Helping your children choose books they will love

I reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

How to Steal a Dragon's Sword

Written by

Cressida Cowell

Published by

Hodder Children's Books

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk



Text and illustrations copyright © 2011 Cressida Cowell

First published in Great Britain in 2011

The right of Cressida Cowell to be identified as the Author and Illustrator of this Work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

1

All rights reserved. Apart from any use permitted under UK copyright law, this publication may only be reproduced, stored or transmitted, in any form, or by any means with prior permission in writing from the publishers or in the case of reprographic production in accordance with the terms of licenses issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency and may not be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

All characters in this publication are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

A Catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978 1 444 90094 1

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

The paper and board used in this paperback book by Hodder Children's Books are natural recyclable products made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The manufacturing processes conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

Hodder Children's Books
a division of Hachette Children's Books
338 Euston Road, London NW1 3BH
An Hachette UK Company
www.hachette.co.uk

THANK YOU to Simon Cowell, Anne McNeil, Naomi Pottersman, Alison Stall, Jennifer Stephenson, and Judit Kovar for your help in creating this book.

How to Steal a Dragon's Sword



CRESSIDA COWELL

Hodder Children's Books

a division of Hachette Children's Books



~ CONTENTS ~

Prologue by Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III.....17
1. The Greatest Day of your Life (not).....21
2. Why They Were There in the First Place.....42
3. Grappling with the Problem.....66
4. A Game of Hide-and-Seek.....82
5. Something Nasty in the Cauldron.....102
6. Trouble at the School.....128
7. Fortunes Told, Futures Improved.....146
8. Oh for Thor's Sake.....165
9. Going Down.....183
10. Are You the Stuff that Heroes Are Made Of?.....186
11. Riproarers and Electricstickys.....204
12. The Lost Kingdom of the Wilderwest.....219
13. Get Your Skates O!!!!.....237
14. The Wicked Witch of the Wilderwest.....250
15. Things Go Surprisingly Well in the Swordfighting Competition.....258
16. Things Start to Go Wrong Already.....272
17. Still Going Wrong.....278
18. Freeing the Dragons.....293
19. Turning Their Backs.....298
20. The Triumph of the Treacherous.....311
21. The Collapse of the Castle.....320
22. Red-Rage.....328
23. Fly, Windwalker, Fly.....338
24. The Boy Hunt.....348
Epilogue by Cressida Cowell.....368


THE BARBARIC ARCHIPELAGO
MURDEROUS ISLAND
FROZEN ISLE OF NOWHERE
THE DRAGON'S NOSE
THE HAUNTED MARSHES
Grimbeard's Despair
VISITHUG TERRITORY
OUTCAST LANDS
The Gorge of the Thunderbolt of Thor
Wrecker's Bay
Reef Warriors
Isle of Berk
Peaceable Country
Flashburn's School of Swordfighting
Hero's End
Meathead Islands
The Island of the Quiet Life
BOG-BURGLAR ISLANDS
The Summer Current
Island of TOMORROW
THE DUNGEONS OF THE DANGER-BRUTES
Berserk
BLOODSPILT BAY
Dragon Hatching Grounds
THE MYSTERY
SWALLOW
THE WATERLANDS

A small plea to readers:

PLEASE DO NOT BLAME THE STORY

Up until now Hiccup has just been playing at adventure, learning to be a Hero when the stakes are not so high. But darker and more difficult times are coming now to the Isle of Berk.

Please do not blame the story.
The story cannot help itself. For sometimes, we do not realize it at the time, but the story we are all a part of is not just a story about Vikings and islands and dragons.
It is a story about growing up.
And one of the things about growing up, one of the inescapable, inevitable laws, is that one day…
One day… One day…

It is going to happen.

I am sorry, but it's true.



PROLOGUE BY HICCUP HORRENDOUS HADDOCK III THE LAST OF THE GREAT VIKING HEROES

Now that I am an old, old man, the past seems very far away.

But once there were dragons in the Archipelago.

And once I was a boy, a boy who in the thirteenth year of my life made a terrible mistake.

I released the Dragon Furious from the prison of Berserk.

The dragon promised to fly into exile in the icy wastes of the north for one year only. One year's grace, and then he vowed that he would bring down a Dragon Rebellion whose only aim was the absolute and utter extinction of the entire human race.

Over the next year the boy-that-once-was-me grew like a weed, at least three inches taller. My arms were sticking right out of my shirtsleeves, but the year came and went, with no sign of the Dragon Furious, or of his Rebellion.

I heaved a sigh of relief, and began to hope that

perhaps the terrible hurts of a hundred years of imprisonment had been soothed by the chill of those innocent snows, and diving free and joyous through the pin-sharp cold waters, chasing the fleeting seals in that endless chilly wilderness, the dragon had returned to the happy carefree life of his ancestors.

Perhaps he had remembered himself up there in his element, and what if he had forgotten his promise, and maybe he might not return after all?

Perhaps.

What if?

Maybe.

But in the quiet watches of the night, the words of the Dragon Furious came hissing and burning back into my brain, and they were not words that melted like water into snow-drops. They were words of flame, and they hissed and leapt into burning, terrible life in my dreams.

'We shall scourge this world with fire, and leave no wretched human being alive, not a single one. For over the last hundred years I have been looking into the past and into the future, and I tell you this, Boy... humans and dragons cannot live together...'

The words spat through my brain like living, burning snakes:

'... and so I will call the dragons from far and wide, from the depths of the ocean and the ends of the earth, and we shall fight the final battle before it is too late.'

'NO!' I shrieked in my dream. 'NO! NO! NO! NO! NO!'

But time cannot tick backwards. The boy-that-once-was-me could not stop it.

And the Dragon was coming.



1. THE GREATEST DAY OF YOUR LIFE (NOT)

One long-ago winter's midnight, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third awoke with a frightened start.

Despite being the Hope and Heir to the Tribe of the Hairy Hooligans, Hiccup was a gangly, skinny, ordinary-looking boy, with the kind of face that was easy to overlook in a crowd.

To tell the truth, he had not been sleeping very well.

It is difficult to sleep well if one's bed is a hammock suspended three quarters of the way up the Hard Way of Angry Mountain.

The Hard Way of Angry Mountain is a cliff so high that it takes two days and a night to climb it. It is so vertical that a climber has to hammer in a couple of nails and spend that night sleeping uneasily in a hammock hung precariously from the shiny rock.

Hiccup's riding-dragon, the Windwalker, sleeping on a little shelf of rock a couple of feet away, was supposed to be looking out for danger.

However it was still winter, the Windwalker's

hibernation time, so he was barely even awake in the daytime, and now that it was night he was sleeping so soundly he might as well have been dead. His long, untidy body sprawled messily on the ledge, snoring as loud as a cow with a cold.

Anything dangerous would have had to come right up and sit on his head before he'd take any notice whatsoever.

Toothless, Hiccup's tiny, selfish Common or Garden hunting-dragon, had not noticed anything either. He was fast asleep on Hiccup's chest, sending out smoke rings that filled the hammock.

But it was danger that woke Hiccup up.

He was sure of it.

Hiccup's heart was pumping like a jack-in-a-box, and he was suddenly, wildly awake, for with every fibre of his being he sensed danger.

Danger all around him.

Frankly, they should have been safe enough, high up on a cliff-face, in the middle of the wintertime, when most of the dangerous dragons in the Archipelago were still hibernating.

The only danger should have been if the hammock fell down.

So why did Hiccup's heart tick so quick, and why was his stomach so faint that he was nearly sick?

Moving very slowly (he didn't want to dislodge himself), Hiccup peered over the edge of the hammock.

The bottom of the cliff was sickeningly far below.

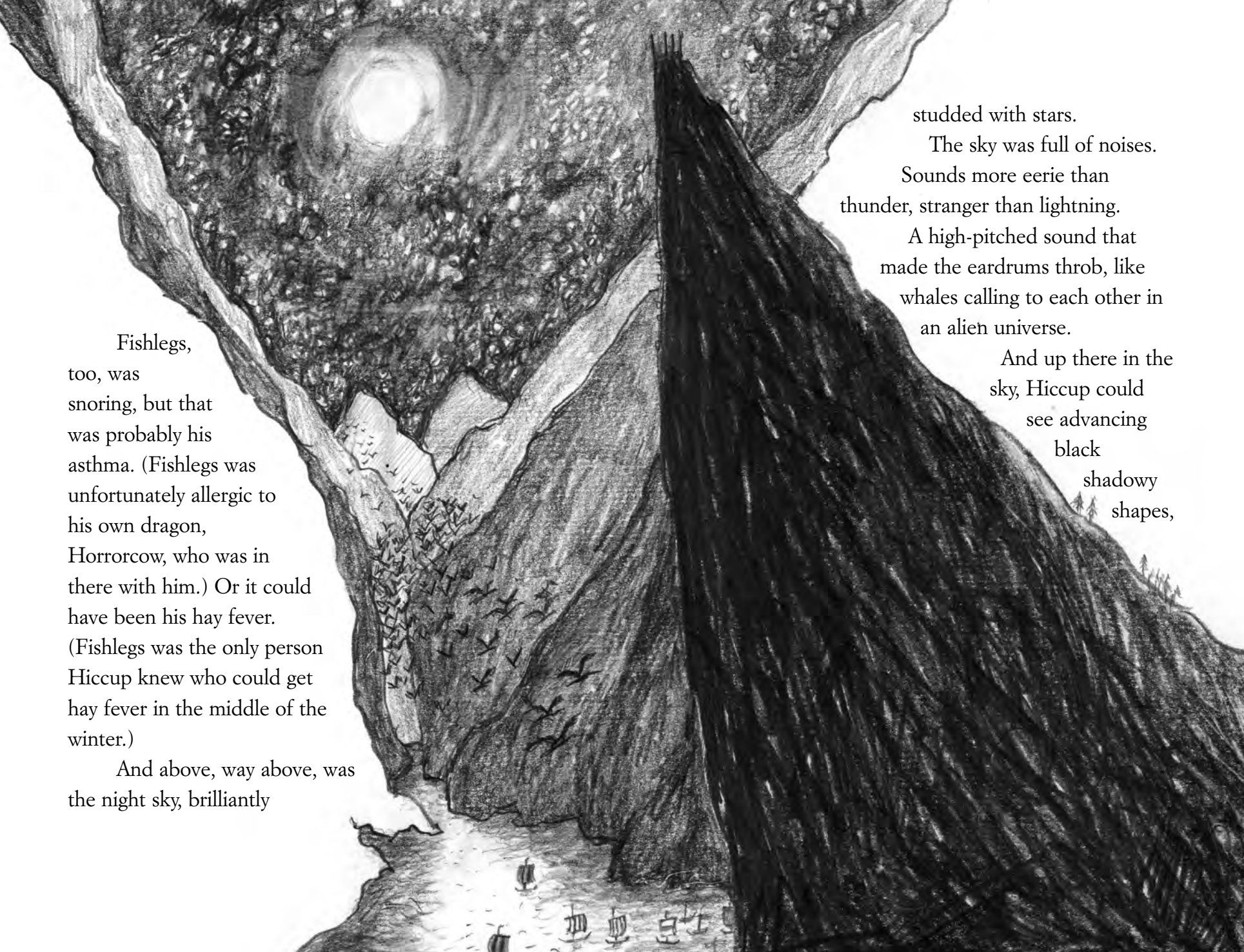
Hiccup swallowed, and tried not to look down.

They were so far up he could see for miles in every direction, as if he were looking down on a map of the Archipelago. To the west, the sea. To the north, the sinister jagged gash of the Gorge of the Thunderbolt of Thor. Further north still, the drifting icebergs and ragged peaks of the Cold Mountains.

And here, right here, the strange mainland landscape of ice and snow, relieved by weirdly warm bubbling pools, belching drifting smoke upwards like dragons snoring.



A couple of feet away on the cliff hung the patched hammock of Hiccup's best friend Fishlegs.



Fishlegs, too, was snoring, but that was probably his asthma. (Fishlegs was unfortunately allergic to his own dragon, Horrorcow, who was in there with him.) Or it could have been his hay fever. (Fishlegs was the only person Hiccup knew who could get hay fever in the middle of the winter.)

And above, way above, was the night sky, brilliantly studded with stars.

The sky was full of noises. Sounds more eerie than thunder, stranger than lightning. A high-pitched sound that made the eardrums throb, like whales calling to each other in an alien universe.

And up there in the sky, Hiccup could see advancing black shadowy shapes,

slowly flying towards them over the Gorge of the Thunderbolt of Thor.

They were too far away for him to identify which types of dragon they were exactly, but there was something nightmarish about their wings, and he knew them deep in his soul.

When a young rabbit spots a hawk circling above, it may never have seen such a creature before – but there is some ancestral memory that tells it to be afraid, to leap in great panicky bounds to the safety of the burrow. So it was with these dragons.

It was not, of course, that Hiccup had never seen dragons before.

He lived in a world full of the creatures, both wild and domesticated.

But what was different about these dragons was their behaviour. They were a number of different species, and they were acting as if they were in a hunting party. And dragon species did not generally join together to hunt humans.

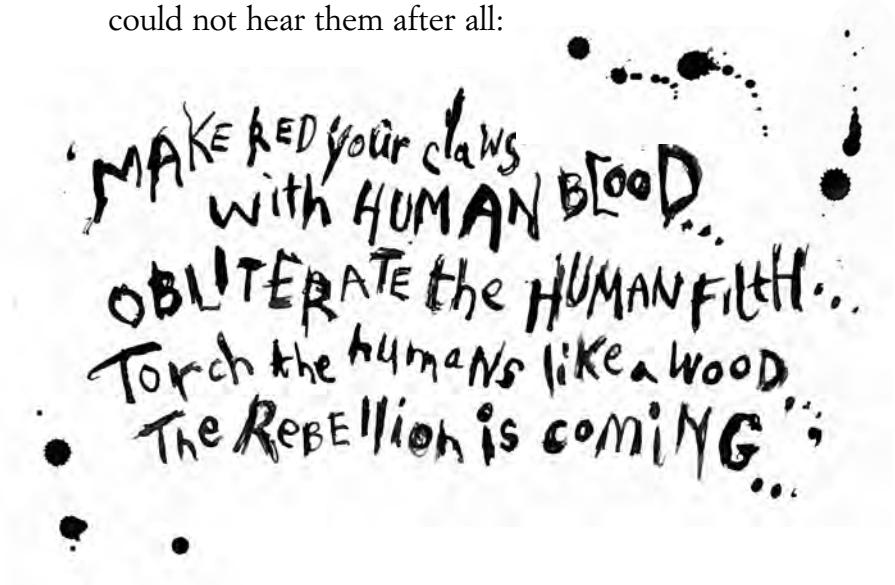
Maybe they had done, once, long ago.

But for as long as the old ones could remember, they did not hunt humans.

A wild dragon would eat you, of course, if you happened to cross its path and it was hungry. But there was no organized hunting of the human, as perhaps there had been way in the past.

Hiccup's scalp prickled all over with fear as if he were being climbed all over by black beetles. He strained so hard to hear into that blackness that it was as if his ears were growing outwards. And somehow above the roar of the wind he could just hear a truly terrifying noise, a savage hiss in Dragonese, but nastier than he had ever heard Dragonese spoken, so cold with hatred was it.

There was something scarily trance-like about the way the words were spat out, so faint he could hardly catch them. But perhaps it was better if he could not hear them after all:



Closer, closer, flew the advancing dragons, heading straight for the cliff where the hammocks perched.

Hiccup craned his neck even further upwards. About sixty feet above him were the hammocks of the other young Warriors of the Tribes of the Archipelago, hammered into the cliff, just like his own. They were a half an hour's climbing ahead of Fishlegs and Hiccup, and while Fishlegs's and Hiccup's hammocks were made out of brown patched blankets, theirs were made out of old ships' sails. The gaudy patterns of these sails, such as red and white stripes, or blue-and-gold diamonds, made them stick out against the cliff like a flamingo sitting in a bog.

The mysterious dragons were heading straight for them.

Hiccup could see what they were now. He recognized them from their wing patterns.

They were a mixture of some of the nastiest types of dragons in the Archipelago: Razorwings and Tonguetwisters and Doldrums and Vampire Ghouldeaths.

I've got to warn the others, thought Hiccup, and he opened his mouth to shout, but terror seemed to have strangled his vocal cords, like it does in your worst nightmares.

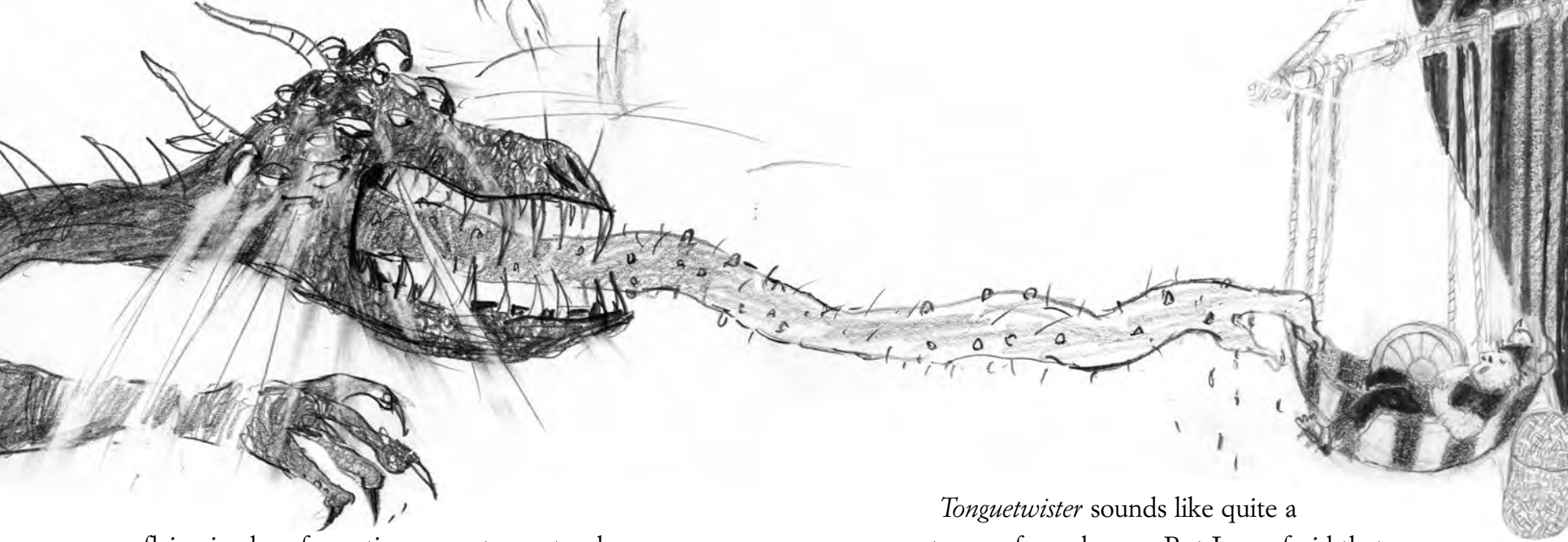
'Squeak,' panted Hiccup faintly, 'squeak squeak squeak…'

That wasn't going to do much good.

And then: 'Dragons…' And as an afterthought, 'Really nasty ones.'

This wasn't even waking up *Toothless*, let alone the young warriors snoring peacefully, unawares, high above him.

The dragons were horribly near



now, flying in close formation – most unnatural behaviour for dragons. They were drawing down their legs and stretching out their talons, ready to strike. The Warriors were totally helpless, they'd be killed inside their gaudy cocoons as they slept.

Hiccup leant across to the small ledge in the cliff where he had stowed his rucksack. Hands shaking, he drew out his bow and an arrow from the quiver.

Perhaps it was lucky that Hiccup was so far away. If he could see what the leader of the dragon pack was doing now… he might have fainted.

For the leader was a Tonguetwister dragon.

Tonguetwister sounds like quite a sweet name for a dragon. But I am afraid that Tonguetwisters remove the limbs from their victims so that they can no longer run away.

I'm sorry, but it's true.

Hovering perfectly still next to one of the hammocks, the Tonguetwister slowly opened its mouth and out flicked its tongue: a tongue thicker than a man's muscly arm. The forked ends of that tongue were flexible and delicate.

The tongue slid inside one of the hammocks, the one belonging to Hiccup's unpleasant cousin, Snotlout, and rummaged around as if looking for something.

Hiccup took careful aim, and fired the arrow.

Of course, he was aiming at the Tonguetwister.

Hiccup wasn't that bad a marksman, actually. Not as good as he was at swordfighting, but not bad.

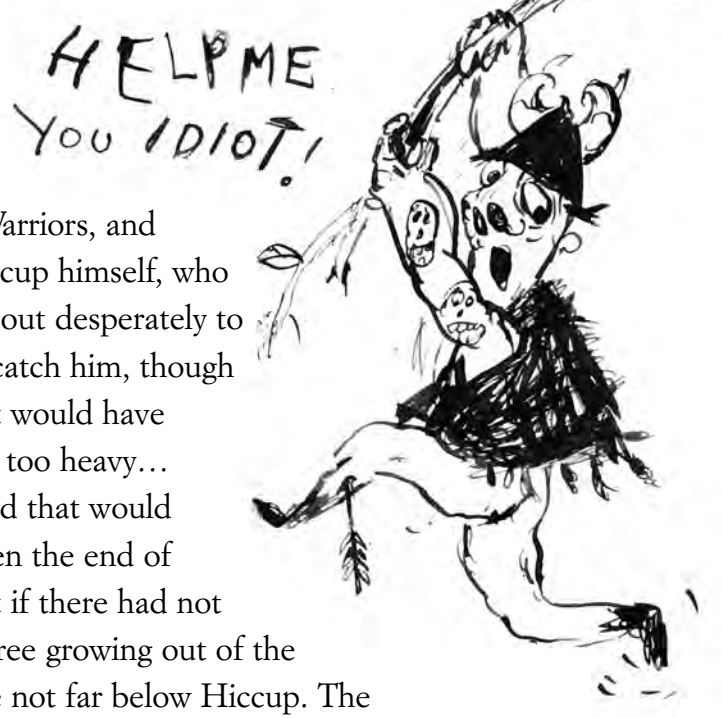
But to do Hiccup justice, it is difficult to fire an arrow from a wobbling hammock. Particularly when you are using a bow and an arrow, both bent out of shape, ironically, by Snotlout himself.

The slightly-crooked arrow left the bow and spiralled upwards, weaving erratically in a drunken fashion. At the last minute it plunged to the right, missed the dragon entirely, and sank into Snotlout's left calf.

It wasn't quite what Hiccup had intended, but it did have the desired effect… sort of.

Snotlout let out a small, muffled scream, as you would, of course, if you had just been shot in the leg by an arrow, and leapt out of the hammock… much to the surprise (and annoyance) of the Tonguetwister, who hadn't yet got hold of one of Snotlout's limbs.

Of course, in his half-asleep, arrow-ridden state, Snotlout had completely forgotten he was three-quarters of the way up a cliff. Down he plunged, hurtling down that hysterical drop, past the hammocks



of his fellow-Warriors, and past Hiccup himself, who reached out desperately to try and catch him, though Snotlout would have been far too heavy…

And that would have been the end of Snotlout if there had not been a tree growing out of the cliff-face not far below Hiccup. The tree broke Snotlout's fall, and though he carried on downwards, he ju-u-ust managed to grab hold of one of the lower bendy branches to save himself.

So there was Snotlout, dangling from the tree, a three-thousand-foot drop below him, so surprised, that he, too, could not make a sound, staring up at Hiccup with round, terrified eyes.

'HELP ME, YOU IDIOT,' mouthed Snotlout gracelessly. Snotlout was not one for being polite, even when he had just been saved from a nasty fate at the tongue of a Tonguetwister, and was still depending on the person he was insulting to save his life.

He couldn't hold on for long, but was slightly out of Hiccup's reach.

Hiccup frantically scrabbled around in his hammock, trying to get out one of his climbing-ropes so that Snotlout could grab on to it. But even at the best of times, manoeuvring inside a hammock is like trying to put your underpants on inside a pillowcase, and in this instance, with the hammock fugged up with Toothless's smoke, it was like taking part in some bizarre sauna-like sweating ceremony.

Back and forth Hiccup struggled and swayed but he couldn't find the end of the beastly climbing-rope and his hands were slippery with perspiration. He gave a frantic wriggle like a stranded worm… and accidentally drew his sword instead of pulling out the climbing-rope…

With a dreadful ripping sound, the sword cut the old faded brown hammock right in half.

'Wooooooooaaaaahhhh!'

Now, at last, he could find his voice.

'DRAGON ATTAAACKKKKK!!!!!!'

It was an enormous shout, the full terrified blast of Hiccup's lungs echoing off the dark walls of the cliff, sending the shout back again, and on and up.

A couple of feet away, Fishlegs caught the full blast of the shout, and rocketed into wakefulness like an exploding starfish. He very nearly fell out of his hammock as well. Way, way up the cliff, every hammock wobbled and wiggled as its occupants blearily sat up blurting, 'Wossat? Wossgoingon?'

'Ȇ-e-e-e-e-ķ!' squealed Toothless in alarm, opening his eyes and putting out his wings as he realized he was plummeting towards the ground.





The dragons paused in their attack, hovering for a moment in the cold night air. They adjusted the lights in their yellow eyes (an extraordinary trick that some dragons possess) from a slight glow to a dazzling glare and turned their heads downward…

And pinpointed Hiccup, swinging on his hammock remains, illuminating him in the dazzling brightness of their many searchlight eyebeams, so that he shone in brilliant detail against the darkness of the cliff.

'Uh oh… WINDWALKER! WAKE UP!!!!' yelled Hiccup, waving his sword around wildly. (He yelled this in Dragonese, for Hiccup was one of the

few Vikings, before or since, who could speak this fascinating language.)

'Hoooooonnnnnnnz... sshuuuuuuh...' snored the Windwalker.

The swarm of dragons, eerily still hanging way above Hiccup, hissed with slow, chilling anger. Something in their eyes clicked. It was the little focus lid, a shutter that came down over their eyes and enabled them to see objects pin sharp from an extraordinary distance.

They hung there for a moment more without moving.

Only their eyes shifted a little, following the waving of Hiccup's sword.



And then they folded back their wings and dived.

The Prey Dive.

What a beautiful sight, if Hiccup had only been in the state of mind to appreciate it! It's a shame that he was hanging by only one blanket strand off the highest cliff in the Archipelago at the time.

For the Prey Dive is a glorious feat of aerial acrobatics, where the dragon goes into freefall with his wings folded back. And to see a swarm of gigantic dragons performing this simultaneously, so vertically and so close to the Hard Way of Angry Mountain, that their wings were practically skimming the cliff itself, in the dead of night-time – well, I can tell you, that should have been a privilege and a pleasure, the kind of sight to see before you die. (And frankly, if you see this kind of sight, the likelihood is you're going to die pretty soon anyway.)

The lead dragon opened his jaws, as the dragons came screaming down at Hiccup, who made a final wild wriggling swing back on to the cliff at the last minute, and the entire swarm of dragons missed him and carried on, unable to stop, in their brilliant dive down the cliff.

Hiccup scrabbled around wildly, desperately trying to get a foothold on the glass-smooth rock face. He could feel his fingers sliding slightly down what was left of the hammock. He couldn't hold on much longer… but there was nothing for his feet to grip on to, and he swung out again over the dizzying drop.



Meanwhile, Toothless was bouncing up and down on the Windwalker's stomach, desperately trying to get him to wake up.

'W-W-Wake up! Wake up! Or Toothless'll grind your bones into broth!' yelled the little dragon. 'Wake up you lolloping l-l-lazybones l-l-loser!'

'Hooooooooooong... ssshuuuuuuh...' The Windwalker's snores were happier and more contented than ever. In his dreams he was flitting happily from tree to tree and a dear little butterfly was gently tickling his stomach with its dear little butterfly wings.