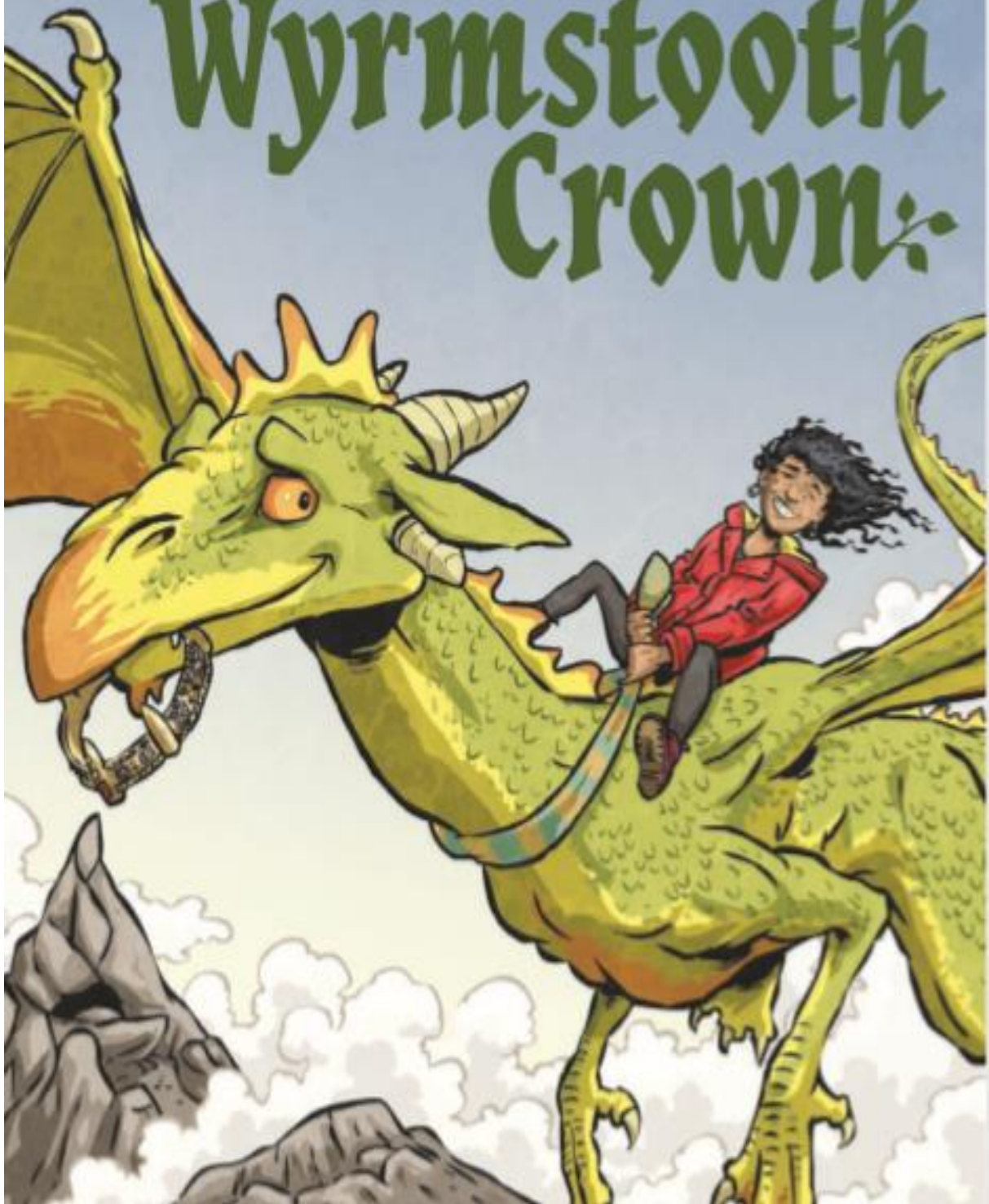


A TWINKL ORIGINAL

The Wyrmostooth Crown:



spinning around in an excited circle. At last, Redbreath was getting to the good part.

The first the humans and dragons knew of the barbarian attackers was smoke on the horizon – a wall of smoke which stretched from the western mountaintops to the roof of the sky. The young boy on lookout duty fled, screaming down the mountainside. “Attack! ATTACK!” he cried, throwing himself at Alfwyn’s feet. “Ten times the number in our clan, and ten times that number again. Each warrior has weapons and armour, the like of which our smiths couldn’t hope to forge in a hundred years. We’re doomed!”

In the middle of the valley stood the moot hill, the place where serious meetings took place. By moonlight, Alfwyn, Tangleclaw and their most trusted advisers gathered on the moot hill for a council of war. The advisers felt only despair.

“We are outnumbered.”

“Their armour is better than ours; their weapons, too.”

Mighty Alfwyn, however, was courageous. “We will

fight to the last man," he declared. "We fight for glory and to earn our place among heroes."

Tangleclaw, the oldest and wisest of dragons, wasn't interested in being a hero if it meant that she'd lose her life. Tangleclaw had the gift of foresight and she had foreseen the village in ruins. However, she revealed none of this to the council. "They are strong, but we are cunning," she said. "Listen to my plan and tomorrow we will beat the barbarians."

A part of Guster wanted to hear again of Tangleclaw's brilliant plan. Brilliant plans were his favourite part of his ma's tales. But his mind kept straying to the humans on the bank. How many had gathered? What were they planning? Did they know already that Redbreath and he lived in the cave at the top of the Wurmstooth Mountain? How could Guster sneak out to spy on them?

As Redbreath closed her eyes and lost herself in the past, Guster had a brilliant idea. He crept, as soft as a whisper, to Redbreath's gold hoard and silently sifted through her treasures. At last, he found the thing that he wanted. Smiling to himself, he tucked the

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The clan and the colony worked all night. Some dug and some sewed, while others bashed and burned. By dawn, the village was ready.

When the barbarian chief marched down the mountainside in the morning, he was surprised by what he found.

It looked as if the town had already been ransacked. The roundhouses were half collapsed, as though a giant had sat on them. The fields were bare and the streets deserted but for a lonely, hunched beggar.

The beggar's hair and beard were matted. He was dressed in rags and he stank like cow manure. As the barbarian chief reached the village outskirts, the beggar cried, "Flee! This village is cursed by a demon. Turn now and run if you value your lives."

But the barbarian chief scoffed.

"You think you can fool me, old man? Lure me into the village and ambush me? I've seen this trick before."

The beggar man quaked.

"Truly this demon is like nothing else on earth," said

the beggar. "In one swoop, it crushed our tithe hall. With one breath, it burned our cowsheds. One stamp of its great foot was enough to flatten three homes. Come and I'll show you. It's not far."

After much persuasion, the barbarian chief followed with a band of warriors. The beggar man led him to the village square. There, they saw a great crater in the shape of a mighty, taloned foot.

"What beast made this?" said the barbarian chief. Just then, a huge shadow swept overhead.

"That one!" cried the beggar.

The barbarians looked up. Above them flew a great, ragged shape with huge, black wings. It blotted out half of the sky.

"Archers, ready your bows!" cried the chief, just as a mighty fireball flew from the creature. It struck down a score of barbarians in one blow.

The beast roared with a sound so loud and harsh that it could split the earth open. As another fireball flew, the barbarian chief lost his nerve.

"Retreat!" he ordered. "Retreat!"

With that, the barbarians fled. Alfwyn took off his beggar's rags, combed his beard and washed himself clean of the stinking manure. The villagers led their cattle and sheep out from hiding and the dragons landed, still clutching the great black sheet that they had trailed through the sky. Tangleclaw's plan had worked; the valley was safe. But that was only the beginning of their troubles.

Guster stared out of the cave mouth. The object hidden beneath his wing was beginning to dig into his skin. It was past midday and he was running out of time!

"In honour of their victory, the human smiths forged a crown of pure gold. They named it after this very mountain: the Wurmstooth Crown." Redbreath opened her eyes and flicked her long red tail. "That crown is the reason humans and dragons are now at war."

Redbreath rose up and stalked to the back of the cave to her treasure hoard. Guster inched closer to the cave mouth.

"The Wurmstooth Crown has been passed from mother to daughter, dragon to dragon, for generations,"

Redbreath said, as she picked up bracelets and helmets and tossed them aside. "Now, it is safe in my hoard."

"Not safe enough," Guster whispered to himself, and with a bound, he leapt out of the cave and up the mountainside.

He could still hear the clangs and crashes of Redbreath's search as he clambered onto his launching rock. He gripped the Wyrmostooth Crown tightly in his talons and leapt.

Guster soared through the cool air, sighing in relief as the breeze soothed his itchy scales. He glided over treetops of yellow and gold, over shimmering streams and thundering waterfalls, and down, down into the valley below. Careful to stay low so that the wizards on the far bank wouldn't spot him, Guster drifted towards the lake. It glittered like liquid jewels. With a kick of his legs and flick of his tail, Guster plunged headfirst into the icy water.