodstained carpet and Windsplitter rose tall and yawned, showing his white hot breath. “Strap them to my back, and I can carry them to the boat. But mind putting on their masks first.” We woke the rest up, and they were bruised but safe. As for Backbreaker, he was breathing shallowly, and for Colby, his face was going pale. Now I understood why they came back with so many battle wounds. We tied Colby and Backbreaker to Windsplitter’s back, and then we swam up to the boat and boarded Colby and Backbreaker. Windsplitter went by water, heading for Portugal. “The Fomorians can wait, we have to go to the hospital,” Mr. Franknorth decided. “I will head off again,” Mr. Maxine said when we found his life raft. We quickly rode on to the nearby island of Ponta Delgada, and then called the ambulance on a telephone booth. The ambulance drove Colby, Asiar, and Backbreaker to the nearest hospital. Our excuses were we had been painting our house blue (hence the blue stains) and Colby had fallen off the roof, and Backbreaker, our neighbor, had tried to save him but fell off himself. Asiar had been in a rush and fell on a spiky stump and punctured his lung. As for the bruises and breaks, we had had a rough day.

“I wish Colby was here to see this,” Mrs. Maurine awed at the cliffs in the distance. “Ancantilados de Barbete,” identified Mr. Thomas, sharpening my new sword. “This is where the battle is to be held.” “It was nice knowing you guys,” I said drolly. “Well, I guess we hold them off here,” Toby sighed. We landed on the rocky shores and then Footsies shot a grappling hook to the top of the cliffs. “Just like Call of Duty,” I whispered. I grabbed onto the rope and started to climb up the cliff. I nearly fell twice. Once I reached the top, my hands were bleeding and my knees were bruised on the sharp cliffs. “How did you get their attention?” I asked. “This will,” Mr. Franknorth shot a gun and a flare erupted in the air. “Let’s hope no human gets caught up in the battle.” We sat down, dangling our feet off the edge of the tall cliffs. “I’ll never see Maxine again, I guess,” I mumbled. “We may,” Toby sighed, lying back against a wad of clothes as his pillow. The sun set soon and then night fell. It was cloudless, and all the stars shone at around ten o’clock. “Get some sleep,” Mr. Franknorth sighed when I yawned. “They may not come at all. I’ll wake you up if anything happens.” I used my duffle pack as a pillow and covered myself with extra clothes. Just as I was about to fade into sleep, Mr. Franknorth awakened me.

“It’s Windsplitter!” Mr. Franknorth shook me awake. I shone my torch off the cliff and spotted the dragon bounding out from the sea, Sargasso hanging from his bony horns. “Telchines[[7]](#footnote-7)! Hundreds of them!” he roared. “Not an hour away!” “But I just got up,” I groaned. “Well, exercise, then! Always wakes me up,” Toby said. “What are telchines?” I questioned. “Seal flippers, dog heads, technology exceeding that which we have today, yeah, that pretty much describes them,” said Toby. “So this is how we must die,” groaned Footsies. “By the hands of dogs! I say thee nay! Light the torches,” I turned on my torch. “No, those torches,” he pointed to the torches lining the cliff side. “That’s what I hate about British speech,” mumbled Toby. “I’m half American!” We sparked one of the torches with a match and then lit the others with the first torch. The precipice and below was full of torchlight. “Stay awake, men! Stay at your post and get ready to hold them off until we die!” “That encourages me superbly!” I said, using every spelling word of which I could think. “Stay at your posts!” repeated Mr. Thomas. “They have ladders, we push them back, they have cannons, we have explosive arrows, they have guns, we have bows, they have swords, we have…swords.” “Can you beat that?” I asked, trying to encourage my allies. “Yeah!” moaned all my friends. Windsplitter popped his turtle-like head above the cliff face and climbed to the top. “Here comes the ship,” we saw a red blinking light way in the distance. “Ready yourselves!” Mr. Thomas cried. “For the good of Earth and for our God!”

 “For the end of the World, and for those who have died in the name of preventing it!” cried Footsies. “Fire arrows!” the vessel was made of fine steel, had missile launchers aimed at our heads and several telchines on board and had guns aimed at us as well. One arrow belonging to Footsies detonated on contact to the iron hull. Several telchines went flying off the ship and parts of the deck were flaming. “Fire!” roared one of the telchines. “Run!” yelled Footsies. We fled backwards or sideways as the cliff face crumbled to the ground. I heard several cruel laughs, but none of us were harmed severely, only a couple cuts from debris. “Lower the gangplank!” one of the creatures roared. The broad metal ramp in the front of the ship was lowered and several gunshots could be heard. “Why don’t we have guns?” I questioned as one of the bullets ricochet off my sword. “Bring out the ladders!” “Uh-oh,” I gulped. “As if it wasn’t hard enough!” I peered off the cliff but a bullet skimmed across my face. The hordes of telchines were bringing long ladders, two in a row. “Bring them down!” Footsies screamed. “Don’t let them raise it!” We hailed rocks down upon the telchines, and some cried out but none fell. “So this is the end,” cried Mrs. Maurine. Toby cried out as a bullet sunk into his shoulder. “Keep throwing!” Footsies yelled, firing arrows impossibly fast. I heard another boom and below us the crowds literally erupted with the explosion of another arrow. “Windsplitter, show them what you can do.” The dragon leaped off the edge of the cliff and used his wings to soar down to the bottom of the precipice. “We may yet survive!” Toby shook on the floor as if it was cold, and Mrs. Maurine applied bandages to his bullet wound. Sadly, the dragon was quickly surrounded and the animals leaped upon him and started stabbing with halberds. Another bullet whistled past my ear, and then another explosion sounded. The ship erupted in a column of flame, and then sunk into the sea. “We can hold them off, no more reinforcements!” I laughed. Then the sea went teeming with movement. “That was only the power. This is the numbers!” shouted Footsies. Row upon row of the beasts stormed out of the water as far as the eye could see. “Windsplitter!” Mr. Franknorth cried, but he was not visible under the mass of telchines. Suddenly a burst of fire erupted around the dragon. He had produced enough methane to incinerate all the telekhines that were upon him. “The youngest dragon to breathe fire in recorded history,” awed Mr. Franknorth. “Watch out!” a doggish face rose above the side of the cliff but I kicked his face. In response he grabbed my leg with his flipper-like hands and I was dragged towards the edge of the cliff. I reached out and grabbed onto a protruding stone as the telchine fell to his death on the rocks below. I gripped the stone with all my might, waiting for someone to save me, but nobody noticed my hazard. “Help!” I squeaked. “HELP!” Mr. Franknorth looked down at me and gasped. He reached down and grabbed my hand just as I couldn’t hold any moment longer. He grabbed my arm with both hands and hauled me up. “Here they come!” he yelled as I stood up and dusted myself off. “Knock them back!” he cried, slicing at the telchines that were now climbing up. “Windsplitter!”

 All was lost. The telekhines were scaling the wall like ants. We were hopeless. Toby was in shock. Footsies had two bullet wounds and a nasty gash. Just as I felt instinct draw my hands up in surrender, I heard a roar, and a crack. Windsplitter was climbing the cliff. Fire blazed upward on the side of the cliff, disintegrating a telchine. The scaly head chomped at another telekhine and then climbed to the top and swung his tail, knocking several off the cliff. “For death!” I screamed. “For life,” corrected Mrs. Maurine. I picked up my sword and slashed down two more telchines. I blocked another blow and decapitated him, then parried with another with a blood-splotched cape. I stabbed my sword into his gut and he crumpled to the floor. Two telchines caulked their rifles and aimed at my head on opposite sides of each other. I ducked as they fired and both of them collapsed, being shot by their own men. “For victory!” I cried, before I was knocked to the ground by a club. I started hyperventilating when I saw the telekhines that were lying dead under me. I cleaved the club-bearer’s tattooed skull and noticed there was a mark of blood from where the club had hit. I stood up slowly, and it felt like my ribs were grinding together. A telekhine with its dog tongue hanging out turned to me and charged, but it fell right on my sword. I rolled it off me, some of the blood sticking to its mangy fur. “Retreat!” cried a telekhine as I gasped in quick breaths. Another telekhine looked down at me and considered stabbing me for a moment, then scampered off. “Why would they retreat? They still have hundreds of men,” pondered Mrs. Maurine. “To show us their power,” I choked. “Nelson!” she cried out and ran to me. “You’re going to be okay,” she said assuredly. I coughed up some blood and she gasped. “Come on, get him to the boat,” she cried. “How?” asked Mr. Franknorth with a missing tooth and a trickle of blood flowing down his chin. “Hoist him,” she assured. “The telchines are gone.” “Their first known defeat since Rhodes[[8]](#footnote-8),” Mr. Franknorth sighed. “Won’t the ropes harm his ribs?” “You’re right. Make a stretcher and we’ll carry him to a place we can get down safely.

## Homeward

 I was carried on the stretcher for quite a while, and then when we made our way down a hill we made our way back to the boat, stained with muddy paw prints. “With the proper treatment we can heal Toby and Nelson without going to the hospital and getting in trouble with the law, or telling more lies,” Mrs. Maurine groaned, lying back on the couch. “I estimate he has a chipped rib which possibly broke through the skin,” Mr. Franknorth said, inspecting my side. “He’ll make it, but if it’s still in there we need to take it out.” I started breathing faster. “I’ll get the tweezers,” said Footsies. Mrs. Maurine sat up from the couch and inspected the bullet they had taken from Toby’s shoulder. “It went quite deep,” she noticed, adding on to the wrapping. “Both of you, relax, you need to look sharp when we get to the hospital in Ponta Delgada, or we’ll take a trip to the psychiatric hospital or worse.” I felt a jab in my side as Mr. Thomas searched my wound for the spike of shattered bone. “Ahh, this should be easy!” he laughed. “It’s right under the skin.” He started to gently tug on the bone until I felt it jerk free. “Let’s dress that wound,” he decided, wrapping the tissue around my abdomen. “We head back home after this,” decided Mr. Franknorth, dropping the bone onto a piece of tissue paper. I sat up and my side ached. The sky was red with the coming dawn, and the waves were golden in the sliver that rose from the east. I rolled off the stretcher and sat down on the more comfortable lounge. “I’m hungry,” I groaned. “Here’s some bread,” Mr. Thomas handed me four loafs of sweetish bread. I wolfed it down in a matter of one or two minutes. In a long while, when the sun had set once again, we reached the small island of Ponta Delgada in the middle of the Atlantic. We walked over to the hospital a short distance from the port. “How are Bob, Dave and Colby doing?” asked Mrs. Maurine to the woman at the desk. “What are their last names?” Mrs. Maurine strained to remember their aliases, when Mr. Franknorth helped her. “Jones, Smith and Franknorth,” “Bob Jones and Dave Smith,” the woman said, grinning at such casual names. She called somebody else over who led us to the room of “Bob” first. Asiar sat in his gurney with an IV and several probes in his skin. A nurse walked up to us with a serious expression. “Does he have a family?” she asked. “No,” Mrs. Maurine answered. “Well, can I ask you for permission for a lung transplant?” “Yes,” both Mrs. Maurine and her husband said together. “We knew it would have to come someday.” “Alright, then, when should we start?” “Tomorrow would be great.” Mr. Thomas sighed. “We’ll need to ask him for permission, and then we’ll get started. We found a cadaver with the same blood type and antibodies. We were very fortunate, because this might have taken months.”

 “Let’s go to Dave now,” decided Mrs. Franknorth. “So not to wake him up,” The nurse led us to the next room, where we saw Backbreaker in his gurney with a neck brace around his throat. “I look ridiculous. I will never lead my hunters again with this dog collar on me!” he whined. “They would follow you to the bitter end,” Mrs. Maurine said. The nurse gave an inquisitive look. “You’ll get better, and then this won’t be necessary,” she promised. “Maybe, but I will never be able to bend my neck again without aching pains,” complained the leader of the hunt. “We should probably move on,” said the nurse. She led us down a couple more halls to the children’s section, and then we entered a room where Colby lay with several wires coming from him and bandages wrapped his chest. “I’ll leave you here,” she decided. “Hey,” Colby gasped. “I’m glad to see you all…whole. Are Windsplitter and Maxine alright?” “Yes, Windsplitter is heading off…it turns out he can fly and breathe fire at an early age. Maxine should be at England by now.” “What happened after I fell asleep?” Colby asked. We told him all of what happened from the battle at Atlantis to the battle of Portugal. “When will I get out?” Colby croaked. “I’d speculate around a week, including recovery time,” said Mr. Franknorth. “As for Asiar, maybe two weeks and Backbreaker should be a week and a half. We’ll have to stay at the hotel for quite a while, but let’s count it as vacation.”

 Two weeks zoomed by, after enjoying snorkeling and tanning in the blazing sun at the beach. But we could never forget the battles that were held, so when all our injured allies were released, we rode the pontoon boat to England. Windsplitter and Maxine greeted us, and we buried the ashes of Pert together, each taking one scoop of dirt for the grave. We buried him in the center of the field where an oak tree once stood, but now had been burned to the ground by a dragon. He was buried next to Amberlog, another bauchan who had refused being buried in Vatnajokull. “Whoa!” I ducked as some moth flew over my head in the burial ground. “A sylph!” Mr. Franknorth laughed. “How am I supposed to know what that is?” I questioned as the moth-creature landed on the makeshift cross over the grave of the medic. “I have news for Thomas Franknorth, delivered by the sea king Anasthen. He reports the battle went well in Atlantis, but they lost many fighters. They say that the king has moved to…the Bermuda Triangle.” “No,” groaned Asiar, now with crutches. “I will go, if it is to my last breath. I will follow you down the mouth of Charybdis!” “In fact, there is a Magnus Anguilla dwelling in the pits of Bermuda.” Mr. Thomas said, cryptically. “What’s that?” “Monstrous eel, the most famous one is Charybdis, written about by Homer.” “Well, we know where to search then. We’re not going on a wild goose chase. Windsplitter, stay here, guard the house. We’re going to Sgarbh Breac, to find Vaskr, friend and ally of the Franknorths, and dark elf rebel.”

 “So, if he’s a rebel of the bad guys, he must be good, right?” I asked in the car. “As good as it gets, dark elf-wise. He’s still rigid and dangerous to mess around with, and in my opinion, too much of a merciless fighter, but he won’t hurt you, if you’re kind to him.” We rode on for a couple hours to Oban, then dispatched on a rented pontoon boat after selling the old one. “There it is,” Mr. Franknorth said, pointing to a large knoll. “And they call it a mountain?” I asked. “It’s barely a hill!” “Yeah, but the dark elves made it a kingdom.” We pulled ashore and didn’t walk ten steps when two rocks sprang to life, actually being elves hidden underneath cloaks. “Bring them to ‘King’ Vaskr, the sight has been revealed to them.” We were chained, blindfolded, and pushed on with long sticks until we reached the top of the mountain. We heard grinding and then descended stairs. We continued on in this manner for a good while, until we stopped. “The king wouldn’t want them, fools! Execute them so not to bother him!” said a voice. I peeked through my blindfold to stare at a elf who apparently had been lashed dozens of times. “You sneaky rat bird! Corvus, step aside!” shouted Mrs. Maurine. “How do they know your name, Corvus?” “Beside the point,” Corvus waved away the question. Take them to be hung.” “Not so fast!” a voice spoke out, to my pleasure. “Lord Vaskr!” sniveled the coward. “I have encaged and punished you time and time again, but you never listen. I have put up with this madness for far too long. Take him to the cells and leave him there until I see a change in his black heart.” “No!!! WE will defeat you, do you hear that? WE!”

 “Colby, Maurine, Toby, Thomas, and…,” I held out my hand to open air. A guard took off my blindfold and I shook the elf’s hand. He had a shaved beard, gray skin, black, creepy eyes, and long, black hair. He wore a tunic and chainmail, and he had both a sword and a bow tucked away. “Many elves are planning rebellion. I knew their hearts would grow dark in short time. Few still are loyal to their king. Ohreinn led them already, but he died in the battle, and they surrendered when we got to the armory first. However, their minds do not learn so easily.” “We must ask you to leave your people, if you will,” Mr. Franknorth groaned. “If there is but one you can trust.” “I trust nobody but my general, Askr. He is a noble fellow, but hardy and stubborn at times. He will govern my people while I am away, but, I must ask, what are we doing?” “The Fomorians are real and growing in the Atlantic. They have now retreated to the Bermuda Triangle with the Black Diamond. We must go and retrieve it, or this world will fall.” “Understood. I will go alone with none of my men, but even with an army I doubt we could succeed against the sea giants.” “We must have hope, if anything,” Mrs. Maurine cried. “Hope that the wings of the Lord will protect us in this fatal combat.”

“It has been long since I have trusted myself to see the light of day,” said Vaskr as he stood at the bow of the pontoon boat. He raised his sword into the air like George Washington, and cried out, “The world will not be overcome by sea or by the tyranny of darkness, as has been attempted, but may grace fall like showers upon we few fighters, who chose to hold back the tide one last time!”

 “We now must find the Ljosalfar,” Mr. Thomas sighed. “One problem…we have no idea where they are.” “Then why don’t we first see Abadaba?” asked Colby. “Who?” I questioned. “A jinni,” answered Mrs. Maurine. We decked on shore in Oban, and then drove homewards. “So, where does this jinni live?” I questioned. “Arabia,” answered Mr. Franknorth. “What?” I stuttered. “Don’t worry, we’ll go by plane this time,” promised Mrs. Maurine. We drove a couple hours until we reached home again, then Joshua and Jonathan ran out to greet us. “Windsplitter’s captured…” “What?” shouted Mrs. Maurine. “Just kidding,” whimpered the boy. “I can’t wait till I’m nine, then I can beat you up!” he giggled, pointing to me. “Not really, you’re barely half my age!” Joshua stopped punching me, (which hurt more than it sounds) and started counting on his fingers out loud. “I’m one year older than a half!” he giggled, making it sound confusing. “We’re going to Arabia soon, and you can come with us this time, just mind the scorpion men,” Mrs. Franknorth joked. “What?” gaped Joshua. “And wyverns, of course!” warned Asiar. Mrs. Maurine eyed him and he slouched. “When are we leaving?” asked Jonathan. “Four days from now. A Monday. In the meantime, back to school.”

 School was a blur. My gang was so happy to see me, but I treated them like telchines. I stopped bullying, but also never worked hard on my homework. The best I made was a C-. When we got back to the road, Joshua kept annoying me the whole way to the airport and on the plane. It was amazing for the first hour, but then it got a little boring. The plane ride, not Joshua’s jabber. That got boring instantly. We landed at an airport around six hours later, and then rested at a hotel. “What are we looking for, he could be anywhere,” I said, plopping down on the couch. “The Blue Lightning…” Mrs. Franknorth typed in the title into her IPod. “Two-hundred twenty-two results. That helps.” “Here,” Jonathan held out his hands and Mrs. Maurine dropped it into his hands. “Magician Blue Lightning…forty-five results.” “Hand it over,” replied the leader of the hunt. “Blue Lightning…Ray Anderson…Abadaba…” “Billy Bob Joe!” giggled Joshua. “One result.” “He has a blog?” Mrs. Maurine questioned. “Let me read it,” Backbreaker held out his hand to stop her. “‘Hello, few who know my actual name…” “What? Keep going!” prodded Colby. “He said it, not me…‘(snicker snicker) you know of the sight, then, most likely a faerie gave you it. But I am located at the abandoned building in Al Kharj, labeled “junky stuff”. I might need to be more secretive.’” “We need to find Abadaba now,” Mrs. Maurine said, getting into the van. “But I have a feeling somebody else got there first.” “But my lady, will it not be safer to move along and find help somewhere else?” asked Vaskr. “No, we have to find Abadaba,” Mrs. Franknorth affirmed. I spat sand out of my mouth and got into the car.

## Epilogue

 “Well, here’s the shack, but no Abadaba.” We entered the sullen shack, which smelled horrid. A rocking chair was labeled, “Mine next to a shattered mirror. “Lots of bad luck here,” I joked. The sun seemed to stop shining for just a second, and then we heard a metallic roar. “Dragon!” screamed Asiar. Joshua whimpered as the sun went black again. We ran outside and Asiar, Colby, Footsies, Vaskr, and Backbreaker all locked their arrows onto the winged beast that soared over the buildings. Colby fired but the arrow missed drastically. The dragon had two legs, was smaller than I thought, and had a hooked beak and a barbed tail. “Oh, it’s just a Common Desert Wyvern! They’re harmless!” laughed Backbreaker, but we ducked as his talons swooped over our heads. “Look! It’s Abadaba!” laughed Jonathan, pointing to the figure leaping off its back. The wyvern came in for a landing and seemed to coo as the figure patted his beaked head. “It’s been a while.” Abadaba, who had a bony chin, talons like an eagle, and sand-colored skin sighed. “Who is this?” he asked. “Nelson,” I shook his clawed hand. “Well, Nelson, welcome to Arabia, if it’s your first time. I am Abadaba,” “So I presumed.” I groaned, stretching out my muscles. “We need help to defeat the Fomorians; we just can’t face them alone.” Mrs. Maurine informed. “I will once again be glad to help alongside my friends,” Abadaba moaned, like he was expecting this but fearing it.

Book II

Second Atlantis

Colby

*“No, it’s an ogre.” “An ogre? But that’s mythology!” “Not anymore. When we get out we’ll give you the sight and you’ll understand everything.”*

## Prologue

Have you ever looked into the wood and felt like there was something other than the leaves, the trees and the wildlife? That’s the way I felt when I was six years old with my mom. “I want to go in there!” I giggled, pointing over the barbed wire fencing. “No, that’s dangerous. There are wolves and boars and scary men!” “I’m not two, I can beat up a wolf!” was my response. I collapsed on the sofa eight years later, remembering that night. We were in a hotel in Arabia, awaiting the time to go to Solihull, our home. From there we would go to the Bermuda Triangle, where it seemed our doom was opened up before us. I could beat up a wolf, now, I thought. But not an army of *giant* scary men. I sighed and prayed, trying not to break my faith with God. He was our only hope now, for the light elves were nowhere to be found. He was our hope.

## Rob

“Why can’t we have peace for…” I ducked as the Wood troll swung its woody fist over my head. “Just a moment?” I gasped. I am Colby Franknorth, thirteen years old, and not really like other kids. Instead of doing school, I was facing a ten-ton juggernaut. “Too fast,” roared the beast. “It’s noo fair!” I let loose an arrow as my side burned from an injury dealt just a couple weeks ago. The arrow stuck into his strong arm, and he howled in pain, nearly falling back on my dad. “Stand back, boys!” chuckled Asiar, aiming a fused arrow at the monster’s head. I jumped to the floor as he fired the bolt, which detonated right before hitting the beast. “Ouch!” roared the giant. I smelled burnt and rotten wood and fungi, and then as the smoke cleared I spotted the beast running into the woods, smoking. “Victory!” laughed Asiar, doing a little jig. “Good practice for the army of creatures twice his size with massive hammers and saws,” growled Backbreaker, sheathing his two swords. “Hurrah!” giggled Joshua, who seemed to be playing the overseer since we got home from Arabia. Nelson, our adopted child groaned and sat on a charred stump. “Nelson, if you wish, you may stay home with me,” Maxine sighed. “Thank you, I’m sorry guys, but I’ve been tempted about going to the wrong side, and I don’t want to hurt you anymore.” “It’s alright. I understand,” my dad responded. “Let’s first take a visit to the bauchan camp.” We journeyed deeper into the woods, Nelson lagging behind. “You know, I want to write a book about this,” I sighed. “I’ll start with the book, *‘The Den of Darkness’*.” “And then I’ll write *‘The Dragon’s Jewel’*,” Toby said. “And we can both write our perspectives of the battle at Vatnajokull,” “Now that’s a great idea,” Dad sighed. “And I’ll add the pictures.” “I’m not sure it will end in a happy ending,” Nelson discouraged. “There it is,” Mr. Franknorth pointed to the twisted metal making the gate to a hobo-like camp. Two bauchan guards stood with dragon-claw sickles like my bronze bow, tipped with the long wing claws of Dirthrundil, a dragon that killed a bauchan we knew. I wondered how they had gotten their dragon claws, but they were much smaller than mine so I supposed it must have been a wyvern, like Abadaba’s. The gates opened and we entered the camp.

“Greetings, allies,” groaned an old bauchan with a gray beard. “Hello, Grayhair, my leader,” Asiar knelt before the old, decrepit bauchan. I had never heard the name of the bauchan spoken like that. “What do you come here for?” moaned the elder. “We need more men,” Mr. Thomas sighed. “And a new medic.” “Crank, come!” a squat bauchan I recognized from the battle of Vatnajokull made his way over here. “I am Pert’s brother,” said the solemn bauchan. “I will ally you in honor of his death.” “Mudrag, Ripmast, will you assist them?” two other bauchans climbed into the treehouse. “Yes, my leader,” both of them said in unison. “This task will not be forced upon you; all who wish to leave may go.” Not one of them chose to leave. “Then it is back to the road.” We made our way to the house, and on the way the bauchans made a discovery. “I smell robgoblin,” growled Mudrag. “I smell hobgoblin,” Ripmast hissed. “It’s the same thing,” Crank moaned. “To the house, quickly! No telling what he’s done now!” we rushed over to the moderate-sized domicile and noticed Windsplitter and Mortimer waiting for us. “I’m sorry, master. It was his eyes, the eyes did it!” Mortimer wailed. “What? Who?” “He introduced himself as Rob the robgoblin.” Windsplitter roared. “He’s in the kitchen, I believe. I can’t fit, you see.” Windsplitter has a large hatch on the roof, covered in shingles so he can enter the attic, but the rest of the house is too small for him, except the garage, but there the car is usually parked. “I’ve always wanted to see a hobgoblin!” I laughed. “I think I’ve seen him before,” Nelson moaned. “Stole all my Gatorade.” We climbed the stairs to the porch and entered the kitchen, where a little goblin about two feet tall, had outrageous sideburns like a raccoon, and had marks like a raccoon dropped a Gatorade bottle with his mouth open. “Oh,” he groaned. His feet tracked soot all through the house, implying he got in from the chimney. “Beetlesprit helped me do it!” he said, pointing to the faerie, sitting on the counter, eating a peach. “She got peach juice all in my potato chips!” he whimpered, widening his black eyes like a harp seal pup. “Out,” Abadaba growled. “Nah,” the gremlin laughed, chugging another bottle of Gatorade. Beetlesprit took a juicy bite from the peach, and then rolled it onto the floor, littered with potato chip crumbs. “Beetlesprit, back to the shed, Rob, back to the woods.” “Nah, nah, nah!” “Hug!” Joshua ran to the raccoon-like creature to give him a squeeze, but he hopped off his head and landed on the floor with a poof of soot. “Tada!” laughed the hobgoblin.

“Piggyback ride!” giggled Rob as Dad lifted him onto his shoulders. Dad walked outside and dumped him on the porch, then closed the door. “Now, you get out or I’ll twist your little wings off!” growled Backbreaker, pointing to Beetlesprit. “Nah!” she hissed, bearing her rapier and spreading her wings. “See, he’s been a bad inspiration to her!” Literally in a poof of smoke Rob appeared at the bottom of the chimney. “I give up,” moaned Mr. Thomas. “I don’t,” Toby groaned. “Will we let them steal our potato chips, peaches and Gatorade, I say thee nay!” Asiar cried. “Did I also mention we got into the Jell-O?” asked Rob. Abadaba sent out static electricity so that all of the hobgoblins fur stuck straight out. “Ow,” he groaned. “I surrender!” he put up his hands, one of them with a handful of potato chips, so he stuffed his hand into his mouth and crunched them down.

“Let me explain the terms of surrender, when we go to get the Black Diamond, you stay out of our house. Understood?” “I want to go, I want to go!” giggled the maniac. “No, no way!” “Why not?” “Yeah, why not?” asked Beetlesprit and Rob. “Because you’d just get yourself killed,” Backbreaker reprimanded. “But really, we’re all going to get killed.” “**Let me come**!” roared Rob. “Fine! Go get yourself stuck like the pig you are!” “You’re mean,” accused Rob, his arms akimbo. “You can come, if you insist,” Mr. Thomas groaned. Vaskr frowned like I had never seen him do before. “Why must this…raccoon come with us?” “Because he wants to,” Rob spoke for himself. “Fine,” Vaskr groaned.

 “If he can come, can I come too?” asked Joshua. “No way, not until you’re thirteen,” Mrs. Maurine answered. “Aww,” groaned Joshua. “Time to pack up again, we’re heading off tomorrow.” We packed up once more, and then we ate dinner after each taking a shower, rinsing off the ash from the battle with the troll. I slept soundly despite the circumstances. When I awoke, Rob was jumping on my bed with a Popsicle in hand, dripping juice onto my covers. “Rob, I told you *I* would wake him up, not you,” Mrs. Franknorth said as she walked into the room. “Rob, get off the bed, guys, get up, we need to get up early if we are to say goodbye to Maxine and Nelson.” We said our goodbyes and hit the road, Toby, Dad, Vaskr, Mortimer…Rob, and I rode in my Dad’s FJ cruiser while Mom and the others rode in the van. Dad and Mom communicated by texts of which way to go. We went down a road near Dover that Dad called the “scenic view” so that we could drive near the cliffs of Dover. However, we quickly found there was a problem. There was a line of cars in a row, all behind a monstrous tree that had fallen in the road. “Why doesn’t anyone call the police?” I asked. After around an hour, an old man with a gnarled cane came walking out of the woods. “Ah, would you like to be next?” he asked us. “Next for what?” Dad asked. “The way out, of course,” the old man groaned. “Two at a time, just two.” “I’ll go,” I decided. “Sure,” Mr. Franknorth said, stepping out of the car warily. We left the car, leaving the others to eat their lunch while we followed the creepy man into the forest.

“The faeries are stirring,” said the man. “I can sense it.” “Who or what are you?” “Just a simple man with the sight lifted, that’s all,” the elder informed. “Whoa,” I awed at a huge mansion in the distance, its spires high in the trees with smoke brimming from the chimney. “This is my home, come in and I will show you great hospitality!” the man laughed. “Wait just a second,” Mr. Franknorth drew his sword. “How did you know how we had the sight lifted? Only glamourous creatures have that ability.” “I’m old and am forgetful,” said the man, suddenly leaning on his walking stick. “You weren’t acting old a minute ago,” Mr. Franknorth said, putting the blade to the man’s neck. “And last of all, nobody but a faerie can sense a faerie, so what are you?” “You’re right,” the man cackled. “I’m an ogre, if you indeed were wondering. I’m cooking a man right now, in fact.” I pulled out my bronze bow and aimed it at his head. “You wouldn’t face me in this status, would you? You wouldn’t even dare face me in the other!” “Let’s put an end to this,” Dad thrust his sword down, but the man blocked it with incredible speed for someone that looked ninety. His staff splintered as the sword became lodged into the stick as the man took on a shade of grayish brown, and then started to grow. His tight pants expanded, and he grew until he was ten feet tall, had fur covering his body, and had a blunt nose. He bore his massive canines as he roared, shaking he trees. He lifted me off the ground a laughed. “I’m smarter than you think, stronger than you are, and harder than rock! I’m twice your size, twice your appetite, and I’m still hungry! HA, HA, HA!” he kicked Dad aside as he swung his sword, and then dragged him by the legs towards the mansion. He squeezed me tight in his arms so that I couldn’t reach my bow, then as we got closer I noticed the door was widened into a mouth like a cave.

## Escape From the Ogre

*“Rik, rock, the red clock, sang it sung, ding and dong, ring and rung! You’ll never make it out till you beat the block! Bick, Back, Rick, Rack, hang as in hung in the big bad bung-alow! How we howl!”* The ogre sang hideously, shaking the house. After taking out our weapons he threw us into rusty metal cages next to a blazing fire with another man in a cage next to us. “He’s awful, what is he?” asked the man. “Is it a mutation? An alien? I knew the Americans were doing something in Area 51!” “No, it’s an ogre.” “An ogre? But that’s mythology!” “Not anymore. When we get out we’ll give you the sight and you’ll understand everything.” “If we get out.” The man shrunk back into the corner of his cage as the giant returned in less shabby clothes, now mud stained purple garments. “Your turn, I’m going to eat you raw right down my smacker like sushi! The rest I cook!” He opened the man’s cage and dragged him out. “Wait, no! Me first!” Mr. Franknorth said as a last action. “Why? Give me one good reason?” asked the giant. “You like riddles? I’ll give you riddles…” “No! Dad, remember the word game?” I asked, and Dad grinned ear-to-ear. “I know we’re not equals at the moment, but just to prove you’re not a coward, play this game with us until my friends return, unless you’re too much of a chicken,” “Bok, bok, bok!” I made the chicken imitation. “Fine.” The giant threw the man back into his cell. “But first the one you get wrong, I eat you.” “Let’s have it as this, we have all three of us, but if one of us loses, they’re out. When all three of us are out, you eat us.” “Fair enough. Now, the rules!” “I start with a letter, then you say another letter that could make a word, like B-A, back. But if anyone does K in back, they’re out because they finish the word. If you don’t think it’s a word, than you can test the other, and they have to prove it by the dictionary.” “Good. Daughter! Bring me the dictionary!” A scrawny girl, a human, lifted a monstrous book and brought it to him. “A changeling child!” I gasped. “I go first,” decided the ogre. “Q,” “U,” said Dad. “A,” the ogre announced. “Now your turn, Colby,” “I,” I announced. “L…aww!” The ogre cried. “Now that just means another game, so my friends are another step closer to saving us,” said Dad. “You…” “Frederick,” the man answered. “Your turn,” said Dad. “P,” Frederick decided after brief thought. “A,” the giant roared. “U,” said Dad. “C,” The giant laughed. “Te…” I started, as the giant obviously had no idea of what he was doing, but dad shushed me. “I?” I guessed. “Test!” laughed the ogre. “Pauciloquent,” Dad responded. “No!” cried the ogre. He flipped through the dictionary, and found the strange word, then whined in dismay.

 “B,” said Dad. “O,” wept the monster. “G…” I said, but then crumpled to my knees and sighed, knowing I was finished. “Yes!” the giant’s visage brightened. He patted his matted hair as if he had combed it all backwards, and then began, “T,” “R,” Mr. Frederick replied. “U,” the ogre snapped. “A,” Dad said. “N,” laughed the giant. I gulped, knowing the end was coming for Dad as well, until he responded, “C,” “No!” cried the troll. “That was my ticket for free lunch! Next round, I give up.” “A,” said Mr. Frederick, but quickly said, “three letter words and up.” “That’s cheating! You didn’t say that!” roared the beast. “Accept failure, or I’ll eat you whole!” “O…kay,” shivered the poor man. I heard the door creak open, but the ogre seemed oblivious. “D,” said the monster. “R,” Dad continued. “A,” “F,” “Uh, uh, uh, F!” stuttered the monstrosity. “Test,” “Draffies!” ‘Um, sir, that’s not a word,” said the changeling. “Give that to me! I’ve had enough of this game, I’ll cook you all on a spit and have a luau!” He stopped short and sniffed, then turned around as Vaskr aimed an arrow from on top of my cage. He fired, striking the ogre in the back of the neck. He roared in pain and pulled it out, then dabbed his finger on his neck. “You’ll pay dark elf, if it’s the last thing I do!” He grabbed a fire stoker and threw it at the elf, but he leaped up and grabbed onto the loft and then hauled himself up. He jumped up from the loft and swung on the crystal chandelier, then leaped onto the ogre’s face as Rob sucked his thumb on my cell. “Unlock it, quick!” I whispered. “Shh, I’m thinkin’,” The hob said, sticking his finger back in his mouth as the giant tried to pry the elf off of his head. “Get me my pocketknife,” I ordered. The hobgoblin leaped off the cell and searched my duffle pack for the item. He tossed me the knife, for which my Dad would kill, as Frederick looked around in amazement. “Why are you talking to a raccoon?” he questioned. I twisted the knife upwards along with a wooden splinter and then the door creaked open. I ran to the other cells and unlocked them as well, but then when I looked up Vaskr was struggling with the ogre’s arm around his throat. “Back to your cages, all of you,” he threatened, but then Backbreaker ran behind him and cut both of his legs with his two short swords. The ogre crumpled to his knees as Vaskr ran off, released from his death grip. “Fire all arrows!” shouted Backbreaker. Vaskr whirled around and fired an arrow faster than I could blink, and then all arrows sunk into his skin or got stuck in his cape. “Fools!” he snatched up an axe and swung it around, splintering a wooden pillar. The house creaked and cracked as he swung again, smashing the wall open. “If I go down…” A piano fell from the upper floor and shattered against his head, the cords clanging out as they snapped from their place. He stood, stunned for a moment, then fell over backwards as stiff as an oak. “Let’s go,” I said, but then we heard a cry. “It’s the girl!” Dad cried, running to where the ceiling was crumbling. The girl was stuck under a beam that had fallen from the ceiling, and the attic was falling down. Dad ran to her and tried to pull the beam off her leg, but it would not budge. Toby and I ran to help, while Vaskr escorted the others out. “It’s stuck in the wall!” I noticed. “We need a prop!” Toby yanked the stoker from the wall and handed it to Dad, who then stuck it under the beam and yanked downwards. The beam slid up and the girl twisted her leg free as the ceiling collapsed. “Dad!” I screamed as he was lost in a flurry of dust. I coughed up the powder as the smoke cleared and Dad stood before me. “Where’s the girl?” he asked. “There!” I laughed. She stood, grinning and unharmed on the other side of the rubble. “Come outside and I’ll explain everything to you,” Dad said. We ran outside as the rest of the room was covered in falling debris. Night had fallen and glowing sprites flew through the night air, possibly Will-o’-the-wisps. They quit glowing, and then buzzed off…literally.

Dad turned on his flashlight, or torch, as most British people say. The spire of the house collapsed as the room leaned over and fell sideways. “Tell me of my father,” she said. “I hated him. Why did I never grow big like him?” the girl barraged my Dad with questions while walking backwards. I estimated she was about twelve years old. “Am I a changeling, like the big book says?” “Yes, John Bauer knew a lot about changelings,” Dad replied. “You’re a human changeling. Your family is keeping the ogre’s child.” “Daddy told me mother was killed by humans,” the girl said. “Yes, it’s likely. Your Father’s real daughter has the second strongest form of glamour, known as the Endring[[9]](#footnote-9) glamour. The first is shapeshifting, like what your false father had. The ogre’s daughter must have some signs, such as grayish or brownish skin, rough skin, or excessive aging. We’ll find your parents, ogres don’t travel far. Hopefully they will be near.” “I remember them!” laughed the girl. “My name is Mina, and the ogre captured me when I was a toddler. That was stupid of him.” “Describe the house.” “Brick, with a screened in porch. Small, but with a moving TV. There were no windows in the basement; we had to light candles when we had a power outage.” “Are you okay if we take you to the police? Where is the Dover police office anyway?” “We’re not even in Dover!” laughed Mina. “What?” asked Dad. “I think we took a wrong turn,” I chuckled. We walked over to Mr. Frederick, who looked pale. “I can’t live like you, Maurine,” he said to Mom. “I’d rather not take your deal.” He departed to his car without another word. “What was the deal?” I asked. “This,” she held out an all-too familiar bottle that you must take by eye to receive the sight. We all climbed into the stuffed FJ Cruiser, while Mom took in Mina. “Somebody call the fire department!” shouted Dad out the window. About an hour later we heard sirens, and the fallen tree in the road was removed. We drove slowly, and then started moving along.

“So, tell me this story again, in full detail,” said the cop. “I was kidnapped by a crazy man that called himself my Dad, then they saved me, but I can’t remember my parent’s names, except my last name is Pool.” “Well why didn’t you tell me at once! I know the Pool’s daughter very well. In fact, she’s in our jail at the moment.” “Oh,” the girl smirked. “Well, I’ll take you to your family as soon as possible.” “Here, take this,” Mom said. She handed her the bottle of hawthorn, amaranth, and St. John’s wort. “Give it to your parents,” encouraged Mom. “Essential oils,” she told the officer. I felt tears grow in my eyes. We had endured so much just because of that one bottle. “You can leave now,” said the officer, not looking up from his papers. “Alright. Come on, guys,” said Dad. We followed him out of the room and then I opened the door to the outside. Rob smiled at me and I looked away. “Are you in love?” he questioned. “What? Of course not!” I face-palmed myself. “Back to the annoyingness.”

We rented a schooner for what Mom called, “Lots of money”. We rode across the ocean for days, and then when the first week had gone by, I started to write on my book with the laptop we had brought. “*Hello, my name is Colby Adam Franknorth*,” I started. “Colby, come look!” Toby ran down the stairs into my secluded hold. I ran upstairs and saw merfolk swimming up alongside the boat above the surface of the water. “Nereids,” I awed. “No, these take the glamour of oarfish, thus these are merrows,” The “merrows” broke the surface with their tail fin, but then they descended into the water so that we could not see them. “How much longer, anyway?” I asked. “Probably a day or two and you’ll see the Isles of Bermuda.” “They don’t come this far,” I realized. “It’s a death trap.

## The Bats Attack

An eerie mist rose up from the surface of the water, making it hard to see ten feet. We saw no more creatures, mostly because we couldn’t see the water from above. “This is creepy,” noted Rob, biting his fingernails. “You’re creepy,” I growled, scooching over. “I smell something fowl, like burnt plastic,” Crank said. Something blotted out the sun for a second, and then all was back to normal. I was on the floor with my hands over my head. “What was that?” I asked, standing up. “The siege beasts,” said Mudrag. “Into the hold, all archers stay put!” I almost cursed. I pulled out my bow, but dropped to the floor again when the creature’s shadow flew over the boat. “Fire!” screamed Backbreaker, but it was too late when the arrows were released. The beast skimmed the top of the ship with its yard-long claws and took me and Footsies up into the air. I saw the ship get smaller and smaller until the mist covered our entire ship, even the mast. I pulled out my sword and stabbed into the monster’s talon. It released me and I was able to keep clinging as it let out a piercing screech. I cried out and climbed higher onto the beast’s feet, then leaped up, grabbing onto its pterodactyl like wings. When I climbed higher I noticed four Fomorians rode on a caravan on the beast’s back. “Hey, you there!” One stood up and pulled out a huge trident. I brandished my sword and charged, while Footsies struggled up to the body of the monster. “The ranbakar suit us well for war, don’t you think?” asked the bearer of the trident. He jabbed at my chest, but I fell over backwards and grabbed onto the soaring wings of this “ranbakar”. The Fomorian forced his trident’s gaps around my neck. I gulped as he pointed his dagger at my throat, but then the beast roared with an arrow sticking through its wing. I stabbed the distracted Fomorian and pried the trident off my neck. Footsies jabbed the corpulent stomach of his Fomorian and he collapsed off the winged monster. My Fomorian quickly recovered as I tossed the trident off the back of the ranbakar and blocked the giant knife of the Fomorian, and then the Fomorian dropped his dagger and pulled a hatchet from his belt. He swiped at me, but I was able to dodge, but then he swung down and snapped the chain holding the caravan in place. I grabbed the chain and quickly tied it in a knot, then looped it around the Fomorian’s leg as the caravan slid off. The two other Fomorians fell to the sea as Footsies leaped back onto the bare back of the monstrous winged beast. The chain tied around the Fomorian’s leg pulled taught and he fell with the caravan. I looked down, and he was dangling by his foot with the sea far below him. Two more ranbakars were flying around in the clouds, and there were probably many more.

The Fomorian grabbed onto the chain and started climbing up as the chain still held around his leg. I drew out my bronze bow and shot him twice, but he showed no pain. I slipped and rolled off the back of the monster, then landed in the caravan, still dangling by three more chains below the bat-like monster. I stabbed the beast’s shoulder as he jumped onto the tilted caravan. The caravan’s second chain snapped with the weight but we both grabbed onto the reigns. I kicked off the caravan that was now completely sideways from the lack of chains and we both parried blows, and then kicked off each other again. I leaped onto his shoulders the second time we passed, then pressed my sword into his neck. He roared and then let go of the reigns. I grabbed onto the reigns but felt a grip on my leg as the giant held on. My hands slid down the rope until I was sure they were bleeding, and then I went falling.

I had never thought water would hurt so much, but if I had fallen any way other than feet first I knew I would have died. My feet twisted in an odd angle as I hit the surface of the water. I barely had enough strength to push up to the surface when the huge hand came out from the water, then sunk. I was almost sure my feet were broken when I saw the pontoon boat roaring my way. Mortimer scooped me up from the ladder and jumped to the deck. “Nasty fall,” said Mortimer. He took off my crocs and viewed my swollen feet. “Broken, most likely,” he sighed. I groaned as they placed me on a stretcher. “Look!” a ranbakar collapsed into the water. “Footsies,” Dad said. “Over there!” Vaskr spun the wheel and we went rocketing in that direction. Footsies was treading water, looking quite serious for once. “Is Colby alright?” he questioned. “He’s fine,” said Mom. That was a bit of an embellishment. I felt exhausted but I knew we were almost at our destination, and I needed to be ready. I had already gotten a broken rib a couple weeks ago. I tried to sit up but felt too tired. “Don’t move,” Mom said. “Ouch,” Rob studied my legs. “Can I touch it?” “No!” Mom snapped. “Just kidding!” “Stop kidding!” “Watch out!” The two remaining ranbakars swooped in with claws outstretched. They passed over our heads without doing any damage, but six Fomorians leaped off their backs and drew out halberds. “We are three men short, but no matter. We will crush you anyway!” one growled. He swiped at Dad, but he made off with a mere scratch. I struggled to stand as Rob leaped on the back of one and started pulling his seaweed hair. “Ouch!” roared the Fomorian. He swiped the raccoon off his face, and then kicked him into the water like a football. Even though I was born an American, football still means American’s “soccer.” I drew my sword but my legs were useless. Two arrows were aimed at a Fomorian in Backbreaker’s bow, and he shot one dead. Rob rose to the boat, dripping water from his fur like a drowned rat. I stabbed my sword through the hand of a Fomorian walking backwards, and he squealed in pain. “You filthy vermin!” he roared, pulling out the sword and snapping it in two. “I have orders to kill everyone aboard this ship, to do anything to keep them away from Atlantis, and I will…yowl!” He yelped as a halberd went through his chest. He crumpled to the floor as Mortimer smiled, then kicked off another one’s face. “Three down, three to go!” he laughed. “Fifty fifty? Not bad!” Toby said, his sword locked on the halberd of the Fomorian he was facing. “For Atlantis, and the new Fomoria!” roared the giant, before an arrow pierced his side. He roared and fell back, and then the spines extended from the arrow tip, a favored bauchan arrow. He roared and yanked it out, then boomed in pain. “Fomoria?” I groaned. “Their name for Ireland,” said Dad. “I wondered why it was called *Ire*land,” I groaned. “Maybe, maybe not!” Dad said, dodging an axe blade. He pierced the Fomorian’s gut and he crumpled to the floor just as an arrow stabbed his heart. “I killed him first!” Both Dad and Asiar said together. “Uh, oh.” The two ranbakars split our ears with the sound of their screeches, and then the Fomorian riders directed them our way. “Two of them could lift our boat!” I realized. “But not one,” Backbreaker lit his fuse and shot one of the ranbakar’s wings, which sent it whirling towards the ocean. The last ranbakar swooped down with claws out and then screeched, rendering us confused. I lifted by bow slowly and shot out an arrow, which flew into the ranbakar’s gaping mouth. It let out a hoarse squeal and crashed into the water, causing a large wave. My stretcher started sliding until I hit the rail, so when the stretcher flipped I hung onto the fence as the ship straightened out. A Fomorian roared as he sunk into the water with an arrow through his heart. Kind of like cupid. “H…help!” gurgled Footsies, struggling to rise to the surface but some force kept him sinking. “Look!” I pointed to an arm around his leg while I climbed back onto the deck. “Shoot it down!” cried Mom. “It’s already…dead!” sputtered Footsies. Mortimer leaped into the water and tried pulling off the hand, but it was useless. “Dad! Look out!” a Fomorian was behind Dad with a mace swung back.

I grabbed a loose rail and twisted it free with adrenaline pulsing through my veins. I threw the rail and it went straight through the Fomorian’s side. He staggered back, and then collapsed. “Whoa,” I awed. Abadaba at last blasted the Fomorian’s hand off with lightning and Mortimer dragged the wet bauchan to the boat. The final Fomorian whimpered, and then leaped off the vessel. “We stay here until Colby gets better, no matter what may come,” Mom ordered. We waited for a long week and two days after putting a splint on my broken feet, and then we moved along. “We have no idea where Atlantis is or how to get there,” complained Backbreaker. “Here’s one answer,” Dad showed us his masks in a pack. “The Pearce Center[[10]](#footnote-10),” said Mom. “It must be in the center!” We continued on, going straight and using a map as our guide. “The most dangerous place in the Bermuda Triangle,” groaned Ripmast. “Get ready.” We continued on for around two hours until we found our fourth ranbakar. It looked like a rogue, and seemed to ignore us. It screeched several times, and then soared away. “Let’s descend,” said Mom.

## The Fomorian Drain

 We leaped off the boat after putting on our masks, and then swam downwards after Dad gave me a new sword. A reef shark was swimming above the sandy seafloor and then rushed off, kicking up sand in our way. “Look!” Toby pointed to a propeller lying half-buried in sand, his voice audible only because of the special masks. “Whoa,” I looked up at a huge jet plane, covered in coral. “Well, let’s go in!” decided Rob, adjusting his mask that was way too big for him. “Would you like to see the crew?” I asked.

“Tell me about shapeshifting, I never really understood it,” I said as we started swimming towards the direction that the bauchans smelled the most life. “It’s the strongest form of glamour, not merely an illusion but an actuality,” stated Abadaba. “Creatures use it as a disguise if they are too big or extraordinary to have a counterpart in the normal world.” “Then how do the giants stay hidden, they don’t have glamour.” “Notice each giant lives in the recesses of the world, whether it’s Fomorians in the sea, Jotunn in the Arctic, or desert giants, which are now extinct.” “Interesting,” I remarked. “And how did Mr. Frederick not understand Rob?” “With the sight comes the ability to listen to the fae, unless they speak in another language. He probably heard raccoon screeches or such, so you looked ridiculous.” “Thanks,” I groaned. “Look!” Off in the distance was a tall mountain, then several buildings tipping it blurred by the water. “Come,” Dad pressured. “Well, no firing arrows underwater,” I grumbled. “Duck!” ordered Backbreaker. We all obeyed as a manta-ray like shape passed over our heads. “No fair, they can fly and swim!” Rob groaned. “Ranbakars,” noticed Dad, as I we didn’t recognize them. “What’s their glamour?” I joked. “None,” answered Dad. “I was joking, Dad,” I chuckled grimly. Two others were circling the sunken mountain, and several ship parts lay on the floor between us and them. “We sneak in, and steal the Black Diamond. That’s all,” Dad said as we hid behind a large rock covered in barnacles. “No avenging the death of our medic!” Backbreaker growled. “No,” Dad sighed. “We have a new one,” he pointed to Crank, who was still solemn. “We must lay low, let’s go through the culvert,” he pointed to the grated water system. “How do we get through?” I asked. “That’s pure metal.” “Another one of my great plans,” chuckled Dad.

“Come on, Rob, you can do it!” I whispered as Rob attempted fitting through the grates of the culvert. “I put my finger to my lips and kicked his bum for payback of his annoyingness, and he drifted through the water inside the culvert after I gave him a boost. “Colby!” Mom growled. “That was mean!” Rob hissed. “You sapsucker!” “You warty pig!” “You *yellow-bellied* sapsucker!” “You *Sulawesi* warty pig!” “Argh!” Rob waved it away with his muddy hand. “You’re a chicken,” he scowled. “Bok, bok,” Toby laughed. “Stop arguing, or the guards are sure to find us.” Dad handed Rob the coil of rope and the robgoblin grabbed it, and then swam through the tunnel. I prayed silently that that would not be our last meeting.

We waited for a couple minutes while Dad tied the end of the rope to a rock, and then the hobgoblin returned with empty hands. “Did you do it?” I asked. “Yep!” he laughed. “But I still need to activate it.” “Urgh,” I growled. “So my plan was right? There was a cog to release the water into the water trough?” “Yes, or I think so.” “What do you mean?” “Well, there was a big metal thing with about, one, two, three,” he counted with his fingers. “That’s it,” Dad interrupted. “Now attach the bungee cord to the rope, and the other end of the bungee cord to a handle.” While Rob set to work, I asked Dad, “Dad, why do we go with swords and not guns?” “One, guns are too dangerous with all you around, two, gun against gun, sword against sword.” “By the way, the new sword’s hilt is too big for my hand. What do you have, an endless supply of swords?” Dad laughed at my joke. “Are you sure this plan will work?” I asked. “Sure, it’s just physics.” Suddenly the rope pulled tight and the rock went flying to the grate through which the rope had gone. Let me explain the plan, at last. The rope was tied around one of the handles to the cog, Rob would twist the cog, causing the rope to go taught and the rope and rock to drag the old rusted grate off the door and back to the crank. The culvert gate snapped at the hinges and started to slowly grind its way down the tunnel. “Come on,” said Dad. We followed him, who was shining his flashlight into the darkness. “Ugh,” Dad waved aside a rotting fish with a hagfish attatched. I nearly released my brief dinner. We entered a small round room like the inside of an igloo, where the water was pulling us to a small hole at the bottom of the wall.

“Rob!” I shouted. “He went down the drain,” said Mudrag, trying not to sound funny. “The hole is small enough,” studied Abadaba. “We can crawl down there and save him!” I suggested, partly as an excuse to get to where there might be fresh air. “You can, the rest of us are too big, or fat,” Toby eyed the bauchans, who looked back with disappointed looks and open mouths. “I’ll go,” I sighed. “No way, we find a way, other than you going down alone!” “He’s an inexperienced brat!” I argued. “I’m going down if you’re not,” “No, Colby!” Dad said, raising his voice. But I had more arguments, but then Dad had a change of face. “If you must. At least he’ll have someone down there to take care of him. Keep him out of trouble, and stay out of trouble yourself.” “Thanks, Dad,” I said. We hugged from underwater. I crawled down halfway, as Dad opened his mouth, but it was too late before he started, I was down the chute. I landed hard on the slick, algae-infested ground on my bum. I went sliding down on the smooth ground, now out of the water. I looked back up, and water was rushing from the hatch I had escaped through. There was not enough water to keep me going, I could turn back, but I pushed forward.

I yanked off my mask as I kept sliding down the hall lit only by luminescent fungi until I noticed there was a fork in the waterway. “Help!” I heard the faint cry from the left. I pushed off down that way and then slid along. “Rob!” I shouted, but heard no response. “Look! I told you the waterway was open!” boomed a rough voice. “There’s something!” up on a metal bridge stood two Fomorians. “Contact the master! Stop all flows!” hissed the other. I pushed off harder, and in less than a minute, I heard the first gate close behind me, and guessed if I had passed through a minute later I’d be trapped. “Whoa!” I slipped off a cascade and landed in a trough that ran down a rail. There was a cavernous room with the rail running below the falls so that the water could be shipped off. “Rob!” I screamed. “Here!” shouted a voice. A raccoon-like head popped from a cart and spat out saltwater. “Have any idea where we’re going?” “Yeah, the filter. We’re going to get boiled,” “Then let’s get out!” said Rob as we passed down a crudely mined tunnel dripping with water. “We’d get run over!” I pointed back to the passing carts. “I didn’t think Fomorians drank,” stated Rob. “Well we need a plan, like Dad,” I said. “Look, mist!” “That’s not good. We’re getting close.” But then the carts slowly came to a stop, to my amazement. “If that cog is the same one we used, the others are in trouble,” I noted. “Then let’s go, we can climb around the big…boiling pot.” Rob said hastily. “Yeah, I guess so,” I said, though it was a dangerous plan. We hopped out of the water-filled carts and walked alongside the rail, occasionally squeezing past a cart. “I thought I was dead meat when I first fell through that crack,” Rob spoke up after a few minutes. “I didn’t think anyone would come for me, and it would be an embarrassing way to die. Flushed down a drain to be boiled.”

“Watch out!” I shouted, noticing the path dropped away. I looked down at the floor off the drop-off. There was a red-hot metal floor on the bottom, and above us were several Fomorians on bridges, working, probably trying to find why it had started working all of a sudden. “You fools!” roared an all-too familiar voice. “We didn’t do it!” cried one. “We were down here when the first cart passed. We think it may be you know who.” “I know who, you know who, we all know who, and it’s those kids and misfits! Those children will go right down my mouth if I see them again, and the adults, well, I’ll cut them up for an appetizer!” Rob and I started making our way along the metal-wrung overhang that led off from the railing. “If that waterway runs again, I’ll cut you up into fish bait!” Apparently that was a favored Fomorian term, because I had heard them say it before. I accidently stepped too hard on the overhang and all Fomorians turned to us. “Get them! Bring me their heads!” The Fomorians started running down the stairs to the overhang while I took an arrow out of my soaked quiver. I shot one of the Fomorians in the shoulder and he roared out, making the others stop for him on the small ledge. “Run!” I shouted. We ran back the way we came, and then squeezed past a cart. When we passed our third cart, the first Fomorian passed through the tunnel. I shot an arrow into his forehead and he fell back onto his much smaller ally. “I’m running low on arrows!” I shouted as Rob squeezed past the next water cart. I followed him closely, but then a Fomorian pushed one of the carts back our way. I leaped above it epicly, if that’s a word, then kicked off it and drew my sword, then stabbed it into the Fomorian’s chest all in midair. Awesome! The Fomorian groaned and collapsed onto the two other Fomorians below him. I squeezed past the other two carts to catch up with Rob, who now realized he was small enough to leap across the carts one by one. “STOP!” roared the voice of Lord Amagon. “There have been more found in the first halls. We need more men! Come and assist them or die here ungracefully! As for them, I will handle it.” “Come on,” I squeezed past the last cart before the waterfall, which was now a trickle, and then passed through. “Colby, down here!” Rob pointed down to where the ramp led down to above the waterway, then split off into two other ways. I ran to the bottom of the ramp, but when I looked back, I got my first close-up look of the master Fomorian himself. He had two massive teeth like boar tusks, spines spiking from his back, and coated in red armor. He held a metal stick and swiped it out, expanding it to a ten-foot long baton/sword. Two other Fomorians walked beside him. “You tamper with something far too great for you, boy. You will feel the sting of my sword! I will brand my wall with every country, every continent to show my power.” “Well, you’re going to have to get past me,” I snickered, terrified of the brute even larger than the normal Fomorian. I charged with my sword raised high. “Colby! What are you thinking!” shouted Rob. The first two Fomorians were a piece of cake. I stabbed the first one through and mounted the other, then knifed his spinal cord. The master, though, was difficult. He swung his staff, knocking me to the ground, and then stabbed his sword into the ground next to me, but thankfully I moved aside so it didn’t stab me through. I jumped up and slashed his chest, but he made off with a scraping of metal. He made a booming laugh and cracked me on the head with his baton, and I slid down the ramp, holding my head. “I will tear you limb from limb, and then devour you. I will throw your limbs to sizzle with the vapor, and then I will be content!” I stood up slowly, knowing this was the end. I prayed silently, then had premonition. If I stood alone I would die. “Come on!” cried Rob. I obeyed.

We ran down the torch lit hall, as the brute roared curses out at us. He trotted towards us, but apparently he was quite slow. I turned around and shot my third to last arrow at his forehead, but he flicked it aside with his fingers. “Keep running!” Rob shouted. We took a curve down the crude mine and then entered into a large, finely lit and intricately made and designed hall. The hall was shaped with a triangular roof and several octagonal pillars, each side having a fish, serpent, monster or dragon. We ran up a fleet of stairs that shrunk into the mines and then out burst the monster. I whirled around and slashed him across the eye. He roared and fell back, holding his hand to his eye. “Guards! Guards!” he cried. Four guards ran at us with monstrous pikes. “Not them, me!” hissed the giant. “Take me to the infirmary!” They all escorted him without a word out of the room. I took out a rag from my wetsuit pocket and wiped off the blue blood from my sword.

## The Halls of Amagon

“Come on, we have to get some food and rest,” I led Rob down the empty, marble hall way too glorious for a Fomorian. “I’m too tired to go on,” cried Rob, limping as he walked. “I know,” I sighed, wiping my head and noticing the bump on my head was bleeding. “I just want peace for a day or two, and then we find the others. For now…we survive.” I nearly collapsed onto the clean floor, then I just stopped trying to stand, and I fell asleep. “Wake up, I’m hungry!” groaned Rob, shaking me from my pandemonium dreams. “There might be guards near.” “How…long was…I sleeping?” I gasped, blood caking my head. “We were that far from that,” Rob pointed to a sofa just ten feet away. More like a wicker bench with cushions, but it looked really comfortable. “I’M HUNGRY!” Rob said, pleased with the echo down the long halls. “Let’s go, can you walk?” he asked quickly. “Maybe,” I groaned. I struggled to stand, and then the two-foot tall goblin pretended to help me up. I limped down the long path, and then pushed the wooden doors open at the end of the gallery. There was a large table full of food, fish, which I didn’t like, shrimp, which I also didn’t like, and…well, I’ll just say all I ate was the salad, bread and chips, which somehow had gotten this far under the sea. “I…wonder who this is for,” I gasped as Rob stripped the fish from their bones. “Probably the king…” Rob started, but then stopped. “No, he would have found us, unless they couldn’t take it to the infirmary.” “Maybe the workers,” I guessed, crunching on some chips next to the fish. I swallowed the hard, crunchy pita chips, which were quite spicy, then finally, got to the bread, which was my favorite food possibly. It was Greek, like Atlantis. I groaned and leaned back, studying the flag that hung over the table. The picture was combined of four small, blue triangles on the ends of one large red diamond. “We should be moving on,” I sighed. “Come on, up, Rob!” “But I’m so full,” he groaned before burping. “Excuses excuses,” I groaned. “Pour some water into your canteen, we need to find the others.” “I thought you wanted to lay low for a couple days!” Rob continued complaining. “No, we’ve got to go,” I argued. “Dad!” I walked forward and from around a marble corner Dad nearly ran over me. “Colby! Toby’s missing. We don’t have an idea where he is!” In a moment the rest of the crew bundled in, all except Toby. “Eat!” I encouraged. “No, we we had food on the way. Last time we saw him was in a fight with the Fomorians. He ran in the opposite direction to get a couple to folow him, and the rest we vanquished. We followed him in this direction, but we couldn’t find him.” “We only got here maybe an hour ago. He might have gone that way,” I pointed to the other path opposite of the corner they rounded. “Worth a try,” sighed Dad. Rob hopped out of ther large chair and we made great haste down the corner. There were glass windows on the right side so that we could see out into the water. We were on the first floor, so we were at the bottom of the reef. I guessed the king would be on the top floor.

“Look,” Mom pointed to a trail of water. “He must have gone this way.” We walked down the hall swiftly, then suddenly a finned hand pressed on the glass. “An adaro!” Dad gulped as Rob jumped back. “Don’t worry, they’re fish, they can’t speak, or warn the others. They’re just pawns.” “Then what are Fomorians?” I asked. “One might say they are higher up in the class of amphibians. They are intelligent enough to speak and reason, and they even have electricity. They are closer to toads than anything else, I believe. The only reason I assume they are amphibians is their capability in land and water, so a mammal might just drown and a fish would suffocate on land. Plus, they don’t look like fish.” “They don’t really look like amphibians either,” I groaned. “Neither do caecillians!” Dad reminded. We walked on and on, until we turned another corner. “We’re going in circles,” Mom noticed. “He must have gone back to where you were when you went around the other way!” I said.

We continued along in silence, decided in our path. To the dungeon. I took a swig from my canteen as we made our way over a huge chasm with many bridges leading under us. “The dungeon should be a quarter of a kilometer away.” Vaskr broke the silence. We faced dwon tow Fomorians that had seen us and got away without a blow, until two Fomorian guards stood next to a portcullis. “By order of Lord Amagon, you will be executed,” one laughed. “Though I don’t see why we can’t just leave you to rot in the cells,” “Neither one is likely,” said Vaskr, lauching an arrow at the first Fomorian. He roared in pain, then snapped off the tip and drew out an Egyptian khopesh[[11]](#footnote-11). I cried out and ran to face the brutes. Instantly, though, the other one slung his club and I was knocked into the wall. I groaned and then all went black.

“Colby!” I felt someone shake me from my slumber. “It’s the dungeon! We found it!” laughed Abadaba. I sat up from my corner, and saw that the guards were dead. I stood up and then we ran to the gate of the dungeon and pulled the lever to open up the barred portcullis. We entered a room much less attractive than the other rooms in the hall, it was layed out with stone bricks to the ceiling, which was dangling with gibbets. “Here,” Dad pointed to Toby, sitting in a gibbet up above us. “It’s a trap! Run!” he cried. “Amagon is coming, and all the others! Run!” “Not without you,” Asiar shot an arrow at the pulley system, which exploded in flame when the arrow made contact. The scaffold collapsed and Toby ran out of the cage door that creaked open ater the fall. “Listen,” I gulped, hearing the thrum of footsteps.

We turned around and readied our weapons for the army that approached. “Make ready!” cried Backbreaker. “All archers, prepare to fire!” a row of Fomorians appeared from around a corner. “Fire!” screamed Backbreaker hoarsely. “Look!” Rob, who was turning around and sucking on his thumb stared at Fomorians coming from behind, and left, and right. “Asiar, Crank, to the left, Mudrag, ripmast, to the right! Warriors from behind, and Colby and me ahead!” I drew another arrow, my last arrow, and fired. It struck a fomorian in the heart, and then when I reported to Asiar, he cursed. “Take half of mine,” he growled, pulling them from his quiver. They were speacial arrows, I knew, and I felt greatly honored. I lit a match and fired an incindiary arrow, which struck another Fomorian. I fired a spiky arrow, then an explosive arrow, but then we had to fall back as they approached. I slashed a Fomorian in the legs with my dragon-claw tipped bow. I once asked Dad how he put them on, and his response was, “gorilla glue”. I pulled out my sword and put up my bow, then cut a Fomorian down. “For the Black Diamond!” roared a Fomorian. “I have a plan!” laughed Dad insanely. “There,” he poined to a fleet of stairs leading to the chains that went through a slit in the wall. We fled for the stairs as the Fomorians proceeded for us. Abadaba snapped a chain with lightning, then gasped in exaustion. A gibbet collapsed on the closest Fomorian, and he fell over unconscious. We ran down the hall and Dad explained the plan.

Asiar fired an arrow with a rope attatched to it. It went through the bars of the scaffold and then the spines expanded. “Pull!” Dad encouraged. The bauchan pulled the rope and Dad lowered the chain. “Release!” Dad ordered as the Fomorians trampled through the hall of controls. I shot one as the gibbet went sailing down, crashing into a line of Fomorians, then when it swng back it hit another, then another, then another. “Success!” laughed Dad. “But it won’t handle all of them! Charge!” I swung my sword down a Fomorians chest after jumping high in the air. He roared and fell back, then I charged farther ahead while the others followed. Abadaba ran forward and shot a blast of ball lightning, a dome of energy right down the middle of the hallway. He sighed and collapsed onto the ground. “Colby, Toby, Get him to a safe place!” shouted Crank. “He’s been drained of all his energy, if he was to do a blast any greater he would have died!”

*“The night grows long, where is the day? When all is lost, we will awake, to dust off swords, and axes strong. This is our anthem, this is our song!*

*When all is nay, we must awake, when all is nigh, we shall not die! With barricade, wave over wave! Though they roam, and the sea foam!*

 *As snow is falling, the road is calling, night is falling, the beast is pawing. I had a dream, of battles fought, but all my kin, will fight ‘til lost.”*

Sung Asiar while fighting. Rob ruined the moment with an Elvis song, doing all the hip movements. “Stop it!” I cried, taking out my anger on a Fomorian swinging his club about. Dad felled a monstrous Fomorian by stabbing his sword down his spinal cord. We slashed our way inbto the oppen dungon, snapping chains across the hall, with gibbets falling right onto our enemies. “Make a circle!” ordered Dad. We all stood in a ring in the center of the dungeon, with enemies coming at all sides. “I’ll see you again, one day,” I gulped. “But for now, fight for your life!” cried Dad. But then we turned to face several Fomorians crowding around another Fomorian with Rob held by his toes. “Now face me!” he laughed. “I’ll slit his throat if you make one move.” We all stopped fighting. “Do we kill them now?” asked one voice. “No. Bring word to the master. They are going to the arena tonight!”

 The Fomorians crowded around us and pushed us forward, some spitting at our faces. “We will go down audaciously!” screamed Backbreaker, but was greeted with laughs. “If we go down at all,” groaned Mom. Rob was set free to join us in the coliseum, as we walked the halls to doom. We were escorted for a long while...perhaps an hour...and then thrown into a dusty cell after a heavy frisking, which meant no weapons in the field. There were several looming statues of beaked whale-like creatures in the cell. “What do we do now?” shivered Rob. “We wait, and then show them we have more in us than they ever thought,” Asiar said. “For the avenging of my brother,” cheered Crank. “I know not one of you stands here today without losing an ally, but now, today, we make our stand! For the blood of our people, who have died for our cause!” we all stood up from the cobbled floor and cheered. “I need water,” I choked after an hour of patience. “I’m parched,” I complained. “I’m cold,” Rob sighed. “Be quiet, will you? I’m listening,” said Mudrag irritably. “What do you hear?” asked Dad as Mudrag put his ear to the wall. “The tournament is starting,” Mudrag repeated. “This is the first grand reopening of the Fomorian arena since twenty-one scores ago. Now, introducing, the Franknorths and their allies!” the wall flipped open and torchlight shone into the room lit only by the guard’s torch past the spiked bars. We walked out cautiously. A crowd of Fomorians cheered in the stadium, and the domed glass ceiling allowed you to see all the sea life above. “They’ve faced berserkers, krakens, an army of Dokkalfar, and even a couple of Fomorians, but now they will meet their grizzly end by the tarbh uisge[[12]](#footnote-12)!” A gate opposite to us opened up slowly and a huge beast, maybe three times as tall as I am, came storming out. “Let the battle begin!” spoke an announcer on a pedestal. The beast resembled a bull with huge forward-facing horns and was covered in fur that looked as soft as a chinchilla. It charged us, and we all split up as it ran into the wall inside our cage. It shook its head and turned around, then charged at us again with its eyes shut tight. “I have a plan!” Dad shouted. “Oh great, this one better be good,” Rob sighed. “And better not involve me getting flushed down a drain!!!”

 This “tarbh uisge” rammed into the wall and the crowd went crazy. I picked up a rock and threw it, but it only bounced off his hard skin. “We must enact the plan!” “What would you want us to do? Die like so many others have?” growled Backbreaker. “First, we must save ourselves. Vaskr, you climb to the top of the gate and shut it once the beast is in. Understood?” “Yes,” replied the elf, who showed no fear. “Run!” shouted Dad as the bull charged us. “Over here!” cried Vaskr, waving his arm. The brute snorted and charged him. He bounded to the gate on the opposite of the ring while the crowd was ecstatic. Vaskr climbed up the statues lining the gate and then took a hidden knife out from his boot and then stood atop the opened gate. The tarbh uisge charged him, and then rushed into the cage as he snapped the chains holding the gate open. The beast went sliding in and the gate slammed shut. “Storm them!” cried the speaker. About twenty-five guards covered in armor leaped to the floor. The crowd was ringing of boos and jeers. Vaskr swung one off the edge of the precipitous platform and he broke his neck from the fall. “Get the elf!” cried the speaker. “Kill him!” “I’ll get the masks!” He shouted as the guards tried to jump back up to the stage to assist with the chase. “Not you, after them!” the announcer pointed to us. “Now that’s not a fair fight!” Toby groaned.

 Vaskr ran down a fleet of stairs after cutting down another Fomorian. The bauchans threw out rocks at the armored guards and one held a massive mace that he had swung over his shoulder. He took it out and swung it back and forth, then hit it on the ground stupidly. “Throw all knives!” cried Backbreaker. All the bauchans took out daggers from their sleeves and threw it past the guard’s visors. Two fell to the dusty floor as Vaskr jumped down a hatch. “For life!” cried Dad, charging after pulling a knife from a guard’s helmet. I jerked out another one and climbed onto the back of a Fomorian and started stabbing at his unarmored neck. He roared and fell back as the last two were defeated by Dad and Crank. “Archers, at the ready!” screamed a Fomorian commander. A line of archers armed with mega crossbows took aim. “On my mark!” Vaskr threw down the tangled wad of masks and weapons as the stadium was emptied. “ONE!” we scrabbled in for masks. “TWO!” Crank readied an explosive arrow at the domed glass ceiling as I put on my mask. “THREE!” Crank fired the arrow and it detonated on the dome, and water rushed in. “FIRE!” All arrows were stopped by the water except one…Crank.

 “Take him to higher levels!” ordered Mom. “Go!” Toby and I lifted Crank as the archers dropped their crossbows and drew out scimitars. We swam up, holding Crank by the hand with an arrow the size of a spear still imbedded in his chest. He had a mask on, but I imagined he was coughing up blood whenever he coughed, which he did commonly. We swam through the rupture in the glass and swam up to the second layer. We went through the draining process, and then Dad did CPR on the grated floor. “Come on, you can live!” Dad said as Mom took off his mask. Blood trickled off of it. “I feel no pain,” he rasped. “The Lord has been merciful to me…he is my…shepherd.” He coughed again, but his agonized look turned to a look of pure joy. “What do you see?” asked Dad. “Pert!” he laughed. “Rocksplit and Bumblebur, and all the others! I…see your mother, Thomas. And my Lord! Can’t you see him?” “No, but I will one day,” said Dad. I wiped tears or saltwater away, and then held Crank’s bow to his chest. “Goodbye, my brother,” cried Backbreaker. “I hope your new life is better than the old one.” “It will be,” said Dad as he closed his placid eyes.

 We passed Crank down and then set up sticks and placed him on it, as he was wrapped in cloth. Abadaba struck the fire as Dad finished the service.

*“I want him to know, we were friends, and I want to see him again.*

*I want to close his eyes, and wrap my arms around him.*

*I want to see him again, I want to see him!*

*I want to see him die! I want to close his eyes, I want to say goodbye, I want to say I loved you, I know you saved me, I want to hold you, like you held me.”*

“That’s beautiful!” said Mom. I had sung the words from my heart, and now it felt good to get them out. “It’s a song I’m writing for Rocksplit, and all the others, but that’s all I have so far.” “Well, that was a great service,” said Backbreaker. “I wish I had been a better leader to him.” “You were,” cried Asiar. Toby hadn’t said a word, and was watching the roaring fire with tears welling in his eyes. “Not another medic,” he cried, and then I crumpled to me knees and wept.

 “We must move on, before anybody finds us,” said Backbreaker while sharing the ashes with each of us. We sadly eased down the decorated hall until we could go no further without sleep. We slept on a wicker bench in an empty room. When I awoke from my slumber at around nine o’clock, Mom was serving out pancakes. I had a familiar experience in the Dokkalfar domain, except it was bacon, not pancakes. “Fomorians have pancake batter?” I questioned. “No, I brought some,” said Mom sadly. “If we don’t get over Crank’s death, we’ll never be able to continue,” cried Ripmast. “We must continue. I will follow you to my death.”

 We ate up, then swung our backpacks over our shoulder and continued along the path. We ascended a ramp and then went higher and higher, until we met a regiment of Fomorians. “There they are! Bring them to the master!” cried the middle one. Around twenty Fomorians charged us and easily overwhelmed us. “Not again,” I growled, being chained one after another. We were carried over their shoulders and then were brought to the top floor. We were thrown to the tiled floor and I looked up to stare at Amagon, with a scratch across his pale eye from my sword blow. “I thought I told you I wanted them dead,” he complained. “I’m sorry my lord. May I do the honor?” One of the Fomorians put an ax blade to Asiar’s neck. “No, now that they’re here we can talk. For now, though, go to their house and kill the others,” “NO!!!” Dad cried. “Joshua, Jonathan,” I wept. “Assemble the others, in case they escape. Also, they have a dragon, so beware. Ride the quickest way possible.” “No,” I cried. “Did you not realize this was a trap?” asked the Fomorian king. He pulled the black stone from his robe. “HRYM!” another Fomorian that I barely recognized ran to his side. “Send all the others to the first Atlantis. Then we wage war on land once the Franknorths are all dead.”

 “How do you like to see all your friends die? Pert and his brother were cowards in life, and in death. “What is life but death, and what is death but life?” asked Asiar, but he was knocked to the floor by a massive whip. “They were braver than any of you," cried Mudrag. “Me, a coward? Never!” “You lounge in this gallery underwater, but you have no place. No right. You are sending your people off while you stay, and I tell you, you are weak. Oh, so weak.” “Do not talk to me of weakness, for you sit here, shackled, but you have lost so many men,” “Dying is living,” Asiar sighed. “We have fought you again and again, and now you will never see land again.” “Pitiful. I will rule land, as my people ruled the land in the ancient days, as if I were Balor.” “Now can I kill them?” asked another guard. “Silence!!!” roared the king. “We will escape. We have done it so many times,” Footsies, who had not spoken since the death of Crank, stood up from his knees and yelled, “You killed Crank!” Then charged forward, but a spear was thrown and it struck his back. He fell over forward, motionless. “This is what happens to those who oppose me,” laughed the king, kicking the bauchan over. Footsies pulled the spear from his back with his pinioned arms and tossed the spear right at the giant’s chest. He roared in pain as Footsies stood up and drove it in deeper until the spear tip hit the wall. I looked away as the blue blood flowed from the wound. “The age of awakening, will come.” I heard his last breath, then he collapsed to the ground. “I can kill them now,” laughed the guard. Asiar leaped onto his back and used his shackles to choke the guard to death, as the second guard proceeded to Asiar with his spear raised. “For the king!” He knocked me to the ground with the butt end of the spear and ran the spear through Asiar’s mechanical arm. “For Pantokrator!” cried Backbreaker, breaking his chains on an axe blade. He took out the axe and swung it at the guard’s legs and he fell to the ground. Asiar screamed in pain and I asked Mom, “Isn’t it mechanical?” “Yes, but there’s skin under it!” she cried. Footsies lay without movement on the round in a puddle of Amagon’s blood. Dad ran to him while Backbreaker prepared a cloth. “It has to run through to the other side or the spear tip will take out more flesh,” gulped Ripmast. “Do not remove it,” Mom ordered. “Okay, okay,” grumbled Ripmast. “Make a stretcher; I have some cloth folded in my backpack…great. They took our backpacks. Use his robe,” she pointed to Amagon. We stripped him to his tunic, and then wrapped the two spears to the robe. “We need to get him to the hospital pronto,” Mom ordered. “Let’s carry him outside, swim to the boat, and then drive to Latin America.” “Cuba,” said Backbreaker. “We have to go now if he’s to survive.” “And Footsies, he’s barely breathing!” Dad shouted. We made another stretcher after Backbreaker released us from our chains and Toby and Dad carried him while Backbreaker and I carried Asiar. We quickly ran down the hall and Mudrag and Ripmast opened the doors for us as Mom took the Black Diamond from Amagon’s tunic.

Rob scampered ahead, scouting out for us, while Abadaba led the way with his fist ready for lightning. Mudrag pulled the lever and the gates opened to the draining system. We passed through with our masks on, even the injured wearing one, and then we left the stretchers on the grated floor. We carried Asiar and Footsies through the water up to the surface, then found our boat quickly. “What about Jonathan and Joshua?” questioned Toby. “Split up, Colby and Toby, Vaskr, and Backbreaker...come with me while the rest go with Maurine,” said Dad. “We’ll drop you off at Cuba. Take the Black Diamond.” It was midday, and we drove till dusk. “Do you need us to escort you?” asked Dad. “No,” said Mom. “We’ve got this handled.” Mudrag and Ripmast carried Asiar in a professional stretcher while Abadaba and Mom carried Footsies. Rob walked alongside them sadly. We said goodbye, then departed into the East for our own fight.

## Epilogue

“Well, what do we do now?” I asked after an hour of silence. “We pray,” said Dad. I prayed a short prayer, and then wrote on my book. Those were better times, before the Second War for the Black Diamond. If we finished this task, I prayed that all would go smoothly from then on, but deep-down I doubted it. After so much war, what would it awaken? That brought up a new thought. The last words of Amagon were, “The age of awakening will come”. What on earth did that mean? But then another thought came to me. It might be an awakening of a creature, not an empire. “Dad!” I shouted. He ran into the hold with me. “What could he mean by awakening?” I asked. “Who?” he asked. “Amagon, his last words,” I said. “I’m scared of the answer of that myself, but one problem at a time.” “But Dad, what could it mean? What creature would worry an army of Fomorians?” “Indian Mountain Dragon,” sighed Dad, then he climbed the stairs again.

## Book III

## The Siege of the House

## Toby

## Prologue

 “Dad!” I called through the house that seemed empty on February the 17th, almost exactly a year ago today. At this time we sat in the boat in silence. We called the police after a day, and since his stuff was still there the police at first doubted it was a walk-away divorce, but after two months they still were sure it was not a kidnapping. You wouldn’t imagine how awful those two months were, for financial and moral reasons. Now that my Dad wasn’t working at his architecture office, my Mom had to go to work once a week at a bank, and we were alone during most of the day. Then I started thinking there might be more to it than it seemed. The pictures were just too fictitious for a simple man to draw them out without selling them, I thought. (At that time I didn’t know much about Vincent van Gogh, apparently.) But now, sitting in the hold, I was scared my Mom would be without us. We were going to battle, a battle of the house, and I doubted any of us would return. But there was still hope.

## The Haven

 “Try it!” I laughed, nearly drunk on root beer. “I’m not going to have something that looks like a giant cracker that you compare to ‘candy’,” Dad responded. “Matzo! Matzo!” cheered the one-man army of bauchans, Backbreaker. “Fine,” Dad lifted the matzo cracker to his lips and ate it. “These Jews have good taste,” laughed Dad. “Where’s Colby?” “In the hold, working on his master design,” teased Backbreaker. “Actually, I’m right behind you,” said Colby, my little brother. We burst out in laughter as Backbreaker looked like he wanted to crawl into the hold himself. “What vehicle do you think the Fomorians would ride?” he questioned, changing the subject. “Ranbakars, most likely,” Colby said. “No, they won’t be open yet.” “What’s more open than tromping to the center of England, if not this?” I asked. “If it’s a foggy day, then yes, they’d use ranbakars, but it’s beside the point, we just have to keep bearing straight.” “Who’s driving, in that case?” I asked. “I put a stick on the ignition,” Dad said proudly. “How smart.” I sighed. I looked back at Vaskr, who was watching the seas. “Where do you think we are now? We’ve been driving for two days straight,” said Colby. “In the middle of the Atlantic, I’d assume,” said Dad. “According to my handy radar, we’re right below Sao Miguel Island.” “Land!” I gasped. “No! We make no stops until we reach England.” “Aren’t you low on gas or something?” I asked. “No, we have extra,” Dad replied smoothly. “How many men do you suppose there are?” asked Asiar. “A hundred or more,” moaned Dad. “Now, back to the matzo.”

 “Land ho!” I cried three days later after waking up. “We know, we’ve been here for hours discussing our plans,” said Colby. “It’s cloudy, alright,” I noticed. “What day is it?” “February the twenty-first,” answered Dad. “Come here.” I walked up to the table on the deck and saw a rough overhead view of our house. “The Fomorians are probably coming in a circle, form the reports of Joshua and Jonathan,” said Dad. “Joshua and Jonathan called?” I asked. “Yeah, they saw two Fomorians on opposite sides of the house. They also saw what Joshua called “a UFO”. I laughed at his exaggeration. “So, what do you suppose we do?” “Make our way by the trees. I know that the bauchans have made a network of branches fashioned into bridges.” Backbreaker smiled. “What about my people?” “Windsplitter apparently plowed through the forces and barely escaped back, with word that the camp has been emptied.” “I don’t know if that’s good or bad,” Backbreaker said senselessly with his lips barely moving. “The Fomorians are ruthless and cruel, but cruel enough that they would only kill innocent lives in front of us.” “So I get to watch my people die!” cried Backbreaker. “No, that’s not what I’m saying. What I’m saying is we need some incentive to do what’s right.” “Then let’s get a move on. How will we get there, though?” asked Backbreaker. “I called Maxine an hour ago. He should be waiting for us on shore.” “Then where’s Nelson?” I asked. “Guarding Joshua and Jonathan,” answered Dad, then he walked up to the steering wheel and stepped on the ignition.

 “Maxine!” laughed Dad at shore, but he was not smiling. “We have to go, and quickly. I barely made it out before the Fomorians circled the area.” “Can I talk to Joshua and Jonathan, while they’re…never mind,” I said innocently. “Sure,” Dad said, handing me the cellphone. I dialed the number and heard Joshua scream. “Joshua!” I cried. Jonathan answered the phone while gasping. “It’s a scout!” he cried. I heard him cry out and throw something breakable. “He got away,” sighed Jonathan. “You provoked him?” I asked. “We thought he had stolen something or heard Dad on the phone!” cried Joshua. “Well, that’s okay, considering if they had heard we would have no chance of saving you,” I groaned. “Did you see any bauchans?” I asked. “A couple ran from the woods and are taking refuge in the basement…” “You kicked them into the freezing basement?” I roared. “They were stinky!” cried Joshua. “Well, anyway, we’re on our way by car.” “Great, but I think they’re getting impatient!” Jonathan gulped. “I estimate they’ll attack in about…an hour at most.” “Dad, how long should it take?” I asked. “Three more hours,” he explained. I nearly threw up. “You have to find a way out!” I cried. “Let me have the phone!” said Dad. I tossed him the phone and put my hand to my face. “There’s a tunnel in the clurichaun camp,” said Dad. “It’s where we kept the Black Diamond before Dirthrundil stole it. No buts! Go by tree. You know that hollow log? Call the password, Grayhair and hopefully a bauchan will send down a rope ladder. Make your way silently over the Fomorians, then sneak down into the clurichaun camp.”

 “That’s risky,” I noted when Dad hung up the phone. “I know, but it’s our best shot,” he replied. We drove on for three more hours, only stopping for gas. When we reached the gravel road leading to our house, Maxine pulled up alongside the street. “What do we do from here?” he asked. “We go by woods. It may be three kilometers, no more. We go around the circle of Fomorians and to the clurichaun camp.” We got out of the car and Backbreaker sniffed and then led us into the woods. We pushed through the dense forest, stepping over sharp sawbriars and tripping over vines. I looked around and gasped. “Look! A fairy ring!” I laughed. “When one steps into one of those, he can see the fae,” said Vaskr. “How far are we to the Fomorians?” he asked. “Maybe a kilometer,” responded Backbreaker. “Then when we’re within hearing range, tell us when to make our turn.” We continued on for several minutes, then Backbreaker whispered, “Lay low!” A black shadow passed under the clouded sun, and then it disappeared into the cumulus. “Ranbakar, sending word to the master,” said Vaskr. “They must have realized the little ones escaped,” sighed Backbreaker. “Keep low, there are…two Fomorians passing by on the road.” “Then we can listen,” said Dad. We snuck closer to the road. “They’ve stopped,” said Backbreaker. “I can narrate them, I can hear.” “Fine,” answered Dad. “Where do you think they are, general? I don’t know, Scumrat. The master has been very lazy lately. He never responded to our first message. How can you say that, general? I just think he should fight with us, like Farbjodr of the Dokkalfar." "That’s enough. They checked the house. We must return." "Wait, do you smell that? No, how can you smell anything with this dragon abroad?” “Stop, we need to leave,” Dad whispered. Then we continued silently.

 “Run!” murmured Dad. “Into the trees!” Backbreaker whispered. He jumped up to a branch and climbed an elm tree, then Colby followed, then me, then Dad. “Vaskr!” Dad yelled. “I…I don’t do well with clurichauns,” grumbled Vaskr. “I’ll circle around…” “Come on!” shouted Dad. “I’ll meet you there!” Vaskr ran off into the woods. I climbed up to the canopy and viewed the area around us. There were rustling trees near the clearing that we once trained in, and all around our house there was a steady movement with the trees. “Toby, come!” susurrated Backbreaker. I jumped down to a branch that barely shook and then we scampered to another branch, hearing the stomping of feet below. We hopped from branch to branch until Backbreaker said, “We have arrived,” and hopped to a pine tree, then shimmied down. The rest of us followed slowly, and at the bottom I had scraped arms from the pine tree bark. We fled across the grassy plain and Dad pushed aside a barrel, then we descended down a ladder into a secret entrance. We heard booming footsteps and an eye peeked into the hole. The Fomorian Scumrat stuck his foot down the hole and then laughed. “Starve them out!” “It’s a tunnel! It must have another side,” said the general. “If we can just find it.” We ran down the dusty hall, complete with cobwebs lining the walls. “What about Vaskr?” I asked. “He can save his own skin,” grumbled Backbreaker. “Guards!” Dad shouted when we ran into a portcullis. Two guards dressed in fox-skin cloaks and helmets aimed their spears at us. “How did you get pass the Fomorians if you are not spies?” asked the one on the left. “By tree,” answered Backbreaker. “We have had a long and terrible journey.” “Bauchan,” grumbled the other guard. “Never trust a bauchan.” “My men were captured, and I was left alone. The rest of my men that were not captured are in Cuba, recovering from their wounds.” “I am Thomas H. Franknorth, the old keeper of the Black Diamond. Footsies defeated their lord, Amagon.” “So you are not spies,” sighed the first clurichaun. “You may enter.” “No!” whined the one on the right. But he had already pulled the lever. The portcullis opened up and we marched in. “This is where we kept the Black Diamond,” Dad said as we entered an oval room. In the center was a pedestal with an oblong bowl in the center, into which the diamond would have easily fit.

“How did Dirthrundil get past the gate?” I asked. “He killed the guards, then picked it out with their spears through the gratings,” Dad groaned. “Where does this tunnel lead?” I questioned. “What I’ve heard is it leads to Mr. Nogard’s wine cellar,” said Backbreaker. We heard a sound after a while as if there was a crowd up ahead, and, in fact, there was. We entered a room domed like a cathedral, full of a host of clurichauns. We pushed our way through the group, then Dad ran into a clurichaun with a crown of grapevines. “Gorbatton!” Dad shook the clurichaun king’s hand. “What are you doing here?” grumbled Gorbatton. “Where is Joshua, Nelson and Jonathan?” asked Dad. “Follow me,” moaned Gorbatton. He led us through the crowd, which opened a path for us to make way. We were sent through some wooden gates, and Joshua, Nelson and Jonathan were sitting on a bamboo bench. I ran to them and hugged both Joshua and Jonathan, then they hugged my Dad and Colby. Nelson walked to Maxine and hugged him. “Where are the others?” asked Joshua. “Crank is dead, and the others are in Cuba,” sighed Dad. Jonathan bowed his head. “Is Mommy there too?” asked Joshua. “Yes,” answered Dad. “Where is Windsplitter?” “He couldn’t fit, so he guarded us,” cried Jonathan. “He wasn’t there, was he?” “No,” Dad moaned. “How much food do we have?” asked Dad. “Beer, maybe twenty packages of bread, no more,” Gorbatton complained. “No water?” asked Dad. “One barrel-full.” “That will not last us one day!” Dad shouted. “We will not die down here! We go down boldly!” “They can squash us! Only our guards have weapons!” sighed Gorbatton. “Then make them. Use your alcohol!” “But that will waste them!” “Better than wasted lives.” Then Dad walked off and called to the men, “Men in front, women in back! We advance to the wine cellar, then use up all of our alcohol and rum to blast those Fomorians back to the water!” Many cheers rang out through the room, but Gorbatton was closing his ears. “No more, men! We can’t fight! We’ll waste our life!” “Would you rather go down here, moaning in pain and dehydration?” I heard a few murmurs. “Do not be afraid because of your king!” Dad yelled. “All who want to die triumphantly, follow me!!!”

## The First Battle

"Dead end," murmured a clurichaun. We had run into a wooden wall. "Easy problem," Dad pushed on the wood and it tilted over, slamming onto the ground. "The wine cellar!" laughed Maxine. "Brilliant!" "If this is the wine cellar, where's the wine?" asked a clurichaun. "Oh, we took it away," Maxine answered. "Then why's it a wine cellar?" hissed another. "Well, come on. If we can get in unseen we may just bring the food down and wait them out!" Dad whispered, opening the cellar door. I heard some muted cheers. We entered the yard, which was riddled with footsteps three times my size. I clutched my sword's hilt, still in its scabbard. "How will we repair this?" asked Nelson, staring at the torn hedges and sunken porch. “We needn't worry about that yet," said Maxine. “This place stinks of fish,” Backbreaker growled. “Grab all the food you need when we get in the kitchen,” Dad murmured. We walked around the house and slowly opened the door to the living room. We tip-toed inside, all thirty of us. We heard splintering trees in the distance as we entered the huge room with beams and a crystal chandelier. We snuck into the kitchen and swiped all the food we could carry, which wasn’t much for the half-sized folk. I turned around when we exited the house and on the tip of a spire was a flag with a symbol plastered on it. “Lay low, and keep quiet,” said Dad. “So you keep saying,” mumbled Backbreaker. We quickly but silently made our way over to the cellar and descended the steps again.

“We have survived,” said Dad sarcastically, heaping a pile of food at the king’s feet. “Where are the bauchans that took refuge here?” asked Dad. “Why would I tell you?” snorted Gorbatton. “Because if you do not tell me, I will expect the worse, and your life is no more important than theirs.” “That’s a horrid insult,” hissed the king. “We would not allow them pass. They would try to make our people warriors.” “Then they are dead or captured,” Dad cried. “You are not an ally,” he growled, then turned heel and walked into the crowd, easily identified by standing two clurichauns tall. I was glad I brought my duffle pack, because the week we were there was very boring. I typed most of the time, and I got all the way to the bauchan camp, remembering the jist of what they said. On the fifth day, we knew something was up when the ceiling started crumbling. Most people suspected the worse, that they had Mongolian death worms[[13]](#footnote-13) digging at the ground. My Dad highly doubted this as they were only sighted in Mongolia and how would they get here? But the day after that it was sure there was something going on.

“Women and children need to stay in the far corners,” Dad informed the king, who now seemed to be Dad’s servant. “I still think they’re children,” grumbled Gorbatton, pointing at Toby and me. “They’ve been through more than you could imagine,” Dad said harshly, still angry at the clurichaun lord. The ground shook and a root fell to the ground at my feet. “Alright, to your post, men!” Gorbatton shouted. We all lined up with the clurichaun warriors at the grand earthen hall and lay flat against the wall. “To the death,” groaned Backbreaker. “If it comes to it,” I sighed. The ceiling released pebbles and chunks of dirt, and then it gave away completely. As the dust cleared, we heard a roar and the battle began.

I heard a ruckus as the clurichauns charged the group of Fomorians. Colby and several others stood by the wall, firing arrows and corks. “Lead them to the house!” Dad screamed. I cut a Fomorian down by his legs, and then another one by jumping up and cutting him down the middle. “Fish-faced seaweed eaters!” cried Gorbatton, riding a Fomorian and hitting his head with a glass wine bottle. “Uhh, this way!” I shouted. “You Sulawesi palm civets!” the Fomorians turned to me and charged as I led the way up the stairs. The remaining clurichauns stampeded up the stairs and then I pushed with all my might on the door. “Archers, to the top of the house, warriors, slash down the Fomorians from the halls!” Dad shouted. We turned around and slashed down the first Fomorian, who rolled down the stairs and tripped another. I wiped sweat from my brow and felt like giving up. I stabbed one’s belly and he rolled over, defeated. A Fomorian swung his club back and forth, taking down many clurichauns until he was felled by the explosive rum and Molotov cocktail. “To the top of the house!” Dad yelled. “We have a better vantage point there!” We all charged up the stairs to the spire and ran out from an open gap in the wall. “Ahh!” I clutched the sides of the wall, staring down into the gap in the roof that I planned to jump to. “Stop, stop!” I shouted, turning around, but then a clurichaun ran right into me and I fell over backwards. I fell right to the cushioned floor in the attic and then fell straight through the floor onto Nelson’s bed. “Ouch,” I sighed, then sat up and jumped out of bed. “You ‘right down there?” asked the clurichaun. “Fine,” I murmured. Then I fell through the wooden floor and stood on my feet on the last floor. Then I fell over and fainted.

I awoke in the middle of the woods in a cell with a domed top. It was definitely way too small: I could barely move. I sat up and hit my head on the ceiling, then looked around. I was all alone, except for one guard. “How did the battle go, guppy fish?” I asked. “I will not answer you until you call me by name!” roared the Fomorian. “I don’t know your name, what is it?” “I cannot answer, for that is a question.” “Urgh!” I moaned. “Let me guess, it didn’t go well,” I sighed. “For you.” The Fomorian chuckled. “More like the other way around,” laughed the Fomorian. “Once again, the Black Diamond is ours.” “What? That’s impossible! Mom took the Black Diamond!” I shouted. “We just got word. They were found at a hotel in Cuba. We took your mother and the Black Diamond!” “Who else was there?” I asked. “That is another question,” laughed the Fomorian.

I stayed there alone with the Fomorian in silence until about an hour later, night fell. “I recognize this place,” I noticed. “We came through here to find Dirthrundil!” “Not that that will help them find you,” laughed the Fomorian. I had strange dreams when I slept that night. “Watashi amu Jishin no Reddo, prepa e miru za po kawa no ea wa.” I saw two red eyes staring at me in the darkness. “What?” I asked. “I’m sorry. What my friend here was trying to say was, I am Jishin no Reddo, prepare to see the power of the earth.” “So…” I said, staring at the new pair of red eyes. “You do not truly think that all that has happened this year will go unnoticed, do you? I am the Earthquake of Red, as my name translates.” “How many of you are there?” I asked. “I am the eight-branched snake, I represent eight languages of the world, Mandarin, Spanish, English, Hindi, Arabic, Portuguese, Bengali, and Russian. We will meet one day, and I doubt you will end up any more than ashes.”

I awoke suddenly, sweating in the middle of the night. Two sea-green eyes glowed in the dark, and when I blinked they were still there. Then I remembered my guard. I breathed a sigh of relief. “Are you going to feed me now?” I groaned, but I heard a sound I could only describe as flute-like and knew it was not the guard. “What were you supposed to do, get me killed by a manticore!” I shouted as a quill bounced off one of the bars. “HELP!” I screamed. Another quill sailed past my head and the catlike beast pounced on the cage, knocking it over. It released a sound like a mad cat and started reaching through the bars with outstretched claws. I grabbed the paw and twisted it back and the cat yowled in pain. I heard the tearing of flesh and knew my captor had “saved” me. “You better call me something other than guppy fish now,” he breathed. He turned the cage upright. “As I noted before, you’re far enough in the woods that nobody can hear you…” Dad put a knife to his throat. “Surrender or die,” Dad threatened. “I…I surrender!” gulped the Fomorian, but he tripped Dad with his leg and put his foot on his chest, then began to push. “Stop it!” I cried, but Dad grabbed his dagger and stabbed his clawed toes. The Fomorian squealed and pulled back as Dad plunged his sword into his belly. “Thanks!” I laughed as Dad pulled the keys from the guard’s belt and unlocked my gate. “Colby, Nelson, you can come out now,” said Dad. The two familiar boys showed up from behind a large oak. “You almost fed me to the manticore!” I sighed. “Yeah well, we would wait until it had paralyzed you,” smiled Dad. “Is the house secured?” I asked. “Yes, thankfully, we have the upper hand now. We even found a couple bauchans!” “So they’ve scattered them, like an Easter egg hunt,” I murmured. “We’ll find them all eventually. The rest of the party has gone to take the house back, we should join them.” “Fine,” I said as Dad tossed me my sword. How did you find me?” I asked. “I sniffed you out,” Backbreaker appeared behind me and I jumped up in the air. “So, all four of you came!” I laughed. Dad light his flashlight and led us through the woods. “So, Dad, I had these weird dreams. There was this dragon that called himself Jishin no Reddo,” “How do you know Japanese?” asked Dad. “That translates to Earthquake of Red.” “That’s why I’m afraid. Do Indian Mountain Dragons have the ability to send telepathic messages?” I asked. “I mean, now that I know it’s possible, with dark elves and all.” “Yes,” Dad sighed, his visage dying. “I’m afraid a new battle waits. But first, we assist our allies.”

## The Task

 “I smell smoke,” snorted Backbreaker. “We’re close.” “So, Dad. Is it magic or an organ that causes glamour?” “That’s what I don’t know. How can I tell, when it decomposes so quickly?” “Ask them?” Colby guessed, looking towards Backbreaker. “You think we know what’s inside our bodies?” he groaned. “Like, we cut someone up while he’s still alive…” “Alright, that’s enough,” Dad gulped. I literally felt sick. We pushed through some bushes and then entered a familiar field, reduced to torn up grass and dirty footprints. Even a couple fires blazed. The sun was just rising above the trees. I looked up to see our house smoking and in ruins. It looked like a bomb had gone off inside it. A Fomorian was climbing the roof with the familiar flag raised high. “Rally the men, Colby, if any are left. Toby, Nelson, charge with me. We make our stand. Backbreaker, shoot arrows at every in-range Fomorian. Forward!” Nelson and I charged while Colby ran around the house, gathering clurichauns. Dad, Nelson and I all slashed up the first Fomorian, and then we spread out to our own enemy. I faced a Fomorian with a huge axe and jumped over the blade as he swung it, then delved my sword into his gut. He grunted, and then fell back as I blocked another Fomorian’s blade. “To the death!” cried Colby, leading ranks of dirtied clurichauns. “For the king!” roared the Fomorians. Then the battle broke loose.

An explosion knocked the first Fomorian to the ground and several others tripped over him in a massive pile. Backbreaker smiled at his work, then aimed a net arrow, but at the same time, two Fomorians circled me. I cried out and ducked as they swung their broadswords together, and they blocked each other, giving me time to crawl out from underneath them and stab at one’s leg and the other’s hip. They both squealed as I yanked my sword out from the second one’s thigh, then jumped up and stabbed his back. I ran to the other and ran my sword through the back of his knee, and he nearly fell on top of me, but I leaped aside. A clurichaun pushed our beehive off the roof and it landed on a Fomorian in a stinging mess. “Where is Beetlesprit?” I asked. “She retreated, as usual, but we may win this fight yet!” laughed Dad, riding a Fomorian with a rope in his mouth as reigns. “Ahh!” a deafening shriek rang through my ears as a shadow swooped down and took out a row of clurichauns. Then all scattered, running from the flying terror. Just as he swooped back in for another chunk, a sand-colored beast much smaller than him tore through his wing and the ranbakar slid into the row of Fomorians. “Abadaba!” I laughed as the familiar being leaped off his wyvern and shot a blast of lightning through a Fomorian. “You were supposed to stay with Maurine!” Dad reminded. “I know, but my steed found me from Arabia and brought me here.” “Great!” I laughed, cutting a Fomorian’s throat. I turned away from the nasty business as the giant collapsed. “They’re just evil amphibians,” I reminded myself. The wyvern was handling his own business, swiping down Fomorians and swinging his tail around to sweep them to the ground. “Reinforcements, advance!” roared a Fomorian. About ten more Fomorians charged from the woods, splintering the trees with their approach. “Toby, Nelson, find Windsplitter,” Dad said. “But…” I started. “No buts, I have full confidence in you. There’s more danger here than out there!” “What about the trees?” I asked. “No, there are no bauchans left unbound.” “Come on!” Nelson shouted, hurdling the torn barbed-wire fence to the woods. I ran after him and leaped over the spiked wire, then pushed through the brush to follow Nelson. A Fomorian jumped out from behind a tree and roared, then swung his axe. The blade hit the tree so hard it sunk halfway in. he tried to pull it out but we were long gone. I climbed over a fallen log and pulled back a twig, which swung back and hit me in the face. I jumped over a thorn bush and ran to catch up with Nelson, who had already run into the field we once trained in. “Stop!” he cried, but I couldn’t stop, I ran right into the field to stare at legions of Fomorians, maybe fifty. “Come on, Nelson, we can’t take them,” I whispered breathlessly. He didn’t answer. “Nelson, we have to go, you can’t stop them!” I hissed. “I know,” he gulped. “Then what do you suppose we do?” I asked. “Run,” he answered. “Fire!” roared a Fomorian. Ballistae that were lined up in a row shot out bolts the size of my Dad. “Oh, no,” I gulped as they sailed over our heads and towards the house. “Come on!” Nelson dashed towards the house and we cut through the bushes. At last we entered the smoking yard, where several spears were embedded in the grass. “No!” Nelson cried. I followed his eyes and saw Backbreaker on the ground. We ran to him and found Dad crouching beside him. “Spear?” I asked. “No, club,” Dad answered, tying up his ribs.

“I apologize, for being so doubtful…” Backbreaker gasped, blood soaking the grass. About ten remaining clurichauns, out of thirty, lined up around the dying body. Gorbatton was scarred and bruised, with is crown gone. “You can’t go,” cried Nelson. “I understand, now…” then he closed his eyes. “He’s still alive!” Dad said, feeling his pulse. “Take him inside the house. Get the first aid kit, Colby!” Colby ran inside while Nelson and Dad lifted up the motionless body. “He can live!” Dad said, determined. “Clurichauns, watch the house!” The clurichauns spread out and took out their cans. We ran inside and fixed up the bauchan, applied oils, and added on to the bandages. “He’s not bleeding badly on the outside, it’s the inside I’m worried about!” said Dad. “Nelson, Toby, back to your task, Colby, bring me the wounded.” I looked away, feeling sickly. “Go!” Dad shouted again. “Where’s Abadaba?” I asked. “Come on,” Nelson tugged on my sleeve. “Where is he?” I cried, fearing the worse. So many were already dead or dying. “He’s getting help from the jinn!” Dad answered. I inwardly cheered, because at least he would survive, he who had been so kind to me. “Come on!” Nelson repeated harshly. I ran with him into the woods away from the scattered battle. We ran through the forest like we did earlier. “This way!” Nelson led me to the side and we ducked under two fallen trees making an archway, and then leaped off a small ledge into a muddy “valley.” We trudged through the mud and then stared face to face with a massive Fomorian. “My new master Hrym will reward me greatly,” he laughed.

Vaskr was sitting, chained and gagged in a hanging gibbet next to the Fomorian with his tongue lolling out. “You’ll never make it out alive,” chuckled the Fomorian, pulling out a huge saw. He swiped down at us and split a birch in two. I took out my sword and Nelson followed. We both traipsed through the mire as the Fomorian yanked the sword from his tree and swung it around at my legs. I grabbed onto a branch and pulled up, having enough time because he was quite slow. The blade passed right under my legs, and then I grabbed a rock and hit his eye with it. Nelson hacked at the Fomorian’s legs as the giant cried out until he fell over in the slime. Nelson climbed over his legs and took out his keychain. He jumped to Vaskr’s cage and unlocked it, then pulled off the gag. “So…much…death,” Vaskr gasped. “I know,” cried Nelson. “But we have to find Windsplitter, even if Dad and the others are dead when we get back.” “They’re picking us off one by one, stomping on us like snails,” Vaskr groaned, limping out of his cage and collapsing in the mud pitifully. “Did you see where Windsplitter went?” asked Nelson. “No,” moaned Vaskr. “We must continue, then,” Nelson sighed. Vaskr stood up and pulled the mud from his filthy hands, still holding his shackles. We moved on, climbed a small incline and were out of the mud. We trod through the dense forest and then broke through into a small glade obviously recently converted. A number of four Fomorians stood in a circle around a chained and muzzled dragon.

“Climb,” whispered Vaskr. “I’ve got a good plan.” We climbed up a short oak and Vaskr lowered the shackles to the chains holding Windsplitter. We hooked the chains and then pulled from the end of our four pulleys. The trees splintered and the Fomorians looked around, but not above them. I estimated in my head…each pulley splits the one-ton dragon’s weight in half, so that lowers his weight to 1,000, then 500, 250, then at last 125. Each one of us pulled about one-hundred pounds, so it would work, I was assured. The dragon was rising slowly, and the chain was twisting him around as he was brought higher and higher, until Vaskr stopped pulling and ran to unchain him. “We don’t have the keys!” I whispered, tugging onto my chains until I was sure my hands were bleeding. Nelson and I released the chain, and Windsplitter collapsed to the ground, just as the Fomorians all stared back at him. “No ideas!” one scolded. Vaskr took out a bungee cord and chuckled softly. He lowered it to one of the Fomorian’s keychain and pulled it up slowly. The Fomorian scratched his side right after Vaskr held out the keys, which he made sure not to jingle. “Again,” he said. “And this time, Toby, you unlock it.”

We quickly hauled up the dragon and I scampered across the branch, and then unchained the muzzle, then the chains. Right as the lock was opened, Windsplitter burst free and swung his tail down, sending a Fomorian flying, then he collapsed onto the ground, trampling another, then knocked the last two unconscious with his wing “fingers.” “That was easy,” he remarked. “Follow me, tell me of the casualties.” We told him all about the deaths and injuries, but he never showed sign of emotion. “Backbreaker,” he sighed. “Hey, you! Get a load of this!” “Duck!” several booms went off, rupturing the dirt. “Save your arrows, friends!” Windsplitter sighed. Vaskr moaned. “Bauchans!” I laughed. We ran to the crowd of bauchans circling a body. “If it isn’t the Franknorths! And their dragon! And, of course, their gangling friend.” “I am not gangling, I am tall,” Vaskr hissed. “Who is that?” I asked, breaking through the numbers. “Oh, no.” I groaned, feeling sick. It was Grayhair. “T’wat shall we do now?” asked a bauchan. “Find a new leader,” sighed Vaskr, burying Grayhair, reduced to ashes from the fast decomposition. “I know just who, if he’s still alive,” I groaned. “Asiar would make a good leader,” agreed Nelson. “I’d say he’d make a good king if bauchans made kings!” laughed Vaskr. “When this storm has passed, you will have your leader!” the bauchans all cheered. “Now, ready your arrows and charge upon the house!” For a moment they lagged, but then cried out and stormed.

“For Pantokrator!” cried the main leading bauchan as we broke into the clearing. Dad and about five clurichaun were on the roof, fending off Fomorians on the crumbling domicile. I ran, panting into the midst of the battle, where the house was surrounded by about fifty giants. Our legion of twenty dwarves charged against the fifty monsters, in a chaotic battle that I will remember till the day I die.

 The bauchans in the back fired out special arrows, decimating the middle ranks of Fomorians while the first line of warriors leaped onto the Fomorians and started stabbing with their copper short swords. Vaskr drew out a copper scimitar he had been given from the bauchans and slashed down the first Fomorians while I was behind all the fighting, until the Fomorians pushed through our small amount of men. “Fire next volley!” yelled a random bauchan, and the next arrows sailed past us and struck down the first few Fomorians, but are ranks were being picked off like flies. “Follow me to the bitter end!” cried Dad, sliding down the shingles and cutting into a Fomorian who was trying to climb onto the roof. He rode the Fomorian to the bottom of the house, and then pulled out his sword, followed by four loyal clurichauns who had fought to the end. “Send forth the dragon!” the bauchan commander screamed. The trees shook and out burst the wyrm. His tail came last, knocking a branch to the ground. He swooped down and flattened the first rows of Fomorians, then breathed out flames at the others. “We will have victory!” I cried, finishing off a Fomorian dressed in full armor. Then the battle was over.

## The Silence Before a Storm

“What’s next, after so much death?” asked a clurichaun. “My lord Gorbatton is missing.” “We find the remaining captives. Then we find the nereids, and request they raid with us against the Fomorians and show them they ain’t seen nothing yet.” I didn’t even smirk. I collapsed onto the bloodied grass and felt myself drift into sleep. When I awoke, a campfire was blazing where our kitchen used to be. “This will never repair,” I heard Joshua say. “Face it. We’ll have to tell the insurance company our house burned down, and then move.” “America, maybe?” I asked. “No, we need to stay close to your school.” Dad reminded. I stood up, my hair stuck together with red and blue blood. “No bath?” I joked. “We’ve sent out Vaskr leading the remaining bauchans and clurichauns to reconnoiter the area, see if anyone made it out alive, or see if there are still captives left. We’ve long since recovered the women and children from the halls below.” The night air was cool and not humid. I sat down and scooched closer to the fire. There were no remains of either Fomorian, clurichaun, or bauchan, they had disappeared into ash, but we would remember them forever. “How’s Backbreaker doing?” I asked. Dad went silent. “He’s not going to make it. But we’ll avenge him.” “Where is he?” I asked. “Here,” Dad stood up from the floor and led me into the basement. Two bauchans were adding pressure to Backbreaker’s wounds, but Backbreaker was barely breathing. “I’m not afraid, anymore,” he sighed. “You’ll make it, you always have!” I cried. “You were the first bauchan I knew!” “Do not mourn for me, I’ll go see Pert, Crank, Rocksplit…” he coughed and then went quiet. “We need to take him to a hospital!” I cried. “No, our car is kilometers away; he wouldn’t make it through the rough terrain.” “Then keep treating him, he can heal.” I ordered, feeling bossy. “It’ll do no good…” started a bauchan. “In the morning we’re leaving. Do as he says,” commanded Dad. I stayed with him all night long, but he never spoke. In the morning, I was quite sleepy. Dad lifted me up and dusted off my knees, then said, “We’re off.”

We hiked alongside the gravel road until we reached the main road. The bauchans had taken the buses, while we rode the FJ cruiser. We hauled the horse trailer in the back, bearing Windsplitter. “Where do nereids live?” I asked. “Mediterranean, usually,” said Dad. “We’ll lure them in with this,” Dad took out his special horn, used to call hippocampi. “Where did you find that?” I asked. “I thought it was lost with the tide!” “I have had more secret meetings than you could imagine,” said Dad. “I had a meeting with them while trying to get information about Fomorians. They gave me it as a peace offering.” There’s really nothing to tell about our ride from Solihull to Dover, from Dover to Calais, Calais to Montpellier. We rented a schooner boat and quickly drove out into the middle of the Mediterranean, carrying all the bauchans and being followed by a flying dragon. Dad blew the horn, and we waited for not ten minutes when a pale head popped out of the water. “The sea groans,” she said, twirling her long, thin hair in her fingers. Her dolphin tail splashed behind her, and two more swam underneath us. “Signal your king, and send the nereids and tritons to war against the first Atlantis.” “And be slaughtered?” hissed the mermaid. “No,” she started to sink into the water again. “Wait!” Dad shouted. “If you do not help us you will die anyway!” “I will contact the king,” she said. “He is near.” Joshua whimpered as schools of Nereids swam off from under our boat. “The sea king Anasthen should lead his people to war against the Fomorians,” Dad growled. “But instead he wars with stray packs after their losses at the first Atlantis.” “Here he comes,” sighed Jonathan, pointing to a wave drawing closer. Out of the wave burst a triton crowned with shells. “Amagon is dead, yet the second war for the Black Diamond continues,” said the king with a monotone voice. “What do you ask of me?” “We ask that you come with us to face the first Atlantis,” Dad repeated. “But the first Atlantis is much stronger than the second,” noted the dolphin king. “This is not an order, for we have no place over you, but if we do not strike now land will be decimated…” “What has land done for us? Netting our messengers and polluting our seas.” “But the sea will come next,” Dad continued. “If we do nothing, despite Amagon’s death Hrym will rule all five oceans!” “Hrym has sent out sea monsters. Deadly ones,” said the king. “One for each ocean. Abaia for Pacific, Makara for the Indian, Kraken for the Arctic, and Charybdis for the Atlantic, since Iku-Turso is dead. We will go, for the sea is will die if we do not. Let us plan.”

“Since you are faster than any ship, I suggest you attack the main gate while our men sink to the tower and lay charges from their mines.” Dad stated. “What charges?” asked the king. “I have heard Atlantis is run off blasts, in a way I cannot understand. That means they would have potassium nitrate grains, coal powder, and sulfur dust. We can mix those into a keg with enough blast to send Atlantis crumbling to the ground.” “But you forget, they are close to meeting the Earth’s mantle. Can you guarantee a blast like that would not hit the covering?” “Atlantis had been booming away for who knows how many years. One blast would not do much.” “I trust you, but if your men do us wrong, I will lock you up in our underwater cells until you rain out the oxygen.” Dad paused, and then said, “Understood.” “We are off, then,” responded the king. Then he sunk into the water. We rode after them until all signs were lost, then we went by our maps and compasses. We saw more wildlife than faeries, except of course the occasional sea sprite. We continued on, and the boat eventually smelled just like a giant cockroach. We circled the area we thought the tower may be located, just off Sao Miguel Island, but we could not find it until the bauchans smelled blood. We all put on our scuba gear which we had rented at a store on the island. We leaped into the water after a long prayer, and then all went fuzzy. I swam downwards along with twenty bauchans and my few family members. I noticed right below us there was a flat tower. I couldn’t see the seafloor, so I kept swimming down and blurred shapes floated around me, stone dead. I prayed that nereids went to heaven as I continued kicking towards the tower. Several bauchans landed on the tower and lifted a panel. Water streamed into an open hole and we swam in. I hit my bum on the stairs about three times, and then fell into deep water in an air pocket before allt he water filled the air. My goggles were blurrier than ever now. I recognized this room from when we once had been heading for the dungeon. “Wait!” Dad said, using a microphone on his mask to speak. “Fomorians aren’t stupid enough to leave a volcano waiting to erupt at their doorstep. It must be farther away.” “We can’t get out, the doors are locked!” cried a bauchan. “Take the stairs!” screamed Vaskr. “The panel is locked shut!” Dad cried. “Then we must wait for our air to run out,” groaned another bauchan. “We cannot die like this!” Dad cried, banging on the door’s panel.

1. The Rarog is a fire falcon in Slavic folklore that represents clarity of mind. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A quilled wolf with large horns that can sling its quills. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The birds with razor shap feathers and eat manflesh. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Latin for Lilly sprite. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Latin for Damselfly sprite. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The Charybdis is a monstrous eel, or whirlpool that sucks in whole ships. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Metalworkers of the sea with flippers instead of hands and dog heads. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The Telechines’ original habitat. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Also Norwegian for changing. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Named after the author’s great grandfather. The center of a triangle. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. An Egyptian scimitar with a curved half. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Or water bull. Found in Scottish mythology. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. A large, reptilian monster with venomous saliva and electric skin. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)