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Opening extract from
Thorfinn and the Gruesome Games

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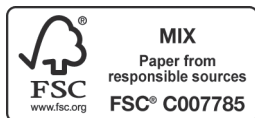
To Jessica – D.M.
To Eben and Aurelie, the little Vikings – R.M.

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CHAPTER 1

Indgar was like any normal Viking village, with sword fighting in the morning, wrestling in the afternoon, and at least three big punch-ups before dinner. And that was just for the old folk.

Around lunchtime the women of the village gathered round the well with their laundry. Not that they ever did any laundry. Usually they just catapulted it into the fjord. It would almost always wash up on shore the next day, slightly cleaner than it had been when it went in.

One of the women spotted the chief's son – a boy called Thorfinn – stepping out from behind a large sheet covering the great hall.

“What are you up to, Thorfinn?” she asked.

“Good day, dear ladies,” said Thorfinn, removing his helmet. “You’ll be the first to see my new surprise. Ta da!” He pulled the sheet away.

The women’s screams could be heard on the other side of the village.



Thorfinn’s father, Harald the Skull-Splitter, Chief of Indgar, sat alone in his chamber, wrapped in furs. He was writing down a list of the





village's competitors for this year's International Gruesome Games. It did not make good reading. The only contest they had a chance of winning was belching.

Harald scratched his head and looked around his private chamber. The walls were adorned with stags' heads, trophies and souvenirs from his many adventures. Harald eyed the village's ceremonial

sword, Whirlwind. He had carried it into battle many times. It was a symbol of his power as village chief.

His eyes moved slowly to the empty space next to it, where his ceremonial shield, Sword-Blunter, used to sit. Whirlwind and Sword-Blunter belonged together, but the shield had been lost in battle many years ago. The chief of the neighbouring village, Magnus the Bone-Breaker, had it now.

Magnus would be at the games too, thought Harald. He would be gloating over the shield and showing it off to everyone. Harald would do anything to get it back.

Suddenly, half the men of the village stormed into his house, yelling over each other and trying to get through his chamber door.

"CHIEF!"
"BOSS!"

Their faces pressed together as they all became stuck, their eyes bulging out of their heads, their arms sticking out all over the place.



"EEK!"

"HUUYYYYYY! BOSS, LISTEN!"

"BLEUUUUGH! CHIEF, QUICK!"

Harald did not like to be interrupted. He rose from his seat, glaring at the men with venom. Harald was famous for his incredibly twitchy eye. It could strike fear into the heart of anyone, even the fiercest of the fierce. And it was quite useful at times like this.

He deployed the twitch. The men froze in the doorway, terrified.



“WHAT is the meaning of this?” Harald roared.
“Barging into my house, my own private chamber.
Well, what do you have to say for yourselves, you
fish-faced idiots?”

For a moment nobody spoke. Lots of eyes just
looked round at one another. Then, it was as if a
spring had been released, as the men exploded
through the door and fell in a heap at Harald’s feet.

“S-s-sorry, Chief,” said one of them sheepishly.
“B-b-but it’s your son, Thorfinn.”

“He’s gone too far this time,” said another.

“You’ve got to stop him,” said one more.

Harald sank into his throne, his head in his hands.

“Ugh!” he sighed. “What has that boy of mine
been up to now?”