



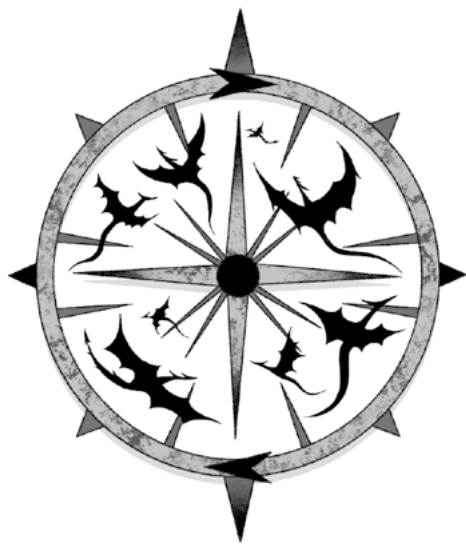
DRAGONFLARE



SOLVE THE
PUZZLES.
DISCOVER THE
TREASURE.

BESTSELLING AUTHOR-ILLUSTRATOR

JAMIE HAMMOND



For Ryan. The greatest treasure
of all is being your twin x

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HORNSPORT

BEWARE!

DRAGONFLARE

SAFETY LINE - DO NOT CROSS

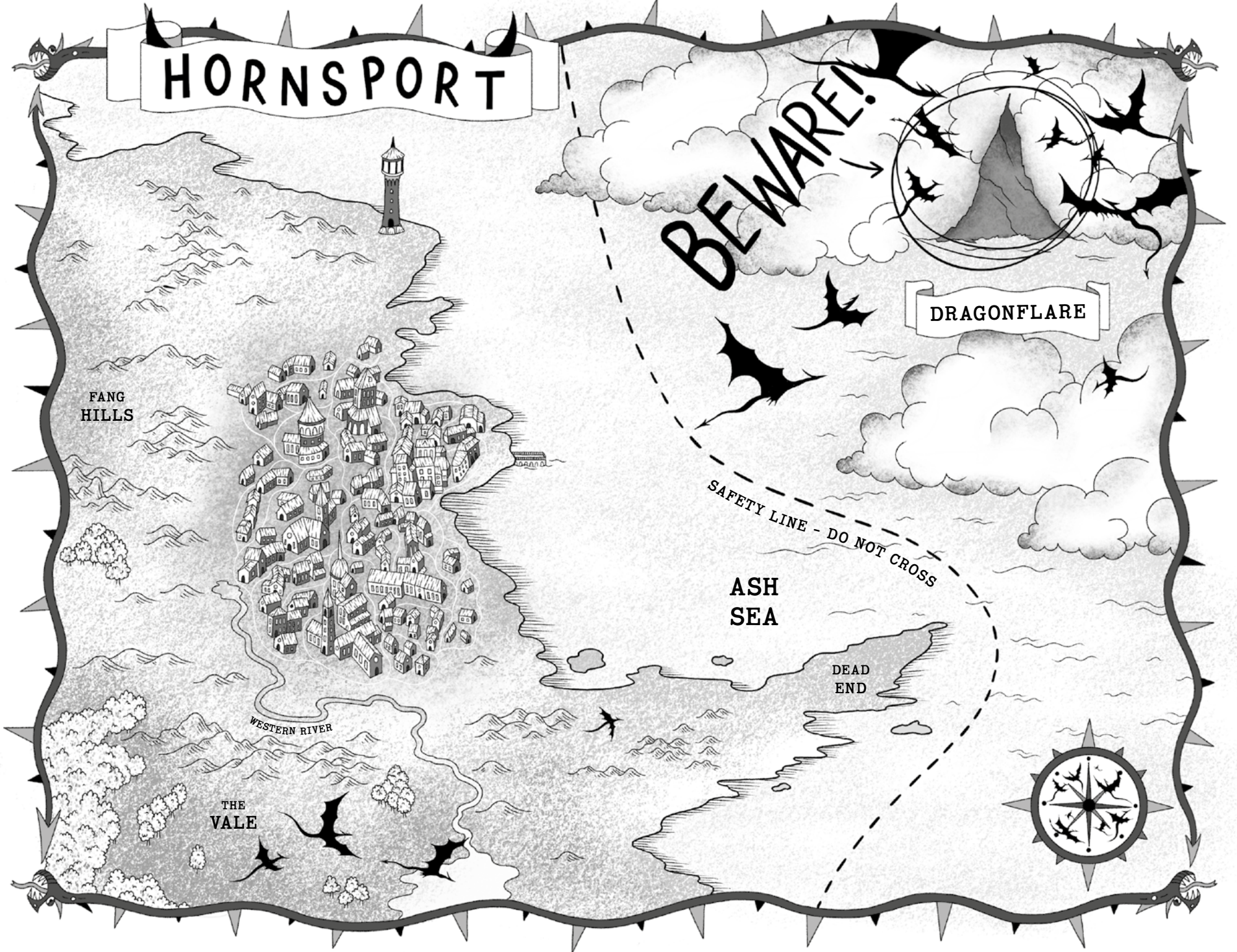
ASH
SEA

DEAD
END

FANG
HILLS

THE
VALE

WESTERN RIVER





You are hereby invited to partake in the once in a lifetime

WINGRIDER TRIALS

on DRAGONFLARE ISLAND.

Participants will be chosen at random on the eleventh day of the eleventh month at the eleventh hour. All applicants must be standing on the pier with their hand raised at the stated time to be eligible. Successful applicants will be paired with a dragon to compete in the trials to win a life-changing supply of firedrake gold.

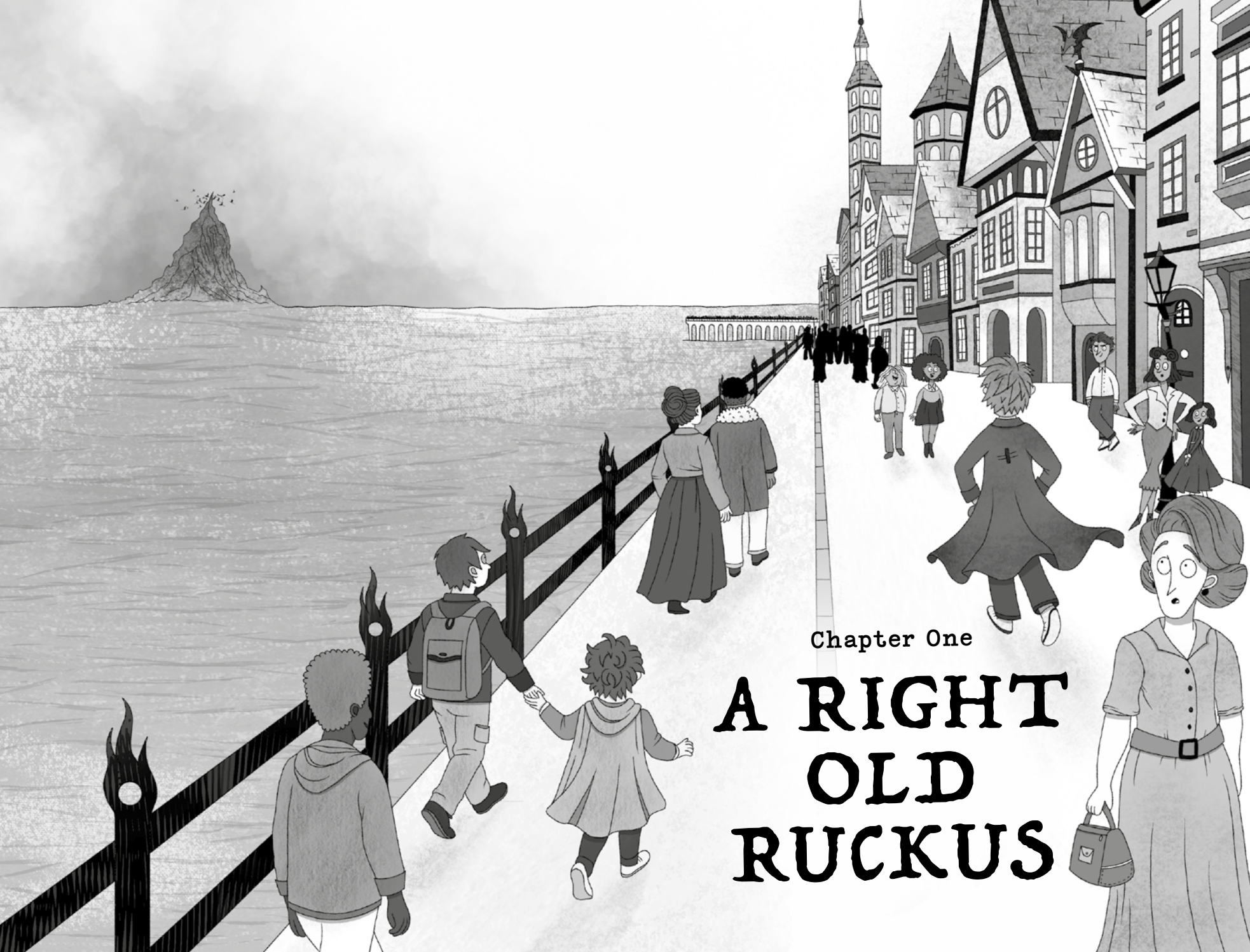
Do you have what it takes to become a

DRAGON RIDER,

enter the labyrinth and find our TREASURE?

Entry to Dragonflare will be open for one day and one day only. Dragonflare will not be held accountable for any breakages, splatterings, trips, splits, flips, incidents, disappearances, loss ~ or death.

May fire's fortune be with you.



Chapter One

A RIGHT OLD RUCKUS



The trickiest thing about being a thief is that it's almost impossible to avoid nosy do-gooders.

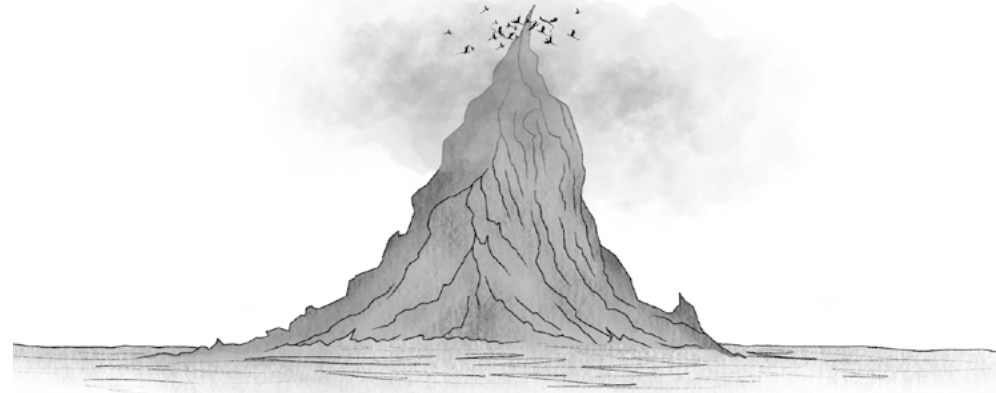
That was what Flynn was thinking as he dashed through the maze of streets in Hornsport. A gaggle of townsfolk chased after him shouting, "OI!" and, **"COME BACK, SKALLYWAG!"**

but none of the yells slowed him down. If anything, they made him run faster as he made his way to the pier.



Some called Flynn a thief; some called him trouble. It depended on the day, and today he'd decided to be both. He had pocketed a gloriously shiny antique from a market stall, which was bound to fetch a few pennies. He didn't know why everybody was making such a fuss. It was only a tiny compass and he needed the money to buy food for him and his sister.

Flynn's battered old coat flapped in the wind as he shot round the street corners with ease, dodging the bustling crowds. They swarmed the pier as they waited for the town clock to chime eleven; waiting for the flap of wings to return to the skies, and the opening of the island which had lain silent for as long as anybody could remember.



From the pier, the sea stretched all the way to the horizon, broken only by the lopsided, jagged tooth island. Mist clung to the peak, no matter the time or day. Just looking at it made shivers run down Flynn's spine. Flocks of seagulls circled it, while the townsfolk whispered of the other winged creatures which lived inside and were due to reveal themselves...

Dragons.

Dragonflare Island was opening its doors for one day for the first ever Wingrider Trials. The townsfolk were equally desperate and fearful to get a tiny glimpse inside the secretive island. Its winged inhabitants had once lived side by side with humans on the mainland, and seeing a dragon had been part of everyday life – until they vanished to the empty craggy rock around a hundred years ago. There were plenty of rumours swirling about why they had mysteriously disappeared, but one thing for certain was that nobody had seen them since.

The town was rife with gossip, excitement and apprehension, which was understandable given that nobody knew what to expect when the dragons arrived. Flynn disliked the idea of fire-breathing beasts swooping down on him, but even he was determined not to miss this event of a lifetime.

Somewhere within the humming crowd waited his sister, Faye. Flynn had promised to meet her before the clock struck eleven to watch the dragons arrive. She'd

been beyond excited when the dragons' invitation appeared overnight on the town noticeboard, so giant that nobody could miss it. She had talked about nothing else since.

Flynn worried she was going to try to take part in the Wingrider Trials, but he would never let her. It was his job as her big brother to protect her. The invitation had mentioned little of what to expect from the competition – and from the stories he'd grown up with, he was sure dragons weren't to be trusted. Before his parents died, they had passed down tales from their ancestors of the awful things dragons were capable of – how they'd burned villages to the ground and stolen naughty children from the streets. So today, protecting Faye meant making sure there would be no dragon riding.

But right now, he had bigger fish to fry.

"OI," shrieked one of the angry market traders closing in behind him.





Flynn dashed into the crowd on the pier to camouflage himself among the wannabe dragon riders.

DING!

The clock began to strike.

He had to find his sister. Sharpish. He remembered reading to her when she was little, her eyes glowing with wonder as she pointed at the pictures of dragons. Every birthday she'd ask for one, like a dragon was a dog or a cat. Faye was too young to remember the fear in his parents' voices as they talked about them. Flynn wasn't going to miss her seeing a dragon for the first time, but there was no way he was going to let Faye put herself forward for the trials. Why were the dragons even hosting this competition all of a sudden? It was all too strange.

DONG!

The sun was shining warmly without a cloud in sight, which made the sudden overhead shadows even more alarming.



Gasps and cheers ricocheted through the crowd like the waves lapping at the shore. Flynn kept moving, peering over shoulders and jamming his way through tight-knit groups. He didn't dare to look up at the sky, not even for a second. Instead, he focused on catching a glimpse of his sister's strawberry-blond hair.

DING!

Flynn felt a gust of wind as a dragon swooped down and then launched back into the sky with a person straddling its back. The first of the competitors had been chosen and the crowd buzzed with gossip. The seagulls wheeled and dived at a distance, timid for the first time in their lives.

DONG!



Flynn worried that he'd look up next to see Faye riding a winged beast. There was no way he could protect her once she was in the skies. As the crowd got thicker, he was beginning to get frustrated. He was moving slower than a snail in the slow lane.

DING!

Finally, Flynn caught sight of Faye at the bottom of the pier, smiling up at the sky in awe. Her hand wasn't raised in the air – she was being sensible for once. He couldn't help but grin with relief as he wormed his way towards her. Faye didn't once look away to see Flynn approaching. So she didn't see the owner of the iron grip that seized his shoulder.



DONG!

A chill passed through Flynn as he twisted round to see the market trader's victorious smirk.



Flynn tried to steady his breathing. He would have to trust Faye to stay sensible. He couldn't risk taking trouble to her, not when she was enjoying the once-in-a-lifetime chance of actually *seeing dragons*. No. This was his pickle and, luckily, he knew just what to do with a pickle.

DONG!

Flynn swivelled and tripped the market trader. They instantly toppled backwards together into the

crowd and Flynn used the commotion to his advantage. The townsfolk crowded and helped the market trader to his feet, and when they looked around, Flynn had already disappeared.

DING!

Flynn pushed and shoved and ran, occasionally glancing over his shoulder, expecting the feel of the market trader's hand grasping at him again. He didn't trust himself to slow down until he reached a clearing at the far end of the pier. He felt sure by then that he'd lost his pursuer – he was safe.

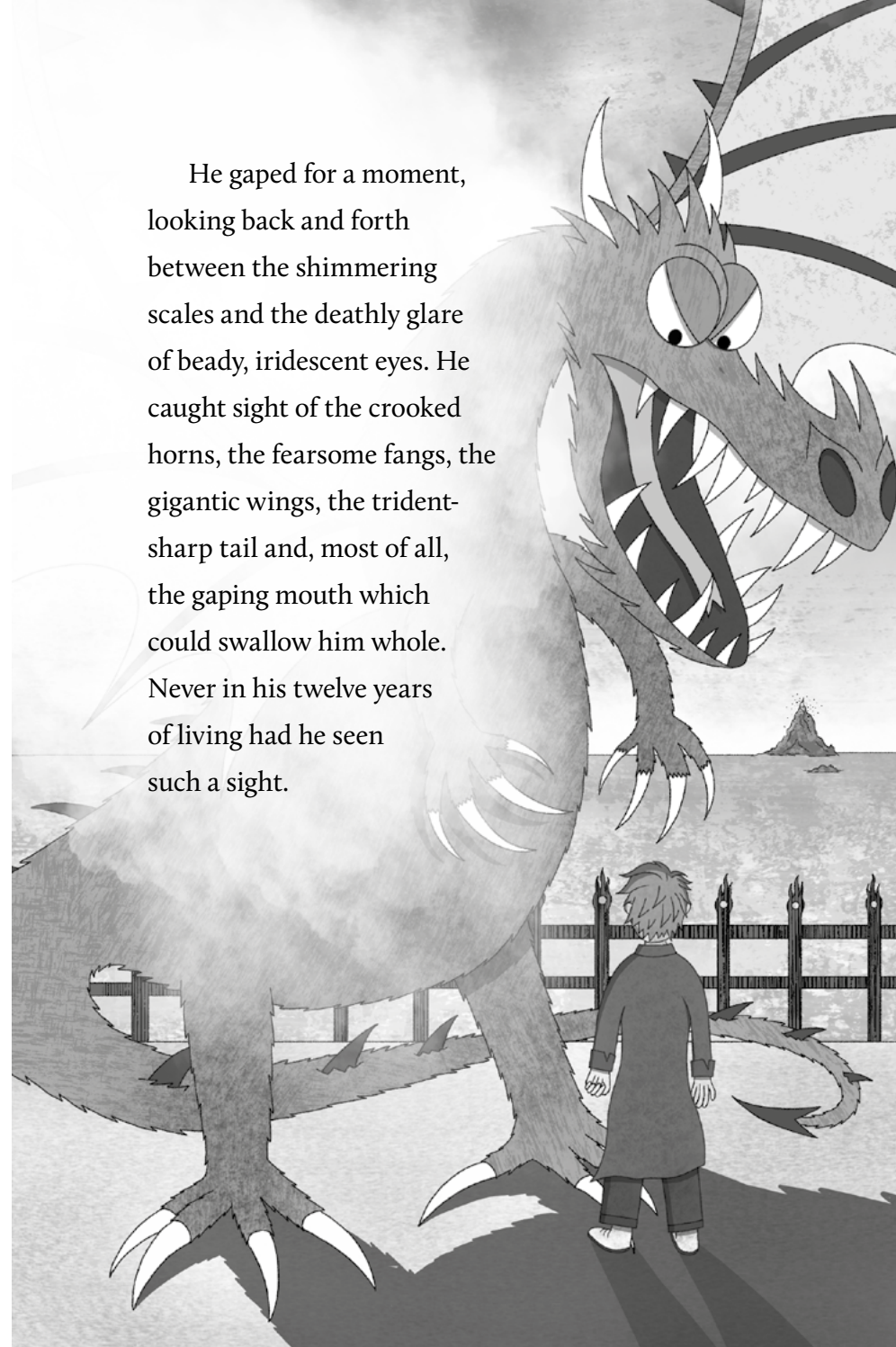
DONG!

A sheet of darkness turned the sky a deep black just as Flynn looked up for the first time.

CRASH!

The ground-shaking thump drowned out the final **DING!** of the town clock as something huge landed on the pier in front of Flynn.

He gaped for a moment, looking back and forth between the shimmering scales and the deathly glare of beady, iridescent eyes. He caught sight of the crooked horns, the fearsome fangs, the gigantic wings, the trident-sharp tail and, most of all, the gaping mouth which could swallow him whole. Never in his twelve years of living had he seen such a sight.



Chapter Two

HOOD- WINKED

“Hmmm,” the dragon growled with a disapproving frown. “Trouble.”

Flynn’s heart was in his mouth. Why was this dragon staring at him suspiciously? He scratched his head in confusion.

The dragon scanned the pier. Every other dragon had already taken to the sky and they were flying back to the island with their new riders.

It turned back to Flynn impatiently.

“You’ll do.”

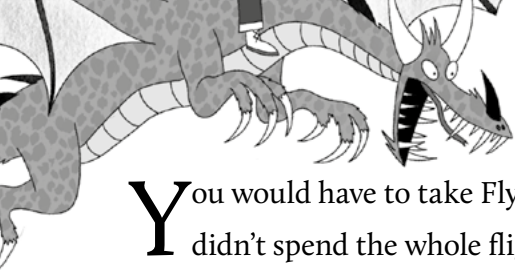
And before Flynn could protest, giant claws grasped his body and lugged him up,

up,

up,

into the sky.





You would have to take Flynn's word for it that he didn't spend the whole flight screaming or protesting or passing accidental nervous wind.

The never-ending sea quivered beneath him as the dragon flapped through the sky. Flynn squeezed his eyes shut, opening them only to glimpse Hornsport looking like a tiny model village in the distance behind them. Seagulls bolted at the sight of the dragons as if they were a storm approaching.

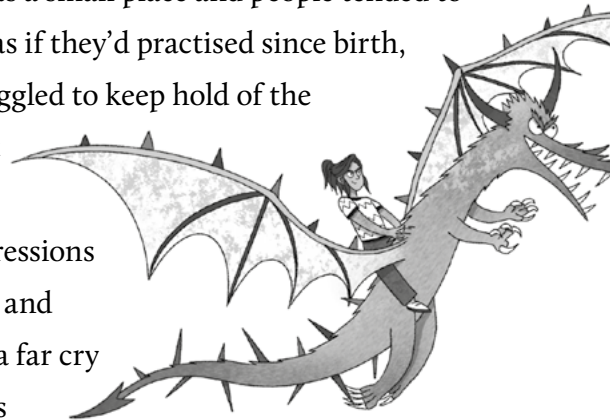
Closer and closer they flew to the island where no human alive had ever stepped foot. Flynn could only wonder what might be waiting for him on arrival – not that he planned to be there long.

As soon as he'd explained that this was all a BIG mistake, he'd demand to be taken straight home. In fact, he'd already tried to explain, in between screaming, but the dragon had either chosen to ignore him or couldn't hear him, because it simply flapped

harder to catch up with the other competitors. Now beating wings gushed air in all directions.

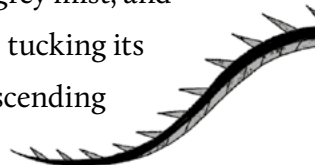
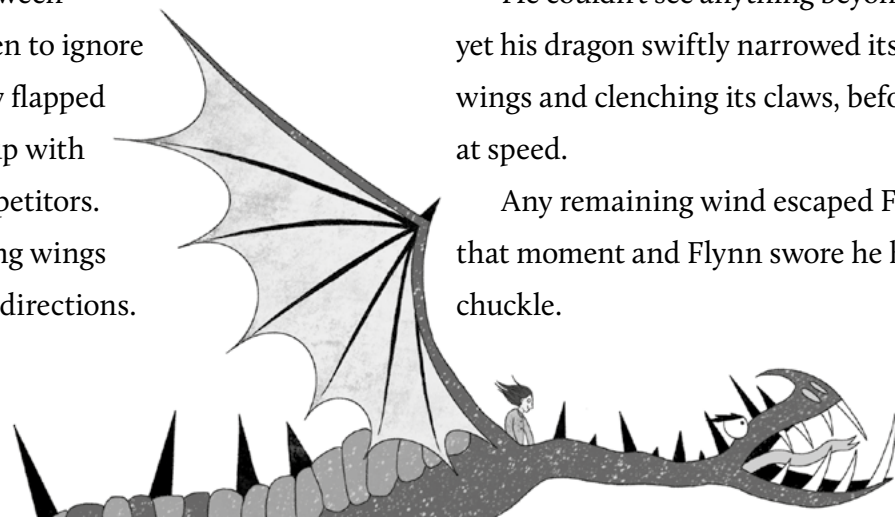


Wingriders who looked around Flynn's age sat atop their dragons. Flynn recognized a few people – after all, Hornsport was a small place and people tended to chat. Some rode as if they'd practised since birth, while others struggled to keep hold of the scaled beasts, but not as much as Flynn. Their expressions of determination and excitement were a far cry from what he was feeling. One smug boy laughed at the sight of Flynn hanging nervously in his dragon's claws. But Flynn didn't have time to pay them any attention as suddenly a thick fog swallowed them all whole.



He couldn't see anything beyond the grey mist, and yet his dragon swiftly narrowed its body, tucking its wings and clenching its claws, before descending at speed.

Any remaining wind escaped Flynn's bottom at that moment and Flynn swore he heard his dragon chuckle.



“We’re going to crash into the rocks!” shrieked Flynn.

He couldn’t splat against a rock face today – he had to get home to look after his sister. This was all a terrible misunderstanding. He didn’t volunteer to be a wingrider. Why did this stupid dragon have to kidnap him?

“OI, DRAGON!”

he yelled. “You need to slow down!”

Flynn felt the squeeze of claws around him.

“Close your eyes if you’re scared,” grumbled the dragon. “But I didn’t choose a wimp as a wingrider.”

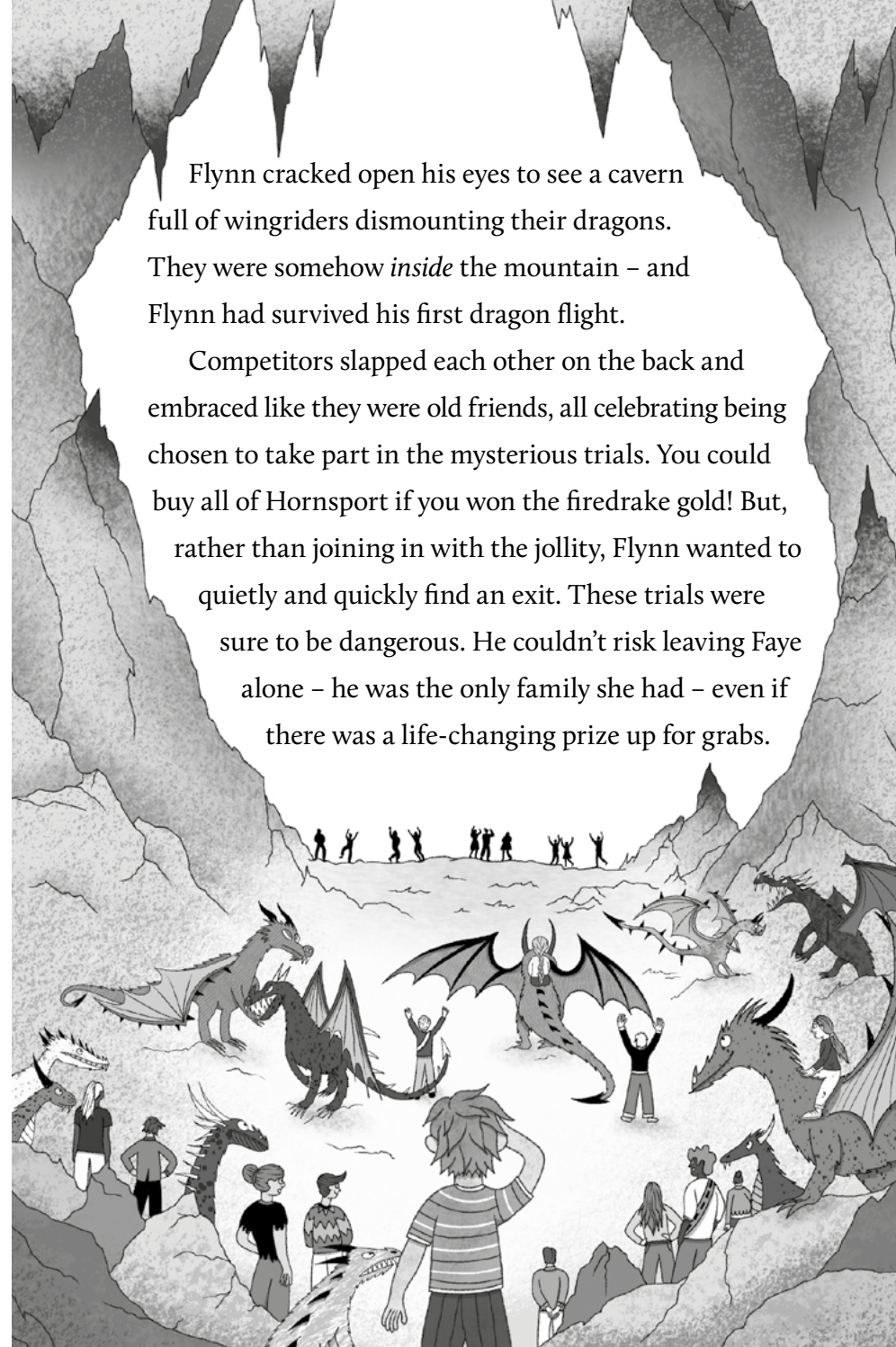
They plummeted into freefall.

It’s hard to know what to do if a dragon kidnaps you and flies straight into a mountainside. So, Flynn did as he was told and squeezed his eyes shut so hard that he felt his brain might implode.

Suddenly, the dragon stretched out its wings like a parachute and Flynn felt them come to a surprisingly soft landing. There was an eerie silence – and then cheers louder than thunder echoed all around.

Flynn cracked open his eyes to see a cavern full of wingriders dismounting their dragons. They were somehow *inside* the mountain – and Flynn had survived his first dragon flight.

Competitors slapped each other on the back and embraced like they were old friends, all celebrating being chosen to take part in the mysterious trials. You could buy all of Hornsport if you won the firedrake gold! But, rather than joining in with the jollity, Flynn wanted to quietly and quickly find an exit. These trials were sure to be dangerous. He couldn’t risk leaving Faye alone – he was the only family she had – even if there was a life-changing prize up for grabs.



A huge shadow loomed over him.

Flynn swivelled to see his kidnapper staring at him with a calculating gaze.

He swallowed hard and smiled faintly.

“Normally, this is the part when I’d say, ‘Hello, nice to meet you. My name is Flynn.’ But there’s nothing nice about being kidnapped by a dragon, especially when you’ve never seen one in real life and your parents warned you not to go anywhere near them if they ever came to town,” said Flynn.

The dragon raised a curious eyebrow.

“But I don’t want to focus on the negatives,” continued Flynn. “So how about you fly me back home and drop me off at the pier – maybe when it’s quiet so those market people don’t see me – and we can call it even.”

A faint, ominous grumble came from the dragon’s throat. “I did not kidnap you.”

“Yes, you did,” Flynn argued. “I didn’t volunteer for these trials!”

The dragon narrowed its eyes. “You stood on the pier,” it stated. “With your hand raised.”

“Well, I was actually scratching—”

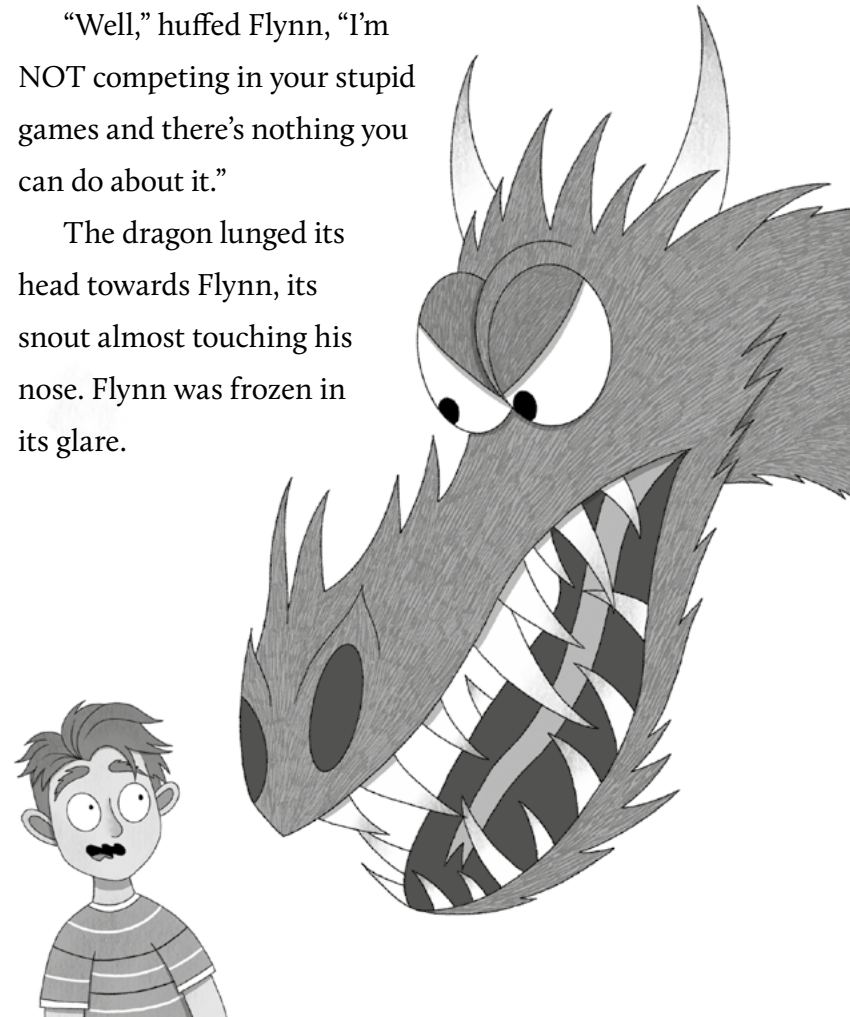
“As per the competition rules.”

Flynn huffed and crossed his arms. “Rules schmules. I don’t want to compete in these games. I want to go home.”

The dragon tittered. “There’s no turning back now.”

“Well,” huffed Flynn, “I’m NOT competing in your stupid games and there’s nothing you can do about it.”

The dragon lunged its head towards Flynn, its snout almost touching his nose. Flynn was frozen in its glare.



“Let’s get one thing straight, because I’m not going to repeat myself: I did not kidnap you. I have flown you to Dragonflare Island to take part in the once-in-a-lifetime Wingrider Trials to solve a series of puzzles within our labyrinth and find the treasure. I don’t want to compete with a human, just as much as you don’t want to compete with me, but I don’t have a choice if I want to win. There is no turning back or flying home. By entering this island, you have agreed to our laws and rules, which you must abide by, whether you like it or not.

“I have chosen you as my champion. We are a team, and your actions reflect on me. I do not choose losers or quitters or scaredy cats, and from what I saw on the pier, you are not one. I will allow you sixty seconds to grumble and moan about how this is unfair, and then we will stand together at the start line to crack this labyrinth.

“As your new partner, you should know my name is River, I am the only girl in my family, my favourite colour is gold, and I don’t lose. And, yes, I will bite you if you say something stupid.” She puffed in a conversation-ending tone. “Any questions?”

Flynn knew trouble when it stared him in the face because he’d caused enough of it himself, so he was sensible enough to shake his head.

A shuffling of claws interrupted his racing thoughts as dragons and competitors gathered. Everybody watched as a dragon perched on an ornate podium. Her horns sagged with old age, but the golden glow of her eyes shone brighter than the midday sun.

“Welcome, Wingriders,” she bellowed. “You are the lucky few who have been selected to enter our labyrinth. But I must warn you, not even we dragons know what is waiting inside. These challenges were created from our oldest magic a century ago to protect our treasures, but it...backfired and locked us out. Though our strongest and toughest dragons have tried to solve the labyrinth, the magic changes the challenges within each time, and they have not yet been successful. We believe only those who show true teamwork will be able to reach the end.”

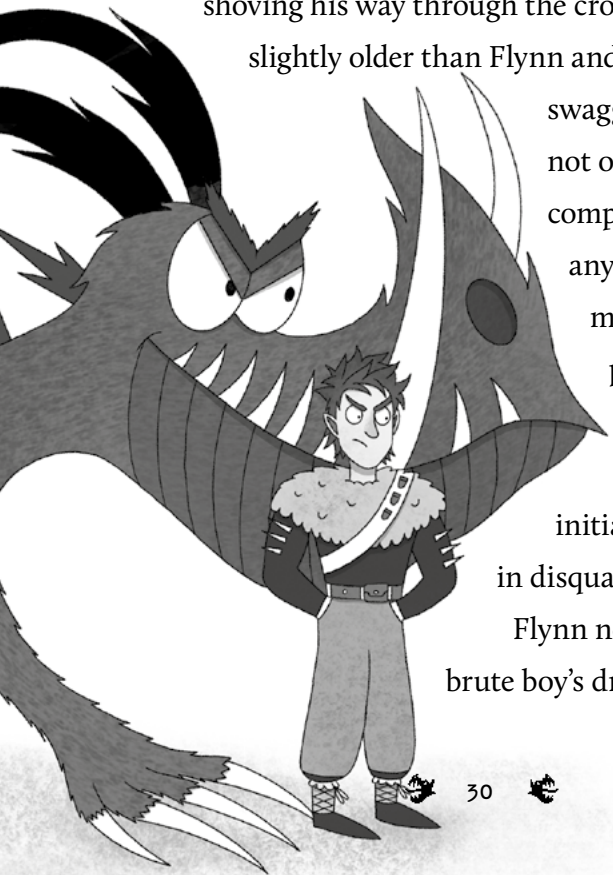
Flynn could feel River’s glare piercing the back of his head.

“Before we begin, there will be the simple task of an initiation. Let’s call it a trial run – a chance for wingriders and dragons to get to know each other. Each pair must complete the initiation *together* to earn their place in the competition. Successful teams will win their position at the front of the pack when entering the first proper trial...”

Flynn was distracted by a tall brute of a boy shoving his way through the crowd. He looked slightly older than Flynn and walked with a swagger. Amazingly, not one of the other competitors said anything, only moved out of his path.

“...failure to complete initiation will result in disqualification.”

Flynn noted that the brute boy’s dragon was the



largest, its mouth wide enough to swallow multiple people at once.

“*Pay attention!*” hissed River. “We’re going to win these games, and it would make it much easier if you listened and showed respect to my elders.”

Flynn bit his tongue to hold in a remark about how *she* hadn’t respected *him* when dragging him here.

“Otherwise, anything goes,” finished the elder dragon. “May fire’s fortune be with you.”

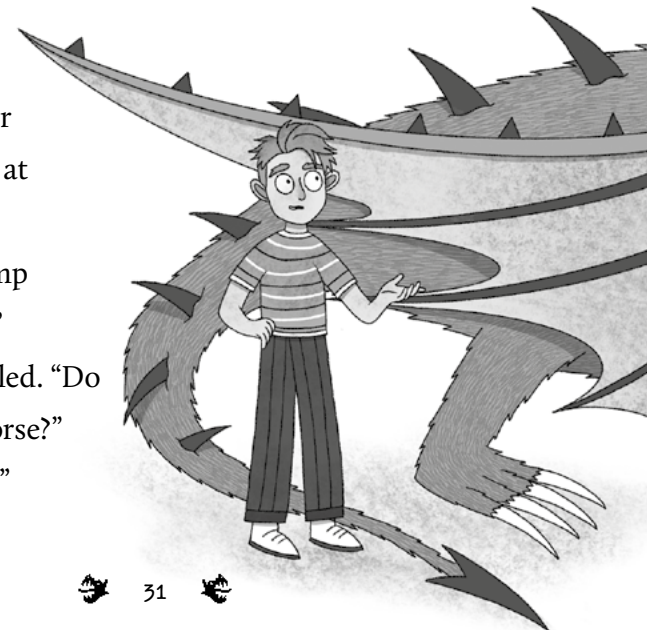
There was no time to bicker or share strategy. Most wingriders hesitantly leaped onto their new winged friends and lined up before a set of perfectly round doors.

Flynn turned to River and looked up at her nervously.

“Shall I jump on your back?”

River scowled. “Do I look like a horse?”

“Well... I—”



“Oh, get on with it.” River lowered her leg for Flynn to climb. “I can’t carry you around in my claws all day, not when I might need them for what’s waiting for us in there.”

Flynn gulped nervously and climbed onto her back like the other riders.

“Just do as I say and don’t mess this up. If you can do that, then I’ll take you home,” said River. “Deal?”

Flynn watched as the elder dragon opened the doors to reveal a blinding light. Every person in the cavern gasped in surprise.

If he was being forced to take part in this competition, Flynn was going to make sure he got through it and got home as swiftly as possible – even if it meant putting up with a grumpy dragon for a little while.

“Deal.”

The elder smirked a knowing look. It made Flynn’s insides drop like he was on a rollercoaster.

“Let the initiation begin.”

