

The Dash

Chapter Thirteen

Without a second thought, Jakob sprang to his feet and bolted forward. His mind was empty, acting solely on pure instinct. If he were to pause and listen to the racing thoughts in his head, he feared he would break under the weight. He ran as fast as he could, pushing through the partially constructed town that now lay submerged. With a quick scan of his surroundings, Jakob spotted a few Rovers parked nearby, likely belonging to his uncle. With no hesitation, he leapt onto one and attempted to start the engine.

“Phwwwhttt.”

Jakob heard a whistle and turned around. He instantly recognized the two Ogres from yesterday slowly approaching him. Jakob smacked the Rover, trying to get it to start. He pressed the ignition over and over, but the damn thing wouldn't start.

“Aww, did the poor boy lose his father?” One of the Ogres said.

Jakob turned back around.

“Look at him, he’s crying.” Another Ogre spoke, laughing.

“Horrible that we have to kill you quickly boy, it would be much more fun to eat you alive.”

The Ogres walked closer.

“Bang!” Jakob hit the Rover with his bloody hands. **“Vroom!”** The Rover finally turned on. Jakob hit the pedal and was off.

“Get him!” One of the Ogres yelled.

Jakob soared out of the town, with the three more Ogres hot on his trail, each riding their own Rover. He scanned the surroundings, searching for any clue about his next move. It was evident that the Ogres had superior driving skills, effortlessly closing in on him. They made aggressive lunges, attempting to snatch him away. In response, Jakob swerved and zigzagged, maneuvering recklessly to shake them off. And then it hit him, he knew exactly where to go.

“The Glades!” The thought came to him.

Having studied the maps of Hyperion, he was aware of the risky nature of the swampy terrain ahead. However, he also knew that if he could navigate through it, he might find refuge. Determined to escape, he repeatedly pressed the pedal, desperately trying to get more speed out of the Rover. Miraculously, he managed to gain some distance from the pursuit. The Ogres made numerous attempts to seize him, but he skillfully evaded their grasp. The chase continued for what felt like an eternity, covering several miles of treacherous terrain. At one point, he cunningly brought the Rover to a sudden halt, causing one of the Ogres to pass by him and crash in the process. With each passing mile, the swamps of the Glades appeared closer.

Suddenly, just as he was navigating his way through the Glades, the engine of the Rover abruptly shut off. The vehicle slid to the ground, jolting him off balance and throwing him from his seat. Luckily, he found himself in the shallow pools of the glades, providing a cushioned landing. Wasting no time, he quickly picked himself up and began running, knowing that time was of the essence, and he had to seize every opportunity to outrun his pursuers. Relentlessly pursued by the ogres, he exerted every ounce of energy in his body, sprinting towards the expanse of the woods ahead. With each stride, his feet sank into the muddy swamp. Determined, he persisted, pushing himself up whenever he became trapped in the waters. Finally, he reached the forest, casting a quick glance behind him to discover that the Ogres had ceased

their pursuit. Without pausing to question their sudden stop, he continued his desperate flight through the dense swamps. As he ventured deeper into the forest, a shroud of darkness covered him, intensified by the sudden heat of the swamps. The imposing darkness of trees and the eerie glow of creatures' eyes sent shivers down his spine, filling him with fear. Nevertheless, he pressed on, his heart pounding in his chest. And then, with a loud impact, "**Smack.**" Jakob stumbled, his head colliding with a low-hanging branch. The blow rendered him unconscious, plunging him into a world of darkness.

Alone and disoriented, Jakob was swallowed by the abyss. Did he want to wake up or did he prefer to keep floating in the dream. The thought of returning to his real life was like a nightmare, he would rather stay here. With both his mom and dad gone, he was an orphan with little to hope for. Suddenly, amidst the darkness, a white light pulled Jakob, and he woke up. His eyes remained shut, but he was aware of his body. He clung to the darkness, hoping that opening his eyes would transport him back to the familiar sight of his room, eagerly waiting for Tita to bring him breakfast. However, the intense pounding in his head shattered that hope. The throbbing sensation was accompanied by a loud thud echoing in his ears. Perhaps it was just the rapid beating of his heart, fueled by the adrenaline surge from being chased. He could also feel a tender knot forming on the side of his head, a reminder of the fall he had taken. Jakob lay on the floor of the forest swamp, drifting in and out of consciousness. He stayed still, hoping to simply fade back into the darkness. Suddenly, he felt his body being dragged but he was too tired to put up a fight. Whether it was the Ogres or someone else who captured him, he no longer cared. The swamp's warm mud covered his body as he was forcefully pulled deeper into its murky depths. Eventually, he was unceremoniously thrown over someone's shoulder, barely conscious and unable to fully comprehend his surroundings. Through hazy eyes, he caught glimpses of a figure

dressed in brown, their legs wading through the rising water. With each step, the water grew deeper, carrying them further into the unknown. The swamps made a thick, heavy sound, and Jakob could feel the warmth coming from the water. It made him black out again. After a while, he was abruptly dropped onto a sturdy piece of wood that he guessed was a small boat. The sudden drop jolted him awake completely.

“Was this the Ogres that were chasing him? It couldn’t be, they probably would have eaten him by now.”

Jakob lay sprawled on the floor of the boat, with no restraints holding him in place. He cautiously cracked open one eye to assess the situation. The person who had carried him pulled back their hood, revealing a man. All Jakob could see was a mop of short, tightly knit black hair on the back of the man's head. The man began rummaging through his belongings in the center of the boat, tossing things around carelessly. Eventually, he retrieved a small black pipe and stashed it in his pocket. As the man turned back, walking towards the edge of the boat, Jakob caught a clearer glimpse of his face. He was an older man with rich skin, and a short white scruff that stretched from ear to ear. His beard showed remnants of the black hair he had in his youth. A thick nose and a square jaw added to the character of his face. Despite his age, the man showed a sense of strength and vitality. The man approached the side of the boat and retrieved a hefty stick that was submerged in the water. With deliberate movements, he used the stick to gently propel the boat forward, allowing it to glide effortlessly through the water. Jakob remained motionless, cautiously peering through slightly widened eyes, careful not to draw attention to himself. Meanwhile, the old man removed his weathered brown cloak and settled into a makeshift area in the center of the boat. Settling down, he began to whistle a tune while preparing his pipe. The smell drifting from the pipe was rich with earthy and herbal notes, though Jakob didn’t know its

exact contents. To Jakob, the man didn't appear menacing or even particularly concerned about his presence. Something about the old man seemed strange to Jakob, and he felt a sense of familiarity when looking at him. However, he couldn't figure out why.

He wondered if he had met the old man before, but it seemed unlikely since he is out here in the boonies. Jakob's gaze shifted, his eyes scanning the unfamiliar terrain. The swamp stretched out before him, its murky waters reflecting the overhanging branches of towering trees, moss-covered limbs and hanging vines around the dense forest surrounding the murky waters. The air buzzed with the persistent hum of insects. Jakob's eyes wandered, and he stumbled upon several skeletons impaled by swords amidst the undergrowth. Attempting to peer downward, he could only catch a narrow glimpse through a small gap resembling a step to disembark from the boat. The water appeared green, slimy, and repulsive. Suddenly, Jakob noticed the water beginning to bubble. A scaly black head emerged from the surface, its bright orangish-red eyes locking onto Jakob's. Slowly, the creature's head advanced towards him, emitting a low growl-like sound.

“What the heck is that!” Jakob yelled popping up to his feet, just as the scaly monster snapped at the edge of the boat.

“Back, Kevin! Back!” The man swiftly positioned himself in front of Jakob, his voice resonating with authority and urgency as he directed his attention towards the menacing creature lurking beneath the water's surface.

“What did I tell you about disturbin ma guests, one mo time and you’re not gettin food for a week.” It seemed like the old man was having a full conversation with

whatever that was. The monster whipped its body away with what seemed like attitude and swam off.

“What was that?” Jakob asked.

“That montsa was a Gatar, loads of them roun here. His name is Kevin, and he seems to be off his rocka today. Usually he’s quite pleasant.”

The man ignored Jakob as he walked back to his seat. Confused, Jakob followed him and continued asking more questions.

“Where am I?”

“You tell me boy, you came in runnin in ma swamp. Shouldn’t yah kno where you were goin?” The man sat back in his chair and took a small breath from his pipe.

“I’m pretty sure this is Wulfsrun Wood, I’ve read this place dangerous, no one comes here, or they never return.”

“I’m in theses woods.” The old man said shrugging his shoulders and stretching himself out in his chair, while Jakob remained quiet.

“If it’s so dangerous, why did you come in here whootin and hollerin, interruptin ma day.” The old man finished. He struggled to get hit pipe lit.

“Hey, you’re the one who picked me up, you saved me.” Jakob was irritated with the lack of attention the old man was giving him.

“I wanted to know why a small boy like yah would wander into a place that yah said no one ever returns from. Why are yah here boy?” Jakob stopped in his tracks, the recent events flooding back into his memory. It hit him like a sudden jolt. Jakob slowly found a spot to

sit down, his mind racing. Unexpectedly, the old man's voice broke the silence. He challenged Jakob,

"Seems like you're runnin away from somethin."

Jakob remained quiet, pondering his next words as he distractedly picked at his mud-caked clothes.

"Well, what are you doing out here all by yourself?" Jakob changed the subject, eager to know more about who this man is.

"Me, I'm Old man Tyranaz and I'm the caretaker of the Wulf's of course. I'm here to protect the woods and guide any lost souls who stumbled through ma swamps. Don't want to run into any real Wulf's roun here boy. If you thought the Gatar was a force to be reckoned with, you haven't seen anythin yet. The Wulf's here put Gatar's to shame. These monstrous creatures make grown men look like children. Huge, deep back fur, with pointed ears, razor-sharp teeth, and claws capable of tearin through flesh, they are a true nightmare to behold. Crossing paths with the Wulf's means one thing, you're as good as gone." Tyranaz was making gestures with his hands like razer claws. Jakob didn't respond and Tyranaz continued,

"Take yah rest boy, I'll have some food ready fo yah when yah wake. I'm not goin to hurt yah. Looks like yah in a lot of hurtin already."

Jakob decided to lie back down, feeling the weight of exhaustion pressing down on him.

Tyranaz, ever observant, tossed him a blanket. Despite the stifling heat of the swamp, Jakob carefully folded the blanket into a makeshift pillow, seeking some kind of comfort. The boat's floor was far from accommodating, but Jakob tried his best to find relief in its uneven surface.

He stared out into the vast expanse of the swamps, allowing the symphony of nocturnal sounds to envelop his senses. However, relaxation escaped him, as every time he closed his eyes, haunting images of his father's face and himself drowning filled his mind. To make matters worse, whenever Jakob dared to open his eyes, he was met with the unsettling sight of multiple pairs of glowing yellow eyes peering at him through the dense plant life of the swamp. Restless and desperate for sleep, Jakob tossed and turned, attempting every possible method to ease his mind, even counting sheep. But nothing seemed to work. Time seemed to stretch on, though it couldn't have been more than a few hours that had passed.

“Tossin and turnin isn’t going to help yah boy.” Tyranaz said noticing Jakob continuous movement.

Jakob stayed still and pretended that he was asleep.

“I know yah not asleep.”

Jakob sat up abruptly, his demeanor filled with attitude, and swiftly turned around.

“How do you seem to know everything old man.”

Tyranaz hunched over a tiny pot, stoking a flame with an iron rod to keep it blazing. Jakob figured he might as well stay awake.

“Boy, come here. I’m heatin up some grub,” Tyranaz, gesturing for Jakob to join him. It was strange how this guy seemed to have a knack for knowing Jakob's every thought.

“Is this old man some sort of Vantis Guard? His robes looked to old and dusty. **“No, it can’t be.”** Jakob thought to himself. Tyranaz grabbed a small wooden bowl and scooped some of the food for Jakob.

“This is gumbo, yah eva had it boy?”

Jakob shook his head and glanced down at the bowl. He couldn't quite tell what type of food it was. It had a soup-like appearance, with rice in a deep reddish-orange broth. There were sausages and shrimp floating in it, along with some unfamiliar vegetables. It didn't look very appetizing, but it smelled great, and Jakob's hunger was getting the best of him. Tyranaz could sense Jakob's hesitation by the expression on his face.

“Just eat it, it’s food that folk from the Southern Islands make, somewhere yah might be headed.” Tyranaz commanded.

He handed Jakob a small wooden spoon, and Jakob devoured the dish in record time, as if he had swallowed it whole. The spiciness of the dish crept in afterwards, perhaps due to the presence of green bell peppers. Nevertheless, it provided much-needed nourishment, and Jakob couldn't recall the last time he had eaten. Silently, he sat there, hoping for another bowl, but the old man only offered him a piece of bread that looked as old and crusty as he did. It was painful for Jakob to bite into it, but he was grateful for any food. Jakob made a conscious effort to focus on the present moment and avoid overthinking. Unfortunately, Tyranaz began to ask questions.

“So where are yah comin from boy?”

“My name is not boy.” Jakob responded. Tyranaz was nice but he was starting to get on his nerves.

“What an odd name, nice to meet yah Not Boy.”

“That’s not what I meant.”

“We’ll say the truth when yah speak.”

“My name is Jakob and thank you for the food.”

“Well now, at least this Jakob has some manners. Yah welcome for the food, always here to help a lost soul.” The two of them were going back and forth.

Jakob lowered his voice, **“How do you know I’m lost?”**

“Well, where are yah goin?”

Jakob didn’t say anything and chewed on his hard bread,

“Exactly.”

“Can I just stay here?” Jakob asked.

“No, yah cannot, yah path is greater than here.” Tyranaz said as he was grabbing himself another bowl of gumbo.

“But I don’t know where to go.”

“Well, it looks like you have a dilemma because yah can’t stay here.”

Tyranaz said with a mouth full.

“Why not, you don’t look to busy.” Jakob bantered at the old man.

“Because if yah stay, I will have Kevin eat yah boy.”

That made Jakob chuckle and even a small smile.

“Looks like tha boy isn’t hurt enough to not smile.” Tyranaz handed Jakob another bowl of gumbo and continued, **“I have a friend in The Colonies, he can take yah far away south to a land of no worries, where you can be as free as yah want, if that’s what yah**

choose to be. Or I can take yah back to where I found yah and yah can be on your merry way. Each way has a path for yah.”

It made Jakob curious to think about going south, he knew in his heart he wanted to find any excuse to not go back, and he always did want to see the south.

“How will I know who your friend is?” Jakob asked.

“The man yah lookin for is a large man, bigger than me, he always wears a hoop in his left ear, and he wears a large gold ring on his index finger. His name is Gary Cornegay, most people call him Gar. I also have a coin.” Tyranaz retrieved a peculiar coin from his pocket. It possessed a unique appearance, distinct from any form of currency. Smooth to the touch, it had symbols engraved upon its surface. In the center, a bold lettering that read **“Do Ra Me”** was surrounded by two intersecting **“V”**. Tyranaz flipped the coin over, revealing an inscription in a native language. However, Jakob's attempt to decipher it was cut short as Tyranaz swiftly returned the coin to his pocket.

“I’ll give yah this coin if you decide to go south and meet him. If yah do, give him this coin, and tell him I sent yah. Just sit on it for a while, we have some time before we reach the end of ma swamp, I’m going to catch some shut eye, yah go ahead and man the boat. Just watch out fo Kevin, that rascal. Nursed him since he was a baby.” Tyranaz finished but it seemed like he was talking to himself in the end.

“But?” Jakob barely had a chance to utter a word before the old man reclined in his chair and started snoring. Jakob rose from his seat and made his way to the edge of the boat. He stood there, lost in thought, for several minutes. He felt something heavy in his pocket, unsure of what it was at first. But soon enough, he realized it was his father's ring. He had taken it from

his father's hand before leaving his body. Looking at the ring filled him with anger, and he considered throwing it off the boat. However, he knew that if he did, he would have nothing left to remember his father by.

“I don’t know what to do, I don’t know where to go, I have no one left.” Jakob said out loud talking to himself. He grabbed the edge of the boat as hard as he could and felt tears begin to run down his face.

“Bury it.” Jakob heard a voice from deep within himself, **“Forget about your old life, there’s nothing there for you anymore. Take the step into darkness.”**

Jakob started pacing back and forth, consumed by overthinking. Reality began to sink in.

“I can’t go back. What would happen if they discovered that I was the reason for my father death. Should I go south, or should I stay here? But staying here isn’t an option. I always thought about leaving home anyway” As he continued to pace, his feet grew sore.

“I don’t know what to do. What’s wrong with me?” Jakob exclaimed in frustration, gripping his mind.

“Boy. Stop, yah energy is killin me. I can feel yah from over here.” The old man stood up.

“I don’t know what to do. My life wasn’t supposed to be like this. Nothing seems right anymore.”

“Jakob, I know yah don’t know me too well, but yah here on ma boat, eating ma food, so let me give yah some words of wisdom. Stop worryin about the future, you have no

control over that, and yah can't change the past. The only thing that matters is right now."

The old man grabbed his shoulders.

"I understand what it feels like to be alone. I lost ma father and both of ma brothers a long time ago. I know what it's like to live with pain."

Jakob had a gut feeling that he could trust this man. So far, the man had rescued him from the Ogres and even protected him from the Gatar. He provided him with food and tried to assist him in any way he could. There was no valid reason for Jakob not to trust him.

"What do I do? Everything just seems so dark." Jakob questioned.

"The darkness itself is not evil, it is made of the same thing as the light. In the light, one may not discover the answers, as it often brings comfort and ease. I know that life has already challenged yah Jakob. Life has a way of forcin people into challengin times, regardless of their choices. Durin those moments of darkness, when everythin seems wrong, it is important to learn from them. From the depths of darkness, extract the finest versions of yahself, and fear shall never control yah again." Tyranaz paused for a moment as the boat came to a stop at what looked like a small broken-down dock.

"Yah can go back from where yah came or you can leave south, either road will have its own challenges for yah. But it's your choice, no one can tell yah what to do."

With a moment of hesitation, Jakob fixed his gaze on the coin that Tyranaz had retrieved from his pocket. A deep longing stirred within him; he wanted to escape the memories of his past and forge his own destiny. Jakob reached out and took hold of the coin, relishing its texture as he examined the intricate symbols etched upon its surface. **"I'm ready."**

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

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