

YODIN^{THE} RESCUER

— AND THE —
GODDESS OF EYOS

“Help me!” she cried, her palms pressed hard to the wet glass.
Yodin just stared, his whole body a frozen lump of cement.
“Please... I beseech you... help me!”

When thirteen-year-old Yodin Baewolf opens a mysterious old book, his world becomes what he reads. Launched into a land of monsters, man-beasts, and Woe Shadows, all seeking to end his young life, he fights to rescue a young goddess and her kingdom, learning who he is and the price of standing up for those who cannot.



Award-winning author of *The Lorian Stones Trilogy*, Lew Anderson creates a fun adventure full of action and intrigue in this mythical land where only a ‘bold-heart’ can survive. Family-friendly for ages ten and up, this story conveys Christian concepts such as perseverance, self-sacrifice, and the power of praise.



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BOOK I

YODIN^{THE}
RESCUER
AND THE GODDESS OF EYOS

LEW
ANDERSON



YODIN^{THE}
RESCUER
AND THE
GODDESS OF EYOS

LEW ANDERSON



TREESTONE BOOKS

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*For my grandchildren and their children,
May you always be bold in kindness and never doubt.*



PRONUNCIATION GUIDE



Adrusala	(a-DREW-sa-la)
Baewolf	(BAY-wolf)
Balzebul	(BAL-ze-bull)
Belazore	(BEL-a-zore)
Drogan	(DRO-gun)
Eyos	(EE-yose)
Goular	(GOO-lar)
Grissawohl	(GRIS-a-wul)
Karthian	(KAR-thee-an)
Lafinya	(La-FEEN-ya)
Malgamation	(MAL-ga-MAE-shun)
Meyanna	(mee-YAN-na)
Mina	(MEE-nah)
Pyrian	(PEER-ee-an)
Sachal	(SAT-chal)
Sloog	(Slewg)
Yodin	(YO-din)



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PREFACE

“**F**ound him at Royce during the War of Maidens, a bleating lamb amidst the carnage. Death had played her scene up the royal steps and across the palace court, yet somehow...”

“A script snatched from the fire.”

“For sooth. Naked, he bore no ring but for the band about his ankle.”

“Befitting mark indeed.”

“Entrusted him to my daughter. ‘Twas she who named him.”

“Indeed.”





PROLOGUE

“**T**hey’re threatening to press charges,” Principal Langer said. “Yodin broke Huck’s finger, and his nose. We’ll have to take disciplinary action.”

“But the boy had it coming!” the thirty-some woman declared, her face flushed. “Been picking on kids since day one. Don’t know why you don’t do something.”

“Now, Mrs. Baewolf, we’ve been working to—”

“Hogwash! This has been going on for near three years. Looks like my son finally got the upper hand. Or is it finger?”

Principal Langer gave a sideward nod, reluctantly consenting. “They didn’t tell you it was Isla?” he asked sheepishly.

“What! Bullying Isla?” She let go a feisty huff. “Well, no wonder! Where are the monitors? Isn’t anyone watching?”

“We do our best, but...” He swallowed. “We had to pull your son off. He kept punching Huck’s face. Was pretty bad.”

Mrs. Baewolf sat back, not even trying to hide the smile. “About time,” she said.

Mr. Langer drew back. “Now, Mrs. Baewolf, you can’t condone—”

“What! Protecting his little sister?” The woman shot forward, both hands thumping the wooden desk. “And you better

condone that as well, sir! Good gracious! Is he supposed to sit back and watch his little sister bullied by that... that brute!" Her face reddened. "You know that Rathbone boy is nothing but trouble. Every day making kids cry. Good Lord, why is my son the only one standing up to him? Just 'cause the Rathbones own half the town doesn't mean you can look the other way while Huck... runs amok."

She shook her head. "My son's been licked by that bully a dozen times, yet keeps taking his stand. Where are you in all this? Why is Yodin the only one protecting the kids here at Lincoln Elementary?" She sat back with a huff.

Principal Langer straightened. "Mrs. Baewolf, your son, well, he's adopted, is he not?"

The woman just glared.

"I mean, he's a bright boy, a good student and all, but... he's never really fit in here."

The woman continued her fiery stare.

"He's rather intense, I'm sure you know, and his sense of justice, well, it's quite extreme. Can be difficult for his teachers."

"Oh?" The woman leaned forward. "Like the other day, when accused of cheating, only to learn it was the other boy copying Yodin's work? Had his teacher bothered to inquire rather than assume and blame, maybe my son wouldn't have confronted him so."

Principal Langer nodded in silence. "Well, maybe you should counsel your son to stay out of fights he can't win. Learn to be more... reserved."

The tall woman slowly stood, her hands firmly on the desk. She leaned forward, her gaze intense. "He does not seek to win fights, Mr. Langer..." She paused to lock eyes. "...but to do what's right, no matter the cost."

Lifting her hands from the desk, she continued staring down. "It takes bravery to do what's right, Mr. Langer. Maybe you should take counsel from my son."



THE KEY

“**W**hat is it?” Yodin asked.

His father held out a small leather pouch. “Not sure. Was told rather sternly, no, *very* sternly, to give it to you if something ever happened.”

“From Grandpa?”

His father nodded.

“So, what is it?”

The man shrugged. “He said you’d know.”

Yodin Baewolf took the worn leather pouch rather gingerly, his face both sad and perplexed.

“I miss him,” the young teen said, hefting the pouch, “miss him a lot.”

“We all do.”

Loosening the leather ties, Yodin took out a small, yet heavy key—a skeleton key—the kind that opens something old. He rolled it slowly between his fingers, the shaft smooth, the ends tarnished.

Yodin’s father watched, eyes on the boy’s knuckles. Three were scabbed, the others bruised. “Only when you’d turned thirteen,” he said. “Made me swear. Was a bit strange... his manner, I mean. Seemed... well, extremely serious.”

Yodin nodded, continuing to roll the tarnished key.

In the attic, tucked behind a mess of boxes and dusty junk, sat a small sea chest with leather straps and worn brass buckles. He had seen inside it only once, shown to him by his grandfather when he was ten. It held unique and curious items, things collected from around the world. But at its bottom, tucked in a corner, lay a smaller chest, a strong-built thing about the size of a boot box. A sturdy brass band bound it shut with an internal lock, a lock that looked to be made for just such a key as this.



Neck hairs bristled as gooseflesh prickled. “The box,” he said softly, “the box... with the book.”



HORLOCK, ROYAL CITY OF THE DRUNES



1 THE LEATHER-BOUND BOOK

Once upon a distant time, when the night was dark and the skies dripped rain...

Yodin paused, snuggling further into his reading chair, the flickering gas fireplace warming the room. Although mid-June, it was cool and damp outside, unusual for Minnesota. His lips had moved in silence as he read the opening line of the old leather-bound book, the book from inside the small locked box. For three years he'd waited to open that box. Never had he imagined it would be without his grandfather, and that he'd be reading the book alone.

A light rain began as he pulled his legs up, glancing outside. He mused a bit, thinking of his grandfather and the small chest he had once shown him, the chest that contained nothing but this old book.

"That box must never be opened," his grandpa had said, his tone so intense, so stern that Yodin's skin had chilled. Though normally curious, the young boy decided then and there to never open that chest until Grandpa said so.

"Only when you are ready," the elderly man had said. "Promise me, Yodin, you won't open that chest until I say."

In reverent fear, the ten-year-old had nodded his consent.

His grandfather's warning now seemed to echo around him, perplexing him as he went back to reading the strange old book. He smiled. Folks said his grandpa, Grissawohl, was a 'bit quirky,' but to Yodin he had been an endless stream of rich experience.

Not only was he full of stories about faraway lands with fantastic tales of men and women who 'faced fearsome foes, defeating the very powers of darkness,' but he also taught Yodin many things that most boys never got to learn.

From hunting and woodcraft, to swordplay and survival skills, to welding and smithing, Grandpa was intent on using every moment to teach him something. Every visit meant a new skill, a new experience, and always a good story.

Sure he was quirky, but he'd always been there for him and his family for as long as he could remember.

He sighed, eyes moistening. He fingered the worn leather strap that buckled to the book's cover, cinching it up like a tiny treasure chest. He had opened and closed it several times, feeding the strap through the old brass buckle, tucking the tip under the loop sewn to the cover with black wiry thread.

He had never had a leather-bound book before, especially not one with a strap and buckle. And one so old, so ornate... and locked up for years inside a small sturdy chest. A warmth passed through him. It did indeed feel strangely special.

Yodin pulled a fleece blanket up over his feet. On the few occasions Grandpa had mentioned this book, his tone had always been extremely serious.

One such day they had been fishing on the riverbank, the two sitting in the evening sun, watching line and bobber as swallows swooped, skimming the smooth water.

"It's very old," he had said, "yet its ink is as fresh as the sunlight on our skin. A 'one-of-a-kind story' that only a bold-heart can finish."

The words had burrowed themselves into his soul as he had sat there, pondering what his grandfather meant.

“Can I see it, Grandpa?” Yodin had eagerly asked that day.

“Only when you’ve learned all I can teach you. Maybe when you turn thirteen... maybe.”

Yodin now blinked to clear his eyes. “You taught me a lot, Grandpa.”

He turned the book over—two inches thick, a few hundred pages. “Be done tomorrow night,” he said, wondering once again what Grandpa had meant that day.

“Only a bold-heart,” he said with a chuckle. “Just wants me to read the whole thing. Must have boring parts... life lessons... like getting into fights you can’t win.”

Yodin paused, thinking over the last day of school, his fists pummeling Huck with fury. He sighed, thinking of junior high in the fall. *Bigger school... bigger bullies.* He glanced at his bruised hands, lightly touching the two scabs on his right knuckles.

“Every fight leaves scars,” he said, quoting his grandfather. “Choose them wisely.” With another sigh, he flipped back to page one.

‘...a young boy sat reading a leather-bound book beside a crackling fire...’

“Huh,” Yodin chuckled, glancing outside once more as the rain fell in scattered drops, plopping loudly on the gas grill and patio near the bay window beside which he sat.

The sky had darkened with the rain, darker than usual for an early summer evening. Home alone, Yodin had chosen this evening to begin reading Grandpa’s old book, intrigued by his warnings that only a ‘bold-heart’ could ever finish. Mom and Dad would be back in about an hour, for it would then be bedtime for his little sister Isla.

He read on.

‘Home alone, the boy let his eyes absorb the words therein, lips moving as he read the printed lines. Outside the rain plopped and pattered, splattering itself into oblivion.’

Yodin gave another glance to the rain doing just that, and snuggled further into his reclining chair, drawing the blanket up to his waist. With the bay window to his left and the fireplace to his right, he nestled in, now more than ever eager to read.

‘Had the lad known what lay ahead, his young, unseasoned hands may never, ever have opened the ancient pages bound by the skin of a Galwyn haro.’

Yodin flipped the cover back over, studying the leather once more, lightly rubbing its texture. “Just cowhide,” he muttered, but a slight shiver trickled up his spine. He read the title once more, his eyes narrowing. *To Stand, by Elsha Dybe.*

For a moment, he just sat listening to the rain plopping and dropping like random blobs invading his yard. After a yawn, he snuggled in further, lifting back the well-worn cover to once again read the inked words that filled page one.



‘For, as every lad knows, any book bound in Galwyn haro-hide is sure to carry its own adventure, to take its reader beyond ink and paper, beyond the realms of comfort and calm, whisking them far into a land unknown, where beasts abound and monsters roam, only to leave them stranded in time where nothing but wit and volition of purest will can ever bring them safely home.’

“What?” Yodin sat up, flipping the cover back to read once

more the title embossed into the leather. “What is this? Old English kind of stuff?” He scrunched up his face, but then remembering Grandpa’s challenge, turned back to page one.

‘But like most young lads, he let his eyes flow from word to word, softly muttering their sounds. A sudden thunderclap shook him from his lazy stupor, rattling his bones as if—’

BOOM! Just then a blinding flash burst through the bay window. Its thundering pulse rattled the glass, trembling its way into the very foundations of the house.

Yodin bolted up with a gasp, his heart hammering. He stared outside, listening to the echoing rumble drift and roll into the distant darkness.

After several deep breaths, he sat back, now looking at the old book with an eye of suspicion.

“That was freak-a-dilly weird,” he said, his voice a bit shaky. He paused, staring at the yellowed pages for a moment, his heart ruffled by a tinge of fear. “Talk about crazy coincidence.” Shaking his head, he took a deep breath and read on.

‘A sudden thunderclap... rattling his bones as if it were the first thunderbolt he had ever seen or heard. But with breath restored and hands steady, the lad returned to reading the words so masterly scribed upon the page. Behold, his eyes read as one now wary, as one entering a world unknown. With tingling suspicion he followed each line, reading the words ever so carefully, reading with renewed respect, even awe for what lay across the page. His fire flickered beside him, the burdened sky still weeping. A wind had gathered, blustering against the house as if to push it clear of its billowing path. The sky had grown so dark, so dense, all light seemed to meld into its shadow. The lad paused to look about, his little home... quiet as death.’

At this, Yodin sat up, a streak of fear rifling through him. He

had stayed home alone before. No big deal. Mom, Dad, and little Isla had only gone to the grocery store and were coming right back.

“The storm,” he said with a dry swallow, noticing how the wind had come suddenly, surging in powerful gusts that did indeed seem bent on pushing the house from its ‘billowing path.’ “And really dark,” he said with some concern. After another moment of hesitation, Yodin continued reading.

‘Although feeling the nips of fear, his brave soul journeyed on, drawn resolutely to the pages worn by time.’

Yodin turned the page. *Is this what Grandpa meant?* he wondered, glancing outside at the splattering rain now dashing against the bay window, the wind huffing and heaving against the house. He looked once more at the old leather cover, then shook his head. No, Grandpa had messed with him, that was all.

“Just an old book,” he said, scoffing at his ‘nips’ of fear.

Page two had an etched illustration of a boy with a sword, a long sword, far too large for a boy. The lad stood atop a high hill overlooking a valley filled with a city where smoke rose from chimneys, and a fortress loomed in the distance. Yodin studied the etched drawing, admiring its fine detail. The caption below said, ‘Horlock, royal city of the Drones.’

As Yodin read the caption, a sense of dreadful hopelessness crept eerily over his soul. For a moment, he sat staring at the detailed illustration, his heart saddening with every muffled beat. *Maybe... this book isn't for me*, he mused, his soul seeming to cower within. *Sorry, Grandpa... but it's not my...*

He pressed his lips, brow tightening.

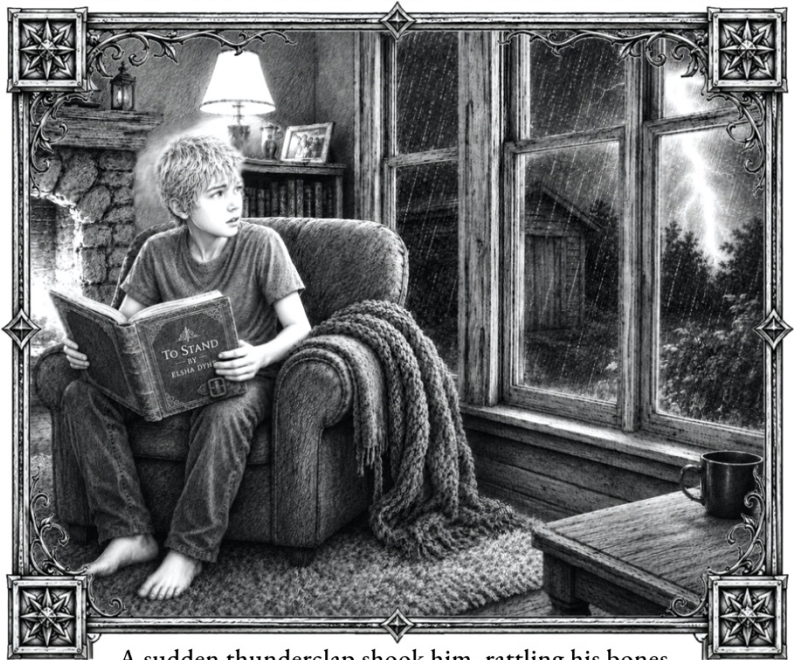
“I’m not scared!” he said aloud. “Just don’t... want to read it, that’s all. Don’t have to read anything I don’t want to.” He tried to sound sure of himself, to be mature.

But his gaze went back to the boy with the long sword and the city of the Drones. *Who is he?* Yodin pondered as his eyes

drifted to the top of page three.

‘Our story begins that fateful night as the sky sought to cleanse the land. Our lad sat reading his book, the fire still frolicking with the shadows that danced in the yellow light, when from the darkness there came a forlorn cry, a cry from somewhere distant, somewhere—’

Yodin jerked upright, his heart pounding. In total stillness he sat listening, straining to hear beyond his thumping heart. The ‘nips’ of fear were now biting rather hard. He held his breath, listening. There *had* been a cry... a distant cry—a cry for help!



A sudden thunderclap shook him, rattling his bones.



2 RUN!

Goosebumps prickled every inch of tingling skin. For a long moment, Yodin sat listening, his hands still holding the book. But nothing more came, only the gusts of wind and rain lashing at the window, pushing at the walls.

Imagined it? he wondered, his heart still beating like galloping hooves. He shook his head and swallowed. “Just... freaked out a bit,” he said, readjusting into his chair. “Just... the storm... and this... old book.” He nodded in agreement with himself, his gaze on the last line. Before he could decide about reading any more... it came again!

This time Yodin jumped from his chair, tripping as the blanket tangled his feet. The cry came on the wind, yet sounded near, like... just beyond the shed.

He peered through the bay window, straining to see into the blustery darkness. “Why’s it so dark? It’s not even eight o’clock.” His heart beat harder, his throat suddenly dry.

Staring at the doorknob, he wrestled with grabbing the flashlight and peering outside.

“No!” he warned himself. “That’s how kids disappear.”

But someone—it had sounded like a girl—had indeed cried for help.

“Help... me,” he mouthed the words.

Stepping back from the door, he looked about. *Is this some joke?* he wondered. *Are Mom and Dad secretly watching?* He shook his head. “No... they wouldn’t do that.”

He put his ear to the door, re-checking the deadbolt.

The wind pushed against the frame in forceful lunges, each billowing blast like an unseen battering ram shaking the house.

“Call 911?” He pressed his ear tighter—only the wind and rain battering and splattering. He glanced back at the open book resting upside down beside his chair.

When nothing more came, he convinced himself, not without a struggle, that he had only imagined the cry for help. It was the book—putting crazy thoughts and fears into his eager mind.

“Books shouldn’t do that,” he said sternly like one who knows things. He made his way back to the chair, eyes peering into the storm, ears keen, listening hard for what sure sounded like a very real cry for help.

For a while, he sat just wishing Mom and Dad were back so he could put off reading this strange old book. He looked once more at the detailed etching, the boy with the long sword, the city and its fortress melding into the background. Again, the dark sadness came.

“Horlock,” he said softly. Then shaking himself, he declared, “It’s just a story. Just a book.” After another long exhale, he decided to read on but promised himself that if anything else happened, anything weirdish at all, he’d wait for Mom and Dad. *Read it tomorrow... in the daytime... maybe.*

“It’s just a silly book,” he chided. “You’re freaking yourself out... being a mouse.”

So, with steeled determination, he flopped back into his cozy chair and took to reading once more.

‘...frolicking with the shadows that danced in the yellow light, when from the darkness there came a forlorn cry, a cry from somewhere distant, somewhere just beyond the shelter.

'The young boy's skin prickled as the mournful cry drifted on the wind.'

Yodin raised his eyebrows. "Got that right," he muttered.

'But being a brave lad, he forced his eyes to read once more the lines etched in black. Fear alone would not keep this young warrior from answering his call. Neither life nor limb be price too great when dire need doth beckon.'

Yodin's brow tightened. "Huh?" His jaw tensed. "It's just... a book," he said, pressing his lips. "Then why is my heart still pounding?"

A gust shook the bay window, striking it hard with a dose of pummeling rain. He looked outside, still perturbed about the cry for help. It sure had sounded real.

Before he turned to read more, a blue flash lit the sky. He froze, chills lifting every inch of skin. In the corner of his eye, from just beyond the shed, a dark silhouette had shone, a faint form of someone, something, running straight toward his house.

"M-m-mom... D-d-dad..." he stammered, wide eyes just staring. Outside, all had gone dark. The rain, flinging itself against the window, seemed bent on blinding his view, on cruelly hiding the dark image now running toward him.

He tried to move, yelling at himself to go hide. But only his chest thumped, a steady pounding beat like war drums calling.

Another flash lit the darkness, its light bursting through the window.

"Ahhh!" Yodin screamed, bolting backward over the arm of the chair. He tumbled hard to the floor, once again tangled in the blanket. Scampering to his knees, he peered over the recliner, eyes so wide they burned.

At the base of the window, peering right back at him, shone a face, a girl's face. Wavy through the watery glass, her eyes were filled with the most horrid dread.

RUN!

"Help me!" she cried, her palms pressed hard to the wet glass. Yodin just stared, his whole body a frozen lump of cement.

"Please... I beseech you... help me!"

The terror twisting the girl's face all the more cemented Yodin to the floor. His heart had stopped, his bewildered eyes stuck open.

Then, as suddenly as it had come, the face disappeared. He sat frozen, mind numb. *Who... was... that?*

But a loud thump jolted him. The doorknob rattled. Pounding thumps shook the door as the girl's desperate cries pleaded for him to open.

"Pleecease..." she wailed, her voice like one being dragged defenseless into the fangs of death. "I beg you... pleeease!"

A bright flash lit the sky, a glowing bolt hitting just beyond the fields. Instantly the house shook, the thundering rumble shaking windows and dishes, rattling the whole house as if it were a toy. Yodin gasped, his body jerking like someone shocked back to life.

Again the girl cried. "Hasten! Do bid thee... please... pleeease!" Her cry became a woeful wail, the mournful cry of one forsaken.

But he had seen it. In the flash of blue light, he had seen a bulky form emerge from just beyond the shed, right from where the girl had come. Yodin stood and leaned into the window, squinting to see through darkness and rain. A pause. A distant flash. Then a sudden silhouette—the dark silhouette of a very large, heavy thing... a running thing, no... a loping kind of thing... a galloping, running creature of really big size... coming straight toward the house... *his* house!

"Pleecease!" came the girl's desperate cry. "Grant mercy!"

Before he knew what he had done, his hand yanked open the door.

Tumbling in with the rushing wind and pelting rain, came the girl, her clothes soaked and dirty. Yodin stepped back, staring down at her like some lost halfwit.

YODIN THE RESCUER

She tried to rise but slipped on the tile, falling hard on her rump. When she found her footing, she sprang to her feet.

“Run!” she huffed, swiping matted hair off her face. “We must... run!”



“Run!” she huffed, swiping matted hair off her face.



3 MONSTERS?

For a moment, Yodin just stood with the door wide open as the girl bent over, lungs panting.

“Bolt the door!” she cried. “Quick!”

Dripping wet, the girl wore strange loose clothes with a short, leather vest, like something from *The Arabian Nights*. She looked to be his age, maybe younger. Her thick red hair hung down in a loose tousled braid, with streaks of blond twisting through it.

“Bolt the door!” she yelled, waking the boy from his gazing stupor. He slammed the door shut and turned the deadbolt.

Click.

The girl stared at the lock, then at Yodin, loose strands shielding her face. “That’s it?” she cried, glancing back at the paltry deadbolt. “Where’s the beam?”

Yodin opened his mouth to answer, but the door shook with a bang, the whole frame cracking. At first he thought a limb had fallen, but then it came again, the door frame snapping with a trembling crack.

“Run!” the girl shouted, her eyes scanning the open kitchen to the left, the living room and fireplace to the right. Yodin watched her, still stunned by everything. For a brief moment their eyes met, the girl’s brow wrinkled in consternation.

Yodin stood staring into the lightest green eyes he had ever

seen. *Like Arlo's husky, but green*, he thought.

"Are you daft, boy?" The girl's face twisted. "He'll kill you as well! Run! Now!"

With that, she grabbed his shirtsleeve and ran down the hall. Yodin stumbled behind, his legs and feet numb like his brain.

Running down the hall, his heart jumped, for behind him came the sound of wood splintering, the door breaking free of its hinges and frame.

As they cut right, dashing into his bedroom, a terrific roar bellowed through the house, a sound so loud and hideous, his knees buckled. Had the girl not been dragging him, he would have fallen headlong.

"Have you no weapons?" she cried, glancing about the room. "A sword, a lance?"

Yodin just stared, his flaccid arm pointing to a bow and quiver in a corner. Howling roars echoed down the hall as did the sounds of metal and wood being torn to pieces.

Shaking her head at Yodin, the girl ran to the nearest window. Her trembling hands pushed and pulled but it was locked, a double-hung that slid upward. When she grabbed a lamp from beside his bed to smash the window, he finally called out.

"No! Stop!" He turned back to peek down the hall, immediately wishing he hadn't.

Stuck in the doorway, its horns having pierced the steel door, stood a giant of a... a... a man with a... bull's head! And the feet—they were huge split hooves with long shaggy hair up to the knees. The mangled door scraped and banged against the ceiling, riding on the creature's head like a long thin hat. The two horns had gone clear through and were now stuck, keeping the beast from pursuing them.

"Open it!" the girl cried. "Haste!"

Yodin heard, but her voice drifted into an echoing distance. He glanced her way, but time had seemed to slow.

As if he alone walked while others stood, he could see everything happening in one-tenth its normal speed.

He looked back down the hallway.

Free of its unwanted hat, the bull-headed man now came charging toward the hallway, the hall Yodin and his family had walked a thousand times. Heavy hooves thundered like boulders falling as the long-haired beast crashed into the narrow hall. Its shoulders were so wide and its head and horns so high, it actually wedged itself to a wall-crumbling stop.

Black eyes glared at the boy peering around the corner, the bull's snout snorting as violent words poured from the black lips.

But the eyes of Yodin rested on the huge muscular arms, their long hairy limbs ending in gorilla-like hands—black and leathery, yet tipped with long yellow claws.

He turned to see the girl still struggling with the window, her face now pleading with him to help. Again the creature roared, its mouth opening extremely wide like a yawning lion. Shaking the walls of the hallway, it broke free, sending shards of drywall tumbling to the floor.

Yodin leapt to the window, unlocked the latches, and flung it open. Like he had done it a thousand times, he scooped up the girl and tossed her out. Crawling through, he dropped down beside her. After helping her up, he pointed toward the road, the downpour immediately drenching them.

As they sprinted over the wet lawn toward the road, the creature's raging howl bellowed out behind them.

Past the apple trees, past the row of pines, up onto the driveway, they ran. Yodin cringed as he heard the window shatter, the huge bull-man smashing his bulk through the narrow opening.

"To the road," Yodin huffed, pointing toward the road to which their driveway led. Living in the country, their nearest neighbor was a quarter-mile away. Whereas the road, a two-lane highway, had regular traffic, even on a stormy night.

An angry, hideous roar filled the dark wet air, as the beast

once again wedged itself within the wall. Without glancing back, Yodin led the way up onto the roadside.

A dump truck hauling gravel rumbled past, blasting a wet, sandy spray into their faces.

Crying out, the girl jerked back from the road, her hands covering her face.

“Great Host,” she wailed, her whole body trembling as she watched the red taillights trail away. When two cars sped past in opposite directions, she screamed as if struck. “What malicious soul,” she huffed, “conjures these whirling beasts?”

“What?” Yodin asked, also huffing. “What are you... talking about?”

He glanced back as a loud crash came from his bedroom window. “We gotta run!” he said, seeing the monster tumble out the window as drywall, siding, studs and glass burst out onto the soaked lawn.

But the girl stood frozen. “What dark powers... now beguile us... to block our way?”

Yodin shook his head and stepped toward the road, glancing both ways. “Let’s go!” he called, reaching back to grab her arm. But as soon as he clutched her wrist, she jerked back hard.

“How dare you touch me, you underling of... of...” She wiped her wrist to clean it of his touch.

“What?” Yodin asked, now seeing the bull-man charging over the lawn. “We have to cross... now!”

He again reached for her arm, but again she pulled back. “Touch me not!”

Yodin peered over her shoulder at the oncoming beast. Its huge legs didn’t run, but rather half galloped, like a bull running without its front legs.

“Cross the road with me!” Yodin ordered, reaching once more for the girl’s wrist.

She stepped back, her eyes glaring with indignation. They quickly changed to mortified fear as a pickup flew by, the gust

of misty rain swirling over them.

“Never!” she said, her voice weak and trembling.

Yodin’s heart pumped so hard his ears clogged. The creature was now at the pines, misty clouds puffing out each nostril, its eyes glowing red with rage.

“Palpitating pig butts!” he muttered, grabbing the girl. Hoping to hoist her over his shoulder like a fireman rescuing a maiden, he ended up clutching her waist in both arms. She screamed and fought, swinging and kicking, her heels striking his shins. As he lumbered toward the road, her mouth spewed out endless declarations of terrible judgments to be cast on the vermin-boy and his family.

The words pouring from her lips made no sense to Yodin, but he huffed and puffed, shuffling his way up to the road. Clutching her tight, he groaned, as several sets of cars took their time to fly past.

With each blustery gust, the frightened girl would stiffen and scream, to then resume her frantic flailing. Yodin held tight, flashing a quick glance to the charging bull-man.

“You vilest of vermin, you!” the girl screamed. “May your vile flesh rot in the deepest glooms, you... you... vile thing!”

“Whatever,” Yodin grumbled as he half carried, half dragged her over the wet, shimmering highway.

They reached the other side just as an eighteen-wheeler sped by, the wet wind spattering their backs. Pushed by the gust, Yodin stumbled down the bank, feet tangling in the tall grass. As if struck from behind, he tumbled headlong, the girl still tight in his embrace.

Twisting as he fell, he landed girl-side-up, his back striking the ditch bottom in a lung-bursting wallop. She bounced free of his grasp, rolling several feet away. When she jumped to her feet, she turned to see the bull-man running full speed across the road.

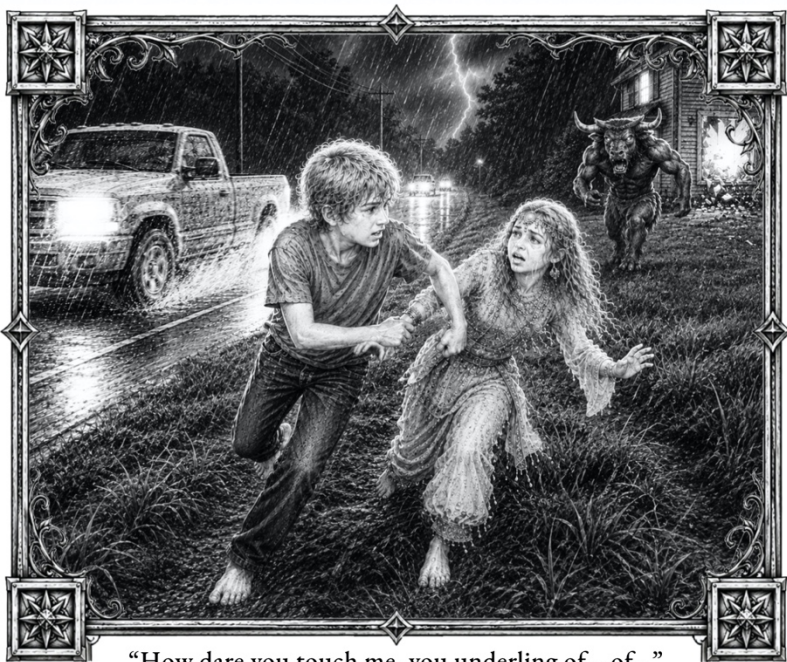
“Run!” she screamed. But Yodin lay flat on his back, mouth open, lungs stuck. “Run, vermin!” she yelled. “Run or die!”

YODIN THE RESCUER

Glancing at the beast, she turned to run, but then reached for Yodin, yanking his sleeve. “Up, vermin! Up!”

Unable to breathe, Yodin lay gulping, his wide eyes seeing only the horns and head of the monster charging toward them. He blinked, trying to see through the rain pelting his face. The girl yanked his sleeve, tearing the cloth. His mouth kept sucking for air that wouldn’t come. His rain-soaked eyes followed the horrid beast as it grew in size, crossing the highway in full gallop.

A loud horn blew like thunder. Headlights came from nowhere, their beams bright upon the running beast. A screech, a wail, a crashing thunk, and the hideous creature was gone.



“How dare you touch me, you underling of... of...”



4 SUCH POWER

Wheels hopped and skipped as airbrakes locked up the tires of the eighteen-wheeler. The air rippled as the truck and trailer squealed and skid, the wake of its taillights showing no sign of the charging bull-man.

A tumbling lump rolled down the bank, stopping just beyond where Yodin lay still struggling to breathe. He strained to see, for something in the lump glinted.

Finally the boy gasped, drawing in a huge gulp. Sitting up, he wiped his face, huffing and heaving, straining to refill his vacant lungs.

Soaked with rain, the girl had gone silent, her eyes wide as ever. "Your monster..." she finally said in a stupor of awe, "killed the mighty Goular." She stared at the taillights of the eighteen-wheeler, her mouth now hanging like a halfwit. She turned to look at Yodin who slowly rose. "You... summoned your beast," she said, "you... lured Goular... lured him to his doom."

She stepped back in fearful awe. "I... beseech pardon, young vector," she said, bowing in submission. "Forgive my reckless words. Implore mercy. I stand humbled... I... I have greatly erred."

Yodin stood, grimacing as he twisted his back. His chest rose and fell with hard-won breaths as he too looked down the highway. Cars began to line up behind, traffic slowing in both directions.

“Is it... dead?” he asked, glancing at the lump several yards away. “Is that its... head?”

The girl saw the black lump, but stood frozen, her wide eyes still on the huge summoned monster with its blinding lights and blaring roar.

The rain had eased a bit, but the two were soaked, looking like they had rolled in grassy mud. For some time they both stood just huffing, wondering if the bull-headed creature was really dead.

Yodin went to the black lump, eyes squinting in the rain. Headlights from numerous cars lit the roadside, the flashing red taillights of the truck pulsing like a beating heart.

Expecting it to be the monster’s head, he approached with anxious steps. A horn blared a few cars back, an angry driver eager to pass. Yodin stooped to study the object, glancing back to check on the girl who hadn’t moved an inch.

Wiping his wet brow, he bent low over the black lump. Seeing the yellow claw-like nails, he grimaced. The severed hand lay palm up, its thick leathery fingers bearing numerous golden rings. Open as if to grasp his throat, the long fingernails rose up from the grass, their jagged tips straining for the bewildered boy.

Yodin dropped to a squat, and bending over the huge hand, he counted to nine. “Nine rings,” he said to himself, studying and pondering the huge severed hand.

He called back over his shoulder, keeping his voice low. “His hand,” he said. “His left hand.”

A string of curses drifted down from the rumbling diesel, as several had gathered with the trucker, all standing and staring at the mangled object wedged beneath the truck.

“A bull,” said one.

“Huge buck,” said another.

Yodin reached down, lowering his finger to touch the hand. For an eerie moment, he just held his dripping finger above the open palm. A dark gloom had come, a feeling of hopeless dread, like some impending doom awaited him. His gut tightened.

With heart and lungs still working hard, he stared into the black palm. Then his jaw tightened, and he slowly lowered his finger. He dabbed it down, quickly pulling it back. Nothing happened. He touched it again, this time feeling the leathery palm.

“This can’t be real,” he said, pondering the strange despair that twisted his gut. He glanced back. The girl hadn’t moved.

A flashlight beam washed over the ditch and field. He ducked down, rain dripping from his head and nose. Counting the rings once more, he then stood and turned about.

“Cheeze-it!” he exclaimed, stumbling backward, tripping over the severed hand. The girl had come up behind him, her gaze locked on the bloody lump. Yodin looked her up and down, his hand over his heart. “You scared the gas right out of me.”

She bent over and, like Yodin, gingerly poked the leathery hand, testing to see if it were truly dead. Then she bent close, and with her delicate fingers, began to work a large ring off the pointer finger. Rain dripped from her hair and nose, her fingers quivering as she worked in a nervous, hurried fashion.

Without looking up, she raised the ring toward Yodin. He just stared, thinking it high time to get back home and away before anyone finds them and starts asking questions.

What will I say? he wondered, picturing himself talking to the news. Then his eyes bolted wide. “My parents! The house! What do I—?” He glanced down at the girl still holding the ring up toward him. “And you... what do I...?”

She looked up questioningly, gesturing with her hand for him to take the ring.

Yodin stepped back, shaking his head.

Her brow wrinkled. “Young vector,” she said, staring up

through the rain. “You have slain the great Goular. His ring is yours.” She gestured again, to which Yodin again shook his head.

She studied him for a moment, then placed the ring in a side pocket of her leather vest. “For when you wish it, young vector.”

She then took a jeweled ring off the little finger, casting it casually aside. Her chest swelled as she took a deep breath, her fingers going slowly to a second ring on the base of the same finger.

Yodin wiped his eyes as he watched the girl work the golden band from off the thick finger. Sniffles came as she slid it free, her hands trembling even more. For a time she sat on her haunches, holding the golden band cupped in both hands, rain filling her delicate palms, dripping to the black hand below.

She convulsed with deep sobs, the rain washing steadily over her slender frame.

“You okay?” Yodin asked, glancing about at all the cars and lights gathering on the road. “We should go. Should go back.”

For a long, awkward time, the girl just rocked back and forth, holding the ring tight in both hands as she groaned.

“We should get out of the rain,” Yodin said again, trying to be gentle. “I think that... monster thing is dead.” He so wanted to ask why she was crying, convinced now it was all a really freaky dream.

Then after a loud sniffle, the girl stood, using the back of her hand to make a quick nose wipe.

She looked to Yodin, then up at the great iron monster with all its eyes of white, red, and yellow.

“You... have rescued me,” she said, bowing her head. “Plead pardon, young vector.”

Yodin watched her, then looked up at the cars now backed far up the road. More flashlight beams swept the area,

searching under the rumbling truck. Approaching sirens sounded in the distance.

“We need to go,” Yodin said, wiping back a strand of wet hair. Then he looked about, fear rising. “Are there more?” he asked. “More of... these things?”

She shook her head. “You have saved me.”

He sighed. “Then we should go back... back to my house.”

“If you wish it,” she said, glancing nervously at the road crowded with vehicles, their lights of red and white flooding the area. “So many,” she said. “You’ve summoned so many.”

She stopped cold when they reached the shoulder, so Yodin tenderly offered his hand.

“It’s alright,” he said, surprised to have her take his hand. He led her through the cars, her whole body shaking as they passed between. He put out his hand to stop the slow train of traffic working its way past the truck and trailer.

When they stepped onto his driveway, the girl paused to study him. Glancing back at the cars, her head slowly wagged.

“Such power,” she said, “yet... so young.” She watched the stream of cars, trucks, and other eighteen-wheelers moving slowly past. “How do you...?”

Yodin too, shook his head as he looked back. He turned to study the girl’s face. The rain had lightened but still dripped freely from her nose, chin, and matted strands of red and blond hair.

“Was that a... minotaur?” he asked, feeling a bit foolish.

The girl cocked her head, face puzzled, then she sniffled sharply. “Goular,” she said. “A wretched man-beast.” Bitterness filled her voice as she fought to stifle a fresh wave of stuttering breaths. After several brief sobs, she composed herself. “But you have killed him, young vector. You alone have... avenged my father.” She paused to study him, her wet, dripping face fully perplexed. “By your power... you have vanquished the mightiest bulgore of Horlock... that most unholy city, where the Woe Shadows roam.”