READY FOR THE CHALLENGE?
IT'S TIME TO FIGHT
OR TAKE FLIGHT!

Kit can hardly believe he and his teammates, Sandy and Thorn, are now real Dungeon Runners.

But with danger at every turn, Kit will need more than bravery to take on enemies as well as monsters. Is he ready for the big leagues? There's only one way to find out!

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KIERAN LARWOOD
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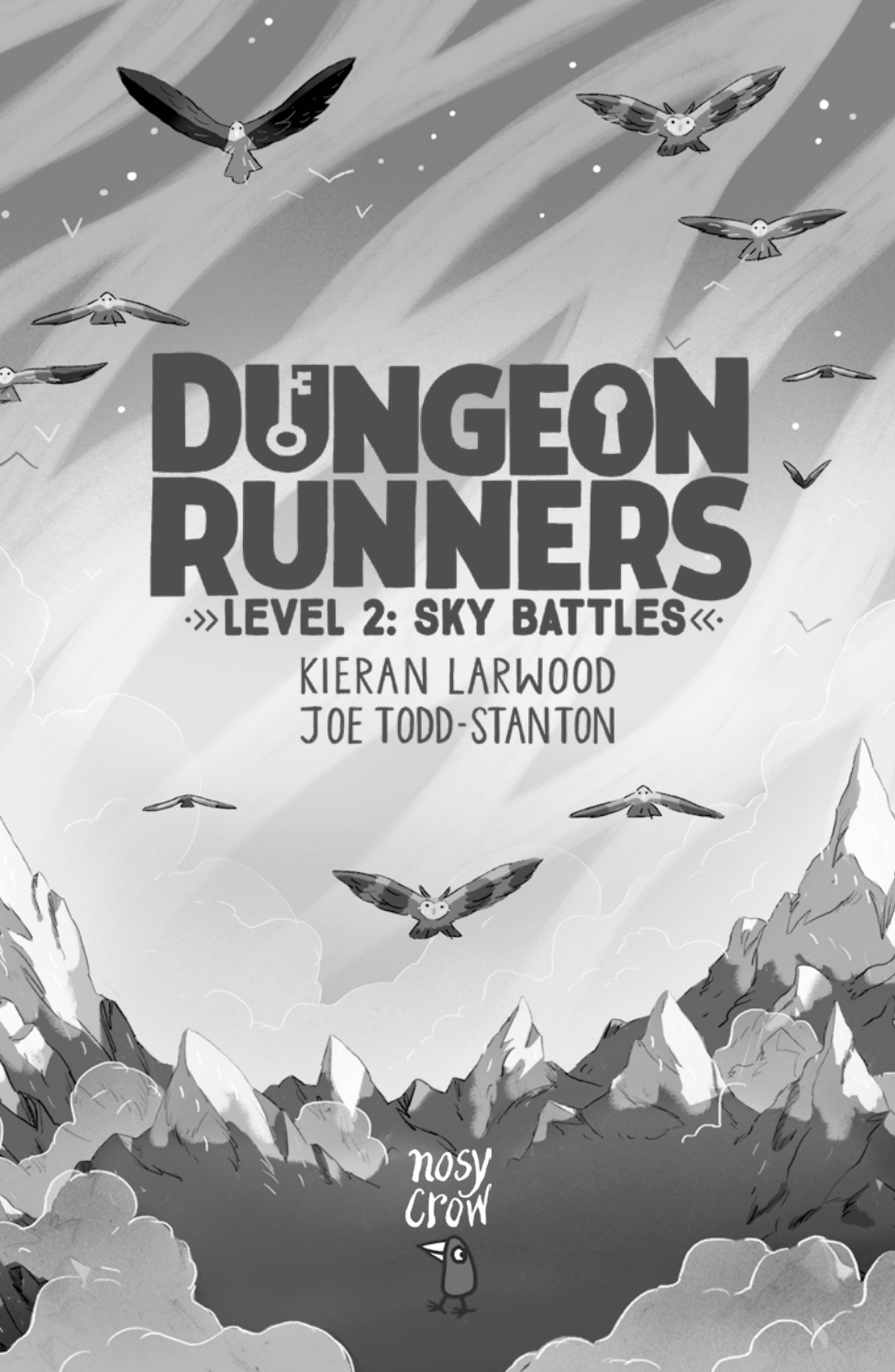
KIERAN LARWOOD JOE TODD-STANTON

DUNGEON RUNNERS

»LEVEL 2: SKY BATTLES«



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To Josephine and Tabitha
K.L.




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BE PART OF THE MOST POPULAR SPORT IN ALL OF ZERB! DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A DUNGEON RUNNER? COME AND TRY YOUR LUCK!

IN AN OFFICIAL NDL DUNGEON, TEAMS WILL COMPETE WITH EACH OTHER THROUGH A SERIES OF CHALLENGES, PUZZLES, MAZES AND BATTLES TO WIN POINTS.

THE FIRST TEAM TO FINISH WILL GET **3 POINTS**
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ALL DUNGEON RUNNING TEAMS MUST HAVE
A FIGHTER, A MAGE AND A HEALER

TEAMS CAN WORK AGAINST EACH OTHER, OR JOIN FORCES IF THEY WISH. BUT REMEMBER AT THE END OF THE SEASON THERE CAN ONLY BE

ONE WINNER!

WELCOME THE NEWEST TEAM TO THE BOTTOM FEEDER LEAGUE... WINNERS OF THE DUNGEON TRIAL...

TRIPLE TROUBLE!!

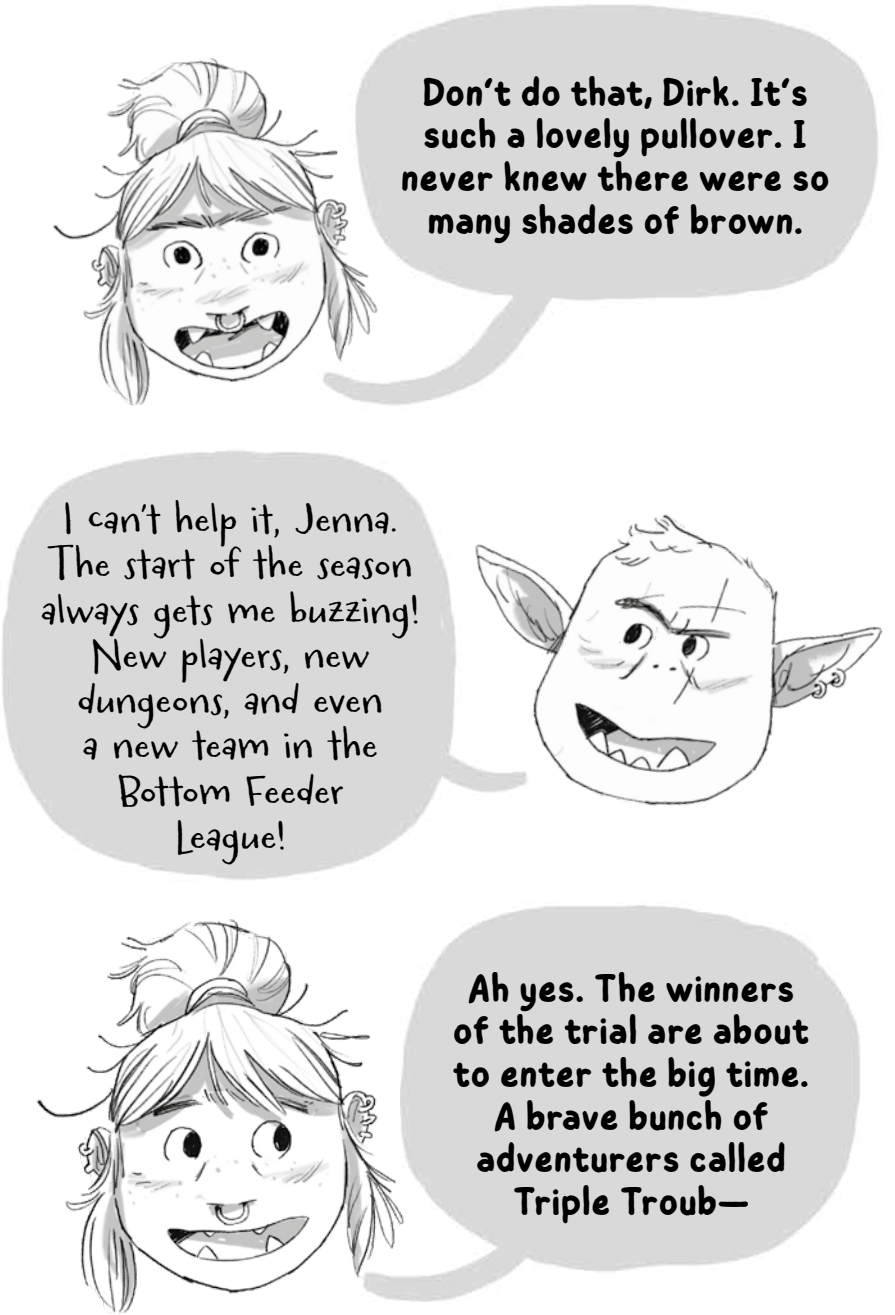



AND NOW ... ANOTHER NAIL-BITING EPISODE OF DUNGEON RUNNERS. AND HERE ARE YOUR HOSTS, DIRK THE ORC AND JENNA THE GIANT...

1

DEPARTURE


And that brings to an end our opening dungeon for the season. Another epic win for the Ultima Squad. I'm so excited, I could burst out of my pullover!



"This is an announcement. The next dragon for Cloudroost will be leaving in fifteen minutes from Gate Three."

The tinny voice echoed magically around the inside of Grotville dragonport, interrupting the show playing on the crystal screen.



"They were just about to talk about us!" Kit cried as the screen changed to show a list of departing dragons.

"That's nice, dear," said his mum. "But you're going to miss your flight if you don't hurry."

Kit was standing in line with his Triple Trouble teammates Sandy and Thorn and all their families, waiting to fly to the city of Cloudroost for their first ever match as proper, professional Dungeon Runners. Dungeon Running was the most popular sport in the whole land of Zerb.



The three of them hadn't known each other long, but they had formed a team with Kit as the fighter, Sandy as the damage-dealing mage and Thorn to heal them if they got hurt.

Somehow they had managed to win at the recent Dungeon Trial, scoring the most points as they had dashed through an underground maze of traps, puzzles and monsters.

And now they were going to be part of the Bottom Feeder League. An *actual* league with *actual* teams and *actual* dungeons to compete in.

Kit still couldn't believe it. He was just a tiny gnorf (part gnome, part dwarf) from a grubby little town next to a stinky swamp. As was Sandy.

Thorn, on the other hand, was a vampire. But a vegan one, so perhaps that didn't count.

"—and you've got your Helmet of Ogre Skin, haven't you?" his mum was saying. "And that lovely wooden sword and shield you made all by yourself?"

"Yes, Mum," Kit said through gritted teeth. He was still deeply embarrassed to be carrying a bunch of nailed-together planks into battle, but his parents couldn't afford a proper set of gear. At least he had looted a magic helmet from the Dungeon Trial. It made him as tough as an ogre, despite being small enough for one of those huge

creatures to swallow whole.

"Oh," said Sandy's mum. "That reminds me. Thorn and I made you all a little something at our knitting group, didn't we?"

Thorn nodded and pulled out a mound of wool from his backpack. He began to unfold it, while Kit wondered what on Zerb a vampire was doing knitting in the first place.

"Here!" Thorn held up what looked like a giant tea cosy knitted out of the brightest purple wool imaginable. It was lined with fluorescent orange and had 'TT' picked out in green in the middle: Triple Trouble, the name of their team.

"What do you think?" he said, his

crimson eyes gleaming with pride. "We made one for each of us."

"Um ... what are they?" Kit asked, praying he wouldn't have to wear it.



"Uniforms!" said Sandy's mum. "A lovely tabard for each of you, so we'll be able to spot you on the crystal screen."

"They're lovely, Mummy," said Sandy, giving Thorn and her mother a hug. Sandy always managed to see the bright side in everything. "We'll wear them with pride, won't we, Kit?"

"Maybe," said Kit. He had been hoping the league might give them some *proper* uniforms, but it turned out all they did was provide a hotel for the teams to stay in. Everything else you had to pay for yourself, which was pretty difficult when you were a penniless nobody from grubby old Grotville.

"Grandad Klot has brought you something as well," said his dad, pushing over a wheelchair in which sat an ancient gnorf, dressed in lime-green robes with a very grumpy expression on his face.

"I was in the middle of making turnip soup," Klot said, scowling.

"What have you brought me, Grandad?" Kit asked. *A magic sword? An unbreaking shield?* He crossed his fingers and held his breath.

"Nothing for *you*," said Klot. He jabbed a finger at Sandy. "It's for her."

Kit's dad rummaged at the back of Klot's chair and brought out a gnorf-sized staff. Its head was carved

with two faces: a smiling fairy and a scowling imp.



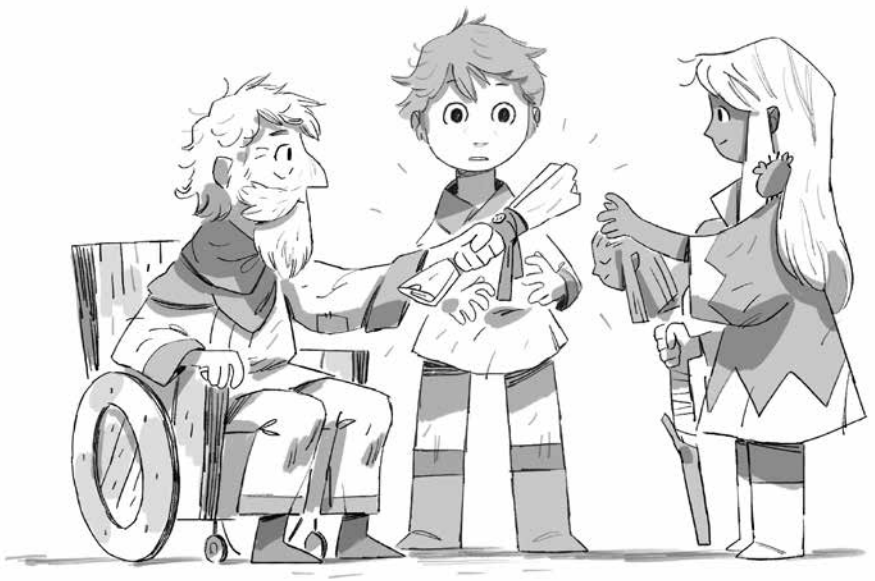
"Oh, thank you!" Sandy jumped up and down, delighted. "Is it magic?"

"Of course," said Klot. He had once been a famous dungeon-running mage before retiring and devoting his life to soup.

"Push the button and it casts the Magic Light spell. Every mage should be able to cast *that*."

Sandy blushed. She only knew one spell off by heart at the moment, and that was for summoning sandcastles. "What about the faces on the end?" she asked, trying to hide her embarrassment.

"It's called the Staff of Good and Evil," Klot said. He handed Sandy a scroll of parchment sealed with green wax. "Read this out when you need it, and a fairy will appear to help you. Don't get it wrong, though. Or the imp will come instead, and he's a right little troublemaker."



"I won't," said Sandy, bending to kiss the old gnorf on his cheek.

Kit couldn't believe what he was seeing. If anyone should be getting gifts from Klot, surely it should be him? "Nothing for me?" he said. "Your only grandchild?"

"I've got some advice," said Klot.

"Yes?"

"Give up this daft idea about being a Runner and don't get on the dragon," said Klot. "Real dungeons are dangerous places. You lot won't last ten minutes."

After a final round of goodbyes, Kit and the others stood waiting for their dragon to refuel. A farmer walked past them, leading a line of terrified sheep.

"Hey," said Sandy, beaming with excitement. "Wouldn't it be a great idea if we put our tabards on now, so everyone can see we're a real Dungeon Running team!"

"Really?" Kit had been planning to 'accidentally' leave his behind somewhere on the way to Cloudroost.

"Nice one, Sandy," said Thorn. He pulled his tabard over his head, and then looked at Kit, waiting. Not wanting to hurt Thorn's feelings, Kit put his on as well.

"Don't we look great?" Sandy posed with her staff, and held up her pet crab, Mister Pinchy, so he could see.

"Wonderful," said Kit with a sigh. At least the uniforms might draw everyone's attention away from his sword and shield. He took out the metal badge his friend Kleekoo the tiny gobrot had given him, the one that showed he was a friend to gobrots everywhere. It had helped them win the Dungeon Trial, by getting those little green-skinned creatures on their side.



He pinned it on for luck, hoping it might make the tabard look better. It didn't.

The sound of bleating and crunching bones came from up ahead, and suddenly the queue was moving. Following the troggle family in front, Kit walked on to the runway and got his first look at the enormous dragon they were about to fly on.

Lying on the wide strip of cobblestone, the beast was over a hundred metres long. It had scales of shimmering blue, a long neck and tail, and huge leathery wings that were folded at its sides. On its back was a wooden cabin that the passengers were going to sit in.

"Have you ever flown by dragon before?" Sandy asked Kit as they neared the giant reptile.

"I've never been out of Grotville before," said Kit, his tummy beginning to churn.

The dragon arched its neck over to stare at the passengers climbing on to its back. Its eyes were flecked with gold and slitted like a cat's.

"Why are you three wearing tea cosies?" it said, in a voice that made the ground around them tremble.

"Eek!" was all Kit could reply.

"We're Dungeon Runners," Sandy called up to the dragon. "We're going to compete in our first proper contest."

"Hmmph." The dragon let out a puff of freezing air that instantly turned into crystals of snow. "My sister is the monster in one of those silly things. She likes the taste of adventurer. Personally I prefer sheep and cows."

"Thank Noctis for that," Kit whispered. He clambered up the ladder and into the cabin as quickly as he could, before the dragon decided to change its mind.

