

Dragonslayer

A low rumble filled the air, pierced by the crack of vicious lightning.
Alaina stood at the precipice, the sliver of stone that overlooked this lone mountain.
In this dark squall she could only see her target in brief glimpses, photo-frames shot by flashes in the clouds.

Claws carved through the cliffs, leaving wide wedges behind.
A serpentine body that snaked, spiralling to the peak.
Wings flared, their outline a faint blue.
Two burning lenses scoured the darkness and saw her.
Each word he spoke carried the roar of thunder.
“Step forward and be destroyed.”

Alaina took a step forward.
“I will not be intimidated. I will not be deterred.
You will answer for what you did in Hyrdshal, Fjallnir,
the atrocity you committed in cutting innocent lives short.
Under the orders of the Queen of the Ashildir and your father-”

Another clap of thunder interdicted her words and wrathfully replied.
“He has grown soft and weak, fattened by the offerings of mortals.
You are *lesser*. I will remind you why we were feared once.
I will remind you why we are superior.”

“Then I will remind you who I am.”

Alaina watched as a ring of cerulean plasma began to rise from the dragon’s heart, through the long trunk at the base of its neck and quickly accelerate towards the exit. Then there was a bang, a white hot flash, the crack of thunder once more! It collided with her directly, but when the smoke cloud settled Fjallnir saw that Alaina had raised her cloak to resist the attack. The metallic fibres of the ironfur cloak she wore were more than resilient for an attack like that.

Fjallnir’s cruel gaze narrowed on Alaina. The drake would not be denied.
His wings flared, and hurtled towards the champion.

“Auntie, tell me of the time you slew the dragon!”

*Alaina was barely seven, and sat on her lap clutching a copy of ‘How to Slay Dragons...’
The book was an accomplishment, a collection of decades worth of knowledge on hunting the most dangerous monsters in the world. Filled with anatomical studies, diagrams, behaviors and strategies to best exploit them, it was surely one of a kind.
She was proud. Auntie, that is. Caitlyn Wyrther loved to gloat. And she told that story with much fervor.*

“If there is one thing I should mention first, young Alaina, it is that dragons are horrible, hateful creatures. The highest form of evil.”

Fjallnir crashed down into the cliffs, claws inches away from Alaina. Parrying it was impossible, and only by the grace of the ironfur cloak could Alaina withstand its power.

“They are vicious and cruel, cunning, highly intelligent and malicious. They revel in the cries of the innocent.”

Fjallnir’s tail slammed against the cliffside, sending an avalanche hurtling down. While Alaina could avoid the falling debris, she could not stop it from crashing even further down the cliffs to the hold capital below.

“Stop this, Fjallnir! They did nothing to draw your ire!”

“They drew it through their heresy, the belief that we are equals.”

“There are many kinds of dragon. Those of red scales who breathe terrible fire, of green scales who spit venom, white scales may harness ice’s chill, while those of blue...”

A bolt of savage lightning screamed past Alaina, splitting the ends of her hairs. She made her retreat down the side of the cliffs, grappling over Fjallnir as he lunged at her again, and then she spun high above his head and landed on his back.

“When you battle a dragon you must never afford it any quarter, for mercy is not in its nature. Take every advantage, exploit every weakness.”

Alaina ran up the stem of his neck as he tried to reach for her, even though they both knew the joints in his shoulders could not extend so far.

“Go for the ears at the corner of their jaw to deafen them...”

Alaina slashed a small hole hidden between horn and scale, while he rumbled beneath her.

“The nose, the eyes, the throat...”

Alaina plunged her sword into Fjallnir’s nose and saw streaks of blood fly forth, and turned to face his eyes...

“But never... ever... hesitate.”

Alaina stopped, for just a moment too long. Fjallnir grasped her and slammed her away into the ground. When she barely caught her landing and stood on her feet, she prepared to block his next strike.

“Never face them head on...”

Fjallnir swung his heavy head into Alaina’s chest. As she spun in the air he spat another bolt of lightning at her, and this one she could barely resist. It exploded upon her and sent her slamming into the ground. Fjallnir thrashed her, consumed by draconic fury. With heavy hands he pounded her into the stone, slashed at the cloak with his claws, lifted her up and drove her down again.

“So how did you win, Auntie?” Alaina asked, thinking all battles to be shining duels.

“I will tell you, but you must promise to keep a secret.”

“I will.”

Alaina felt the throngs of pain crossing her body as she held back against Fjallnir's onslaught. He snatched her and flew her down the mountain, scraping her through the granite and then tossed her down into Ashil's Bay with mighty force! Alaina began to sink, and struggled against the water's pull. Her ironfur cloak was weighing her down...

“If you shall surface, I will clutch your spine and rend it asunder.” Fjallnir's silhouette loomed over her. She held her breath and unclasped the mantle.

“The beast never saw me. I hid.”

Alaina crawled onto a rocky shore and stepped towards the lighthouse. She climbed through its window and held her back against the wall, slowing her breathing while she felt the crackling hot breath inches away, glowering eyes almost able to see through the stone.

“I waited, and bode my time.”

Alaina sealed her eyes shut and stilled herself, a craning snakelike neck almost able to taste her...

“And in its lair, when it had finally lost me...”

Alaina felt Fjallnir begin to turn away...

“I struck.”

Alaina saw that Fjallnir hadn't turned away from her, he had turned his sights towards Hyrdshal again.

It wasn't that he had given up...

“I crept up on the monster as it slept...”

Alaina saw his wings beat, tail straight, his prey in his sights.

“I laid a trap, a bed of spears...”

Fjallnir soared over the water's wake to the town he would torment...

“I found its eggs and spilled them one by one...”

Fjallnir blasted vengeful thunder at the mountainside to topple the Jarl's hall underneath...

“I slipped poison beneath its scales so it could not breathe...”

The drake feasted on their livestock, destroyed their wells, crushed their boats, sundered their towers...

"I saw it rise and impale itself on thousands of needles, clipped its wings..."

As the free-folk ran from the fires, Fjallnir landed on top of them.

"And when it finally opened its eyes, the last thing it would face was me."

Alaina stood amidst the ruins, arriving all too late.

Fjallnir waited, backed by the storm, his clawed grip digging into the shoulder of an innocent. Under his wings were the villagers terrified for their lives.

"You taught them to fear death." Fjallnir said. "And in your hubris, taught them to fear me."

"I taught them that their lives were worth living!-" Alaina said, her blade pointed at him.

"Mortal lives are worth nothing. Easily cut short. They have forgotten who their gods once were."

"You were never gods. Never devils." Alaina grit her teeth. "Your cruelty is your own."

"Then why can't you slay me?"

Fjallnir's pride would be satiated.

His challenge had to be met. If he could best even the Champion of Stormheim then the supremacy of his kind would be proven.

His bait had worked, and drawn her into the open.

No cloak. No place to hide.

Fjallnir opened his maw to breathe.

"And when I looked into the eye of the monster before me, I took up my spear and carved it asunder."

Fjallnir spat lightning, and Alaina felt the shockwave rush out from behind her, as she went towards him at full speed.

"I lashed out, swinging wildly..."

Alaina swung Valour mightily, knocking Fjallnir's head aside.

"I scored its mouth on every time the foul thing opened towards me."

Alaina voided Fjallnir's clamping jaws and rammed her blade through his gums...

"When it tried to fly away, I would not allow it to..."

Fjallnir beat his wings, but found Alaina had already snared a chain around its arm. She wound her silver meteor tightly into her hands and wrenched the beast back down towards the earth.

"I placed my foot on its heart..."

Alaina placed her foot on his heart...

"I raised Gungnir high over my head..."

Alaina raised Valour high above her head...

"And then..."

She pierced...

"Its heart-

Alaina stopped, her blade's tip licking the blood beneath Fjallnir's scales.

"No."

Alaina said.

"I will not."

She drew her sword away.

Fjallnir thought he had won.

"The weakness of mortals is proven.

You cannot stop me.

Father's threats mean nothing.

No matter who they send.

Or who comes for me.

I will not be stopped.

And all will lie in terror of Dragonkind."

Alaina glanced at him. Her mercy was not borne out of weakness.

"Is that the message you think this story has?"

She gazed at the villagers, and so did Fjallnir. They raised arms against him, drew the broken splinters of their houses into long knives, spears, battered doors to shields, donned buried armour, took hammers and axes and tools and joined Alaina's side.

"But you taught them to be afraid." Fjallnir hissed.

"You taught them to fear for their lives. I taught them how to fight for it."

The people of Hyrdshal had always been close to dragons, but they had never before witnessed a perfect example on how to battle one until now. She had shown them how to strike back.

"They will not be victims to you any longer, Fjallnir.

Leave now and be humbled by this loss.

None are greater or lesser by the quality of their kind. Only the virtue of their actions."

Fjallnir saw the hundred spears arrayed at him by the people of Hyrdshal, led by Alaina's silver point. They drove him back, pushed him back, chased him off to his mountain lair. And if he ever came again they would be ready.

"Auntie, how do you know all the dragons are bad?" Alaina asked, and saw Auntie groan.

"You think too much and have too big of a heart. They're beasts. So slay them."

Alaina would soon again visit the mountains of Stormheim, and find another drake.

This one was older, wiser. His scaly protrusions had formed into beardlike shapes. His voice was like a low rumble, with scales mottled and pale.

"I heard of your battle with my son from miles away, but not of many casualties." The Old Wurm said. His lair was bright, charged electro-crystals providing the space a soft teal light.

"I was grateful to reach them in time. Your son, Hvitnir, is wayward and lost." Alaina approached him and bowed as she said his name. This was one worthy of respect.

"He is. And I am sorry that you should have dealt with him on your own. But we did not need another drake to prove this point. We did not need the queen of the Ashildir to prove it either, lest he claim her victory was by another God's favour. Only a mortal could prove to him that we are no greater than you are."

Alaina frowned. "Who taught him to be this way?"

Hvitnir considered those words well, and said thus. "I failed him, many years ago. The Thorignir were once cruel and vicious just as many tales about us claimed. I raised him as a mirror."

"I was taught something similar once." Alaina said. "But slaying you would deny your chance to take a better path. For one so long lived, you have so many chances for change."

"Indeed." His voice trilled through his thunderous gullet. "You have given me the chance to change Fjallnir too. And I will do everything to make him see the truth."