

..... Trinoh Dockraiser .....

## Chapter 6

**Y**arm Hullbinder ran his calloused hand along the damp planks of the *Sand Triller's* starboard side, careful not to prick himself on the splintered wood that surrounded the three foot wide breach. Horice Flintlender stood several paces back, arms crossed and eyebrows furrowed, which scrunched up further with every shake of the the ship builder's head.

Yarm briefly turned to face the captain before returning to his inspection. "800 spikes."

Flintlender shook his head defiantly. "No. No way, Yarm. It's a fucking hole."

"Three holes. This is just the biggest one."

"Fine. Three holes. There's no way I'm giving you 800 spikes to fix three holes and a broken mast."

Yarm had lost his patience. He reached out and tore a three foot plank from the ship with the slightest of grunts. He then tossed it at Horice's feet.

The captain motioned to the plank with bulging eyes. "What the hell did you do that for, you fucking brute!? Are you going to charge me for that too?"

"Flintlender. Make no mistake. I'm a very strong man. I could break every one of your fingers like a bundle of twigs. But I'm not strong enough to tear apart a proper ship with my bare hands."

He wasn't getting it. "Wha-? But you just..."

Trinoh had watched this performance for a while, but now he was starting to feel bad for the new ship captain. He thought he might lend him a lifeline. "What Yarm is trying to say, is that your ship is rotting away as we speak. Too much water soaked into the wood."

Yarm closed the distance between himself and Flintlender. The hairless, burly ship builder standing tall over the hunched and skinny former banker was yet another punchline in this humiliating display. Horice's bushy eyebrows remained contorted in anger. *But he's not fooling anyone.*

Yarm continued his assessment. "What happened to those barrels of wax that Trinoh sold you two weeks ago? Did you use them to trim your ball hair?"

"You mean those vats of muck that cost me twenty spikes each? Yes, I used one of them. My deckhands coated the ship last week."

Trinoh uncrossed his arms. "Only one? I sold you three."

Flintlender wheeled on Trinoh. "If I had to spend sixty spikes every time the *Sand Triller* needed a new coat of wax, I might as well melt my coins into paperweights. I used one barrel so I could save the others for future applications."

At this point, Trinoh's head was throbbing. Yarm and the other ship builders had requested his presence to help assess damages and supply tools and materials from his stores. The first few ships had been cakewalks, mainly due to the minor nature of most of the damages, as well as Yarm's reputation. Few challenged his solutions, as well as his fees.

Unfortunately one of those few was Horice Flintlender. If it wasn't for his request for an appraisal, repairs would have started an hour earlier. He was one of the wealthiest people in the city, amassing his fortune from his business dealings across the Peninsula. 800 spikes was three week's dinner for the banker. But if he believed the price could be lower, then damn it he was going to make a fool of himself.

Yarm's expression never shifted over the course of the exchange. "800 spikes, Flintlender. Cough it up or we'll put our wood to use in the ships of experienced captains that can actually waterproof their hulls."

Horice went red in the face. "Scammers! All of you. This whole goddamn dock is full of thieves. You know I can't go anywhere else, so you're shaking me down. I guarantee that if any other ship captain was here you'd..."

Flintlender was interrupted by a harsh shriek. It came from the sliding doors at the entrance to the boathouse. Pushing them open

with great effort was Orek. Once they could move no further, he rested an elbow on the handle and wiped his face with his sleeve.

“Holy hell, guys. Either this door needs to be oiled, or you ship builders are downright super-human.”

Yarm continued to face Horice, but he rotated his head slightly to Orek. “Captain Orek. Pleased to have you join us.”

Flintlender was markedly silent after Orek’s arrival. Trinoh had to suppress a smirk. Word had spread quickly of his friend’s leadership on the sea, especially his salvation of the *Sand Triller*. Flintlender would have been at the bottom of the ocean if it wasn’t for Orek lending him a tow rope, so perhaps he didn’t want to make a scene in front of the more respected captain.

Trinoh’s mood changed as well when Orek walked in, as is the affect he has on most people. His charisma and optimism radiated from him constantly. He always had a bright smile, standing stark against his chestnut skin. The tight curls of his hair were cut short, accentuating his sharp, clean cut appearance. Orek was two years older than Trinoh, but his smooth face and the energetic look in his eyes made him look not a day older than thirty.

Orek joined the circle of men. He gave Trinoh a sharp pat on the back. Trinoh had expected it, so he planted his feet firmly on the ground in preparation. “So,” Orek said with a quick clap. “What are we talking about? Is the *Sand Triller* going to make it?”

Trinoh responded. “It’ll survive, at the measly cost of 800 spikes.”

Flintlender finally opened his mouth. “But...”

“That’s great to hear, Horice,” Orek interrupted. “You know, my crew on the *Silver Watch* said your ship was doomed, that I was a fool for dragging it back to shore. I’m glad for a small cost you can get it back out there and rack up some quality catches.”

“Yes, but... 800 spikes is quite steep.”

“Oh... I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have assumed.” Orek unslung a pouch from his belt and started picking through its contents, making sure to knock as many coins around as possible. “Captain to captain, I could cover some of the costs. We need as many ships as we can get out there after the storm.”

Flintlender broke out his own money purse, larger and made with a much finer cut of leather. “Oh no no no, that is quite all right,

Captain Orek. In fact, Mr. Hullbinder and I were just about the finalize the transaction.” Horice moved over to a work table and started pulling out spikes from his bag. The triangular coins depicted an image of the spikes atop Coello’s head. with the head itself absent. A small pile formed neatly as he continued counting each coin carefully.

Yarm looked at Flintlender’s display, finally showing a bit of emotion; satisfaction. “Trinoh. Obviously we’re going to need more timber to perform this job. Could you have your men carry five or six palettes over?”

“Certainly, Yarm. Care to accompany me, Orek?”

“And do all the heavy lifting? You know it.”

Trinoh and Orek exited the boathouse and began the short walk to the dock houses. The two guilds shared the same pier, and sometimes the same buildings, meaning cooperation was quite common. Trinoh and the shipbuilders would often trade materials, equipment, and men when the need arose.

The two friends waited until they were far from the boathouse before letting their laughter ring out. “I told you,” Orek said in between chuckles. “Flintlender will always back down when his credibility is called into question.”

“We tried that. Yarm and I insulted him and his qualifications so many times.”

“Yes. But were you as subtle and patronizing as I was? Also, Flintlender doesn’t give a crap about being a ship captain. If you want to really hurt his pride, you have to hit him right in the sack.”

Trinoh looked up at his friend with a raised eyebrow.

“The money sack,” Orek explained.

“Oh. Ohhhh.”

The two men reached Trinoh’s dock house and pulled the door open together. Inside were a small number of dockraisers, all busy carting around materials and performing maintenance on the structure. Each greeted Trinoh and Orek with respect as they walked past. One of Trinoh’s workers that walked past was Carten, carrying a line with a hunched posture.

Trinoh stopped him with a hand on the shoulder. “Carten, how is your chest holding up?”

He shrugged. “Well, it feels like a giant set of claws is digging into my lungs with every breath, but I think I’ll be fine. I’m keeping busy. Just helped pull in some buoys from Dock Six.”

Trinoh shook his head. “I think you need to pay a visit to Dr. Bonesetter. Most men don’t walk away from an anchor to the chest.”

“But, Head Dockraiser, there’s so much work that’s popped up after the storm. I want to make sure I’m useful.”

Trinoh removed his hand from Carten’s shoulder. “Fine. Let’s compromise. Yarm and the other shipbuilders need six palettes of timber. Go around and ask who wants the job. Once you’ve gathered enough men, go to Bonesetter and don’t come back until tomorrow.”

Carten had already started moving. “Yes, Head Dockraiser.”

The man had walked five feet before Trinoh turned to face him again. “And if I catch you wheeling those palettes yourself...”

“Yes, Head Dockraiser.”

“Shit, Trinoh,” Orek said when Carten was out of earshot. “What are you going to do, break his other twelve ribs?”

“What? You never have to threaten your workers to take a day off? Hmmm... Maybe, just maybe, my crew is better than yours.”

Orek put a hand to his chest. “Ouch, my pride. My crew is going to have you to thank for the hell I’m about to put them through.”

Trinoh started walking away. “Nice try, Orek. You couldn’t be intimidating if you had the head of a bluntbison. Now, follow me to my workshop. I want to show you something.”

Trinoh’s workshop was separated from the rest of the dock house by a thin metal wall with a cut-out doorway. Trinoh motioned for Orek to step inside first, and when he did, the dockraiser heard his friend grunt in pain and curse.

“Dammit, Trinoh!” He spat, clutching his knee.

“Sorry. I didn’t think I had put it so close to the door. I guess I got used to going around it.”

A large mechanism was situated in the middle of the workshop. It was elongated, about twenty feet long, with large planks of wood attached along its length. Each plank had large, blunted metal teeth bolted on either side. It was slightly elevated, with the wood planks disappearing over and around one end of the machine and

reappearing on the other side. A system of gears and ropes held the wood together around two central beams.

Orek finished worrying over his leg. “What the hell is this thing? Looks like a pier. A pier that was designed to eat whoever walks on it.”

Trinoh squatted down to inspect the inner workings of the machine. “I call it a Tread Mover. Some traders that stopped by the city about a year ago described the fundamentals of the design, so I wanted to make one myself. They can be used to move large objects over distances with minimal effort.”

The dockraiser moved to the far side of the machine. He removed a large hammer from his belt and placed it on one of the wooden treads. “Hey!” He yelled to Orek. “You want this hammer?”

“Sure I want it. But seriously, I can just walk over there. No need for theatrics.”

Trinoh bent down next to the machine and began turning a heavy crank. The treads started moving, accompanied by a harsh shriek as the gears and ropes sprung to life. After sixty seconds of cranking, the hammer arrived at Orek’s position. He picked it up and admired it closely. “Great work, Trinoh. Pretty soon, we won’t even need to use our feet anymore.”

Trinoh ignored him. “One of the potential uses for it is transporting beached ships back to the sea. This is a scaled down prototype, but it’s already capable of lifting hundred of pounds. If we could get one under the hull, and lay out a short line of Tread Movers, we could transfer any vessel over hundreds of feet with ease.”

The captain feigned shock. “And rob our shoreline of such beautiful and iconic landmarks? Absolutely not.”

“Orek, would it kill you to be impressed with me just once?”

Orek walked over to Trinoh and handed his hammer back. “I am impressed. But I’m worried that if I make it known, you’ll want to show me every single one of your crazed inventions.”

The dockraiser continued inspecting the machine for damages. “It’s not necessarily an invention, but in order to gain access to the complex technology of the greater world, all one can do is build it themselves.”

Trinoh and Orek's conversation was interrupted by a knock at the opening to Trinoh's workshop. Standing in the doorway was Uffie Fountainlady, half her body hidden by the frame as she sheepishly looked around the room. "Oh good," she said almost in a whisper. "You're here, Trinoh. I was hoping I wasn't too late to catch you."

*Oh no. Not with Orek here. I've had enough embarrassment for one week.* Trinoh quickly returned the hammer to his belt and turned to face Uffie, standing as straight as he could manage. "Yes, yes. I'm still here. Still have a long day's worth of work to get done."

"Oh. Well, I was just going to ask for a small favor. I can come back tomorrow if you..."

Orek rushed towards her, his beaming smile intact. "Nonsense. Trinoh is on his lunch break. He was showing me around his new invention here. Please, come in." He gingerly grabbed her hand and led her inside.

Uffie was startled by Orek's friendliness, but everyone new Orek to be energetic and personable. "Oh, Orek. I didn't expect you to be here. I wanted to thank you for bringing all those ships back to the Watch. Though I'm sure you've heard that many times already."

"Maybe a couple dozen at this point. People act as though I steered all those ships myself. Never mind that. Take a look at this giant thing that Trinoh built." He walked her up to the device and released her hand.

Uffie stared down at the machine with great curiosity, her eyes moving side to side drinking in every detail. She then bent over with her hands on her knees to get a better look at the internal mechanism. Her long straight hair fell like thin curtains in front of her face. "This is amazing, Trinoh. It's like a giant, elongated wheel. What does it do?"

Trinoh realized that he had been silently staring at Uffie. "Oh. What does it do? Of course. Let me demonstrate." He put his hand on the hammer in his belt once again.

"It moves heavy things along its length," Orek interrupted before the hammer left its leather holster. "Like beached ships and materials."

Trinoh pushed the hammer back down. "Yes. What Orek said. I call it a Tread Mover. It's...just a prototype."

Uffie stood and made eye contact with Trinoh for the first time since she arrived. “Well, if this is the prototype, I can’t wait to see the final design.” She went around the Tread Mover to get closer to Trinoh. “Um...I came because I’m looking to start a small project. I want to honor the lives that were lost because of the hurricane.”

Her hands fumbled around her waist a few times before she found several small scrolls tucked into her pockets. She unrolled them and stood next to Trinoh, showing him the designs. “I want to create a few small sculptures. One for Nellwa Scribemaster, and one for each of the three ships that were lost at sea. Hopefully the council will let me display them in or around the Council Chamber.”

The drawings were impeccable, clear and precise with mathematical measurements and even cross sections. Nellwa’s face was highly accurate, and the three images of the lost ship’s figureheads; a beautiful nymph, a splash of water, and a wide ram head; were uniquely designed with a subtle touch of artistic flair. *What is she still doing in this city. She could be the greatest artist in the land. She IS the greatest artist in the land.*

“So Trinoh,” she continued. “I was hoping to borrow, well I guess not borrow, but buy a few chunks of stone. If, of course, you have any lying around.”

Trinoh had practically everything lying around his workshop. He found use for any resource he could get his hands on, and low supplies made him anxious. Uffie might find more stone and ore at the smith shop, but Trinoh had a reputation with being forthcoming with his stock. “Ah yes. Of course, Uffie. I have shelves of stone over in this corner.”

He led her over to the shelves and showed her the chunks, some of them as large as her torso. He removed a smaller one and handed it to her. Her arms were just long enough to hug the stone tightly as she inspected its strength and shape.

“Wow. Thank you, Trinoh. But I’m not sure how I can carry four of these back to my studio.”

Trinoh glanced behind her at Orek. He winked at Trinoh. Then he winked again, over and over again, his smirk growing wider.

Trinoh looked back at Uffie. “I will...get you a crate, and a hand cart so you can wheel it back. You can bring them back next time you stop by.”

Orek gave him a subtle thumbs down below his chest.

“That would be great,” she said, still straining from the heavy stone. “How much do I owe you?”

From behind Uffie’s head, Orek held up a hand, his fingers together forming a clear “0”.

“Two spikes each,” Trinoh answered.

Orek threw his hands up in silent defeat.

Uffie payed the eight spikes happily and picked out three more chunks of stone. Orek and Trinoh helped her pack everything and she set off back to her studio.

“That was a poor play,” Orek whispered as Uffie passed through the doorway and waved at the two men. “She could have been butter in your hands.”

“She’s a married woman, Orek.”

“What kind of performance was that? You didn’t even compliment her drawings. At this rate your dad’s never going to get grandkids.”

“There was no performance. I’m not trying to woo her. Are you going to protect me when Ulric Rockcharger comes barreling in here looking to make me another head shorter?”

Orek took a seat on the Tread Mover. “You know she thinks you’re a catch. Women love creative types. She can have a lot more fun with you than she has with Ulric.”

“Get off my machine. I don’t want you breaking it.”

Orek shifted to his side, resting an elbow and his feet on the wooden planks. “I thought you said it could support hundreds of pounds.”

“Yes. But I think you may need to lay off the fish for a while. Your trousers are looking a bit tight.”

Orek raised an eyebrow at Trinoh and remained silent. *Sometimes Orek doesn’t need to say anything to get under my skin.* Trinoh sighed. “What do I have that Ulric doesn’t have?”

Orek straightened his posture. “Oh how about a sense of humor, a personality, a soul?”

“Yes, but am I mysterious and aloof? Have I probably killed someone? Do I have a beard that covers my whole torso?”

Orek chuckled. “Someone has an inferiority complex it seems. I’ll pray for you, Trinoh. Hopefully one day you’ll find a woman to cover you like a bear skin.”

*Unbelievable. Orek and Enko talked for one hour last night and this is what they chose to discuss.* “You two just love laughing at my expense.”

“We’ve spent thirty two years laughing at each other. Why stop now? Here, it’s your turn. Feel free to make fun of Enko for getting mauled by a cat.”

Trinoh sighed. “Unfortunately, I’ve always been the mature one.”

Trinoh moved to the shelves in the corner and began rearranging the stone chunks to fill the gaps. The two friends were silent for a few moments.

“Trinoh?” Orek asked. “Are you nervous about tonight’s council meeting? Looks like you and Enko are in deep shit with the Watchmaster.”

Trinoh stayed focused on his task. “I’m going to take full responsibility for the endeavor and apologize profusely. That is my strategy. Public opinion will be in my favor no matter what. I’d rather have the support of the masses than the council any day.”

“The masses don’t control your monthly budget.”

He ignored Orek. “I just hope the punishment isn’t too severe. I’ll accept a personal reprimand, but the dockraisers, and the docks while I’m at it, don’t need to suffer for my actions.”

Orek laughed. “Dammit Trinoh. You hammer planks of wood together for a living. You don’t need to be the picture of honor and dignity in this city.”

Trinoh moved the last stone into place. *Hammers and nails hold this entire city together. Without men like me, and their precious honor, everything would fall apart.*