

## **HIGHER THAN LEVIATHAN**

When a distant land is disrupted by a dangerous creature from the sea, only one can save the city, but does he have the means?

It was in the middle of the third season, just past harvest and getting on into the snow, that an awakening from the deep cast its sight upon the shores of Icarsol. Long had it slept, forgotten but by the songs that had turned it only into legend, and long had it been that the snake-like Leviathan was known to men. It caught them by surprise, as does anything that is where it never should have been. They first noticed the way its scales gripped the underside of the icy water, causing shadows on the sea, pressing upon the waves which tried uncertainly to conceal it. They noticed the harbor nets, once easily filled daily, remained empty and hollow where fish ought to be. They noticed, above the refutable evidence of these other things, when ships did not return from the sea.

The men of Icarsol were brave and filled with desire for their land, having protected it passionately in ages past from those seeking its profit. They knew the soil and the roots that would grow there, and above all they knew about making it a home. When the presence of the mighty sea python could no longer be disputed a party was erected to venture forth and kill the beast, lest their land fall as its prey. A trip began that would last many days, and cost many lives, before victory was conceded to the fish.

Time passed, as it does after all great grievances, and with it the snow did not melt to uncover what should have been blossoming notes of new life once again. The ravens and the hawks stayed, perched in bare branches and calling for unseen change. The ice would thaw and then freeze again. And the men, the men who remained, were ashamed.

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As usual and just like any other day, smoke was churning into the beginning creep of sunlight from the cottage nestled into the underbelly of Devanside Hill. The pattern of its erratic spray against the forever-gray sky gave name to the icescapes that formed between the lower village and the higher hills, known as the Frozen Smoke, where Logan Alexander and his family lived. But something unusual was happening inside the cottage of Devanside Hill, something so unusual that not even the prophetess who lived there was aware of it, being out at that early hour to gather what she could find of mountain herbs and berries before the birds, who seemed to eat everything now-a-days.

For bustling about inside the cottage, and quite clumsily indeed, was an intruder who, though he had been there many times before to seek counsel, was clearly not invited. If anyone had been watching from outside, the constant clanging of copper pots and pans would have given the burglar away. As it was, there were only the sparrows flitting uncomfortably from frozen branch to snow covered shrub, and they liked Logan Alexander far too much to tell anyone what he was up to.

The door jammed open into a pile of snow that had just moments before fallen from the roof, loosened by Logan's careless looting. The boy, nearing the other side of sixteen, sucked in his musculature and squeezed through the space between, slowed down only by

the catching of whatever it was he had stolen in the doorway. He had to turn it all kinds of awkward angles before boy and booty were able to pass, leaving a scuff of wax on the doorframe.

Logan jumped over the re-freezing creek outside the cottage and his landing shook snow from all the nearby trees so that it looked as if a new storm were brewing. He felt that time was passing too quickly and he had promised his mother to return home for a kiss before the annual hunt. Clutching his newly prized possession inside his cloak, and wrapping it beneath the swing of his bow and around the quiver of his arrows, he adjusted his gait and ran off towards home singing songs of battle under his breath, so as to be less afraid when the time had actually come.

Carried away in the notes of victory, answered in harmony by the trailing sparrows, and caught up in his escapade through the barren trees, but still a good distance off from the Frozen Smoke, Logan stopped abruptly just short of being seen. He had expected everyone to be by the docks saying goodbye to the men.

“Not all of us wish to spend the morning as if we had already died, when we may yet go on living. Doesn’t it seem so, Logan Alexander?” The wizard spoke to him without having even seen his face, as Logan had hoped to sneak by unnoticed from behind.

“Yes, sir,” he said, backing away from his teacher even as he said it.

“I don’t suppose you are running away?” the wizard turned, transforming his question into a statement.

“I would never do that!” Logan burst, feeling the hot pride of his manhood flood into his face. For a moment he forgot about what he was carrying, letting his grip loosen under the layers of cloth and armature. A single piece of twine slipped from his fingers.

“Nor would any of the men in Icarsol. You’re father would be proud of you today.”

“Would he?” Logan couldn’t help but think of his recent theft.

“Oh yes, so would all the men who have given their lives defending our land from the troublesome Leviathan. It is a noble quest, and those can be right hard to come by.”

“It’s a stupid quest,” Logan found himself saying, becoming more and more irritated with the old man who was leaving him with less and less time to stop at home to fulfill his mother’s request. The wizard did not say anything, silently prodding Logan Alexander to spill his eager opinion.

“They’re doing it all wrong. Every year they make better ships, build better weapons, and what does it do but buy them more time to wait out the casualties and the fish still wins.”

“It sounds like you have a better idea?” the wizard’s laughing question transformed itself into a comment.

Logan hesitated. He hadn’t planned on telling anyone what he was up to. Although, the wizard had instructed him in many things, perhaps he could offer some trustworthy advice. Logan decided he would share a little, but not too much, for fear of being called foolish, lest doubt delude his plan.

“They’ll never beat him on the surface of the water. It’s like trying to put a stone puzzle together but you’re just one of the pieces on the same level. They need to get above and see the whole scenario, watch the shadow spots change on the water, and see the kill spots wide angle in order to strike. They don’t need to navigate from the sea, but from the stars.”

“My dear boy, I’m afraid that what you speak of...” the wizard twitched as if to convince himself of the absence of hope, “...has no possibility,” though something the boy said had begun to rouse it. “What would you climb upon? It is the middle of the ocean. You should keep your lofty ideas well tethered to dry land and get the nets ready as is always done.”

“I fight with arrows, not nets! And you’re just hung up on the prophecy anyway. No one is coming to save us.”

“You would do well to not speak of things you know little about.”

“I know I’m not going to die the way my father did!”

An eruption of fowl broke through the trees at that moment from the Frozen Smoke, accompanied by the battle horn calling all men to the ready.

The prophecy of which they spoke had been made as a warning before the first trip to slay the fish. Chandra, the prophetess of Devanside Hill, had spoken of the one who would save Icarsol from the threat, but he never came. Her words were wisdom from another time and no one unfortunately understood them. The wizard alone had held on to her revelation, though half believing it was true, and it passed from the minds of men. Instead, they relied on themselves.

This was the first year that Logan Alexander would be old enough to join the hunt. He had watched for too many times behind the snowflake-clad-eyelashes of a little boy. He had seen the men wade out knee deep in the icy pitch before scaling their massive ships, though not as large as Leviathan. He watched them draped in seal skins and vests of fur. He waited by the shore until the waters returned red, and the remaining men carried each other back with steam rising off them. He knew there must be another way besides defeat. And now was his chance.

Logan made to leave at the sound of the horn, and just as he pivoted away a tuft of feathers floated down from where they were hidden inside his cloak.

“What do you have there?” the wizard peaked, startled back from some deep place he had been thinking.

Logan considered what to say. After deciding it would be better to tell the wizard the truth and get on with the consequences, and perhaps still make it back to see his mother, rather than to spend his promised time crafting the milieu of a lie, Logan Alexander held out the item he had taken from the cottage at Devanside Hill.

The wizard recoiled in awe, as if seeing the treasury of a king. “Ever since its pair was lost in the accident by the sun this object has been highly revered. You must return it to Chandra at once,” he referred to the prophetess.

Logan looked at the feathers in his hand and studied their binding of wax and twine, wings. He could already imagine the view they would afford him. He could see the broken edge of the ocean from above where ice islands grow cracked strategically to reveal the dark blue below like veins running through the desert sea. Like the surface of the white moon, pockmarked with craters and fault lines, that is how the water would seem covered in ice and snow before the open waves. He had never seen the monster Leviathan, but could already imagine how small it would be from so far away. He could anticipate it roiling in the dark secrecy of the sea, and where he would shoot his arrow precisely, delivering death by plague.

It occurred to Logan that although the wizard rebuked him, he was not stopping him. In fact, something peculiar was moving across the old man’s eyes, the cloudy way in which disbelief works its way into disappearing. Logan took the opportunity to run and was soon out of sight. The wizard listened to the crunch of snow beneath Logan’s feet as he ran and felt the temperature grow even colder. He considered that the presence of the monster and the perpetual winter may have one to do with the other, but that there was only one way to find out. In the back corner of his mind he remembered what Chandra had said, having chewed it over numerous times, rubbing all the flavor out. She had said there was one who would save them, and in the process unlock the spring. But it was what she had called him that had confused the many. It was this something that the wizard had never understood which suddenly clicked into sense. You see, the understanding of this word had not yet been invented, but with the passing of each second it was morphing into existence. As Logan made it home to the Frozen Smoke, and kissed his mother what they both hoped was not goodbye; and as he donned the wings without getting caught, the wizard aha’d at who would actually save them, he finally believed: The Astronaut!