

The warrior did not rise from the mire of unconsciousness easily. He clawed his way desperately back to the light, as feeling slowly crept back into each limb, and then back out as the snow of the Freljord leeched warmth from his body. His eyes opened, and the familiar pale sky came into view, snow pounding down. Covered in gore, he struggled to sit up, the dried blood cracking upon his skin. His entire body was filled with pain, from his legs to his head, and screamed in protest as he hauled himself to his feet.

Olaf looked around, his mind hazy, as he strained to remember what had just occurred. Where he was, and what he was doing - both were obscured to him. He stood in the snow, surrounded by a white crag of rock. He had clearly been in a fight, his jerkin tattered, flesh rent, and axes bloody. Yet he could not spot the other combatants. Taking his axes from the ground, he wiped the steel blades in the snow, adding more scarlet stains to the ground. Stumbling over to the white rock, he reached out, taking a hold of the patterned rock to climb out of the hollow he found himself in.

The warrior stopped, craggy face frozen in disbelief. The rock under his hands was warm, and yielded ever so slightly under his grip. Reaching out, hand shaking, he wiped away the snow that had covered what surrounded him. Olaf trailed his hands along the scaly pattern, before his eyes widened and memory returned to him.

“No.” The word fell heavily from his lips, caught and swept away by the winds of Lokfar. He reached out, took a hold of the body, and began to haul himself up the flesh of the creature. Scrambling atop the beast, he cast his gaze about frantically. The warrior spotted what he was looking for in the near distance, a massive mound of snow to which the body he now stood on led. Olaf began walking, stumbling as he pushed himself on despite his wounds. The distance was not far, but every step seemed a league to the man. As the pale sky began to lighten further, pre-dawn light brightening as the sun rose above the continent, Olaf reached the massive mound, and began his arduous task.

His body cried in agony, flesh closed by the cold opening again to let his blood spill out, yet he continued on, ignorant of the pain. Hands, almost blue from the cold, frantically scraped away the soft snow upon whatever lay below. “No, no, no...” Olaf repeated the word like a mantra, hoping beyond hope that what lay beneath was not what he believed it to be. It did not take long to discover, as he wiped away the last bit of snow to reveal a large eye, almost as large as his torso. It was a poisonous yellow, the pupil a slit - and it was dull, the life having left it not long ago.

Disbelief was being torn away by the stark corpse before him. Desperate to be wrong, he clambered up the head to the top of the skull. Looking from atop his perch, his eyes followed every curve and twist of the beast’s body, until it narrowed to a tip. Certainty set in now, a horrible sinking certainty like a pit opening in his stomach. Only one beast was this long. A beast he had set out to be slain by. A beast dead by his hand.

“NO!”

His voice, raw and cracked, pierced the sky, as the berserker howled in despair at his failure.

The great sea serpent of Lokfar, the monster that had annihilated ships of sailors, torn entire bands of warriors to shreds, lay dead at the hand of one who had wanted to lose.

His knees gave out, the mounting wounds he had reopened finally taking their toll. Olaf's hands hit the skull shortly thereafter, clenching and unclenching in a rhythmic pattern in the snow. His craggy face twisted into a grimace, frost cracking and flaking off as the flesh moved. For a while, he stayed there, on his knees. Finally, after what seemed like ages, he moved. With purpose, Olaf slid off the head of the serpent, and ripped off his jerkin. He pulled it apart, creating long strips, and began to slowly bandage his wounds. Once, twice, three times the leather wrapped around his side, before the warrior cinched it tight. Red slowly began to bloom around the edges of the makeshift bind, but it would do, until he could make it back to a village.

There, Olaf would heal, until the wounds inflicted by the serpent had become just more scars in the tapestry of pain that his body was. Then, he would hold his axes once again, and set off. He had heard tales from hunters of the west Freljord of a cloud dragon, one that came screaming down from the peaks, taking game, and sometimes humans, before returning to its lair to feast.

*Yes, thought Olaf, a grim smile coming across his face. Such a beast would be well worth dying to.*