

Far to the east, over the Tirsuli Mountains lightning can be seen illuminating the low lying clouds, at a frightful frequency. As the thunder storm approaches, Advait, with assistance from Vikkama and Pradaa, manoeuvres the great lifting arm and drops a score of large cut timber logs right in front of the southern sally port, effectively blocking it. He then swings the arm out over the wall. Vikkama and Pradaa crawl out onto the jib and slither down the sturdy rope cable and onto the outer ramp. Advait then cuts the cable, affixes a heavy timber as a counter balance and lowers it to the ground. The guards break through the heavy wooden door and begin to file out, onto the wall. He sets off the black powder which Vikkama had installed, causing confusion and injury upon the wall. With a final look into the chaos of the inner keep, he swings himself over the wall and descends as the timber rises. Once at the bottom, he lets go of the rope and the timber crashes to the ground, bringing with it the remainder of the cable.

They run down the ramp works as a hail of arrows fall all around them. By the time they get to the docks, they are out of arrow range, but a sharp explosion right beside them sinks a loaded cargo vessel.

“Cannon fire! They’re firing cannons! They have cannons!”

“Of course we have cannons, you stupid monk,” yells Pradaa, “What were you thinking? This is a military fortification.”

A cannon ball whizzes over their heads and another explosion takes out the end of the dock upon which they are standing. They stumble over each other, while, as planned, they board a cargo vessel that had previously been loaded for their needs. In their haste, they forget to undo the stern line from the pier. Another explosion on the dock severs the line and knocks Advait to the floor of their boat. Vikkama raises the sail just as the gate at the top of the ramp crashes open and torch-bearing palace guards pour out in pursuit.

Another cannon ball misses them by only one or two meters, sending a torrent of water into the air.

While it is dark, they are not invisible. The wind quickly carries them beyond cannon range. They can see castle guards, carrying torches, boarding the remaining vessels, getting ready to follow. Behind the pursuing palace guards, the conflagration inside the castle walls grows and seems to consume much of the island.

“Wind, wind wind. What’s happening to the wind? Why’s there no wind?”

Vikkama focuses his mind on the torches of their pursuers. He summons a light, oxygen rich zephyr down the hill. The torches brighten and suddenly explode in a shower of gold and green, blinding the guards and sending them tripping over themselves as they try to make their way along the docks.

Advaith drops the sail and breaks out the oars, but they are hopelessly out paced by the guards coming after them. With only two rowing, Prada and Vikkama have little chance against the ten to twelve oarsmen powering each of the pursuing vessels. Now, in the distance, the entire Naga Dama Island seems on fire.

In desperation, having no other options, Vikkama looks in his bag and finds the naga flute. “This is no time for music!” yells Pradaa, slapping the flute from Vikkama’s hands, sending it spinning into the water.

“That was a naga flute you idiot! It was our only hope!” He lunges at Pradaa, and they both tumble off the central plank seat into the bottom of the boat.

“Get with it you two! They’re gaining. We need time.”

The pursuers are gaining. Both Pradaa and Advaith have recovered and

are now pulling desperately at the oars. Despite their efforts, in a few moments they are within archery range again and they must hide beneath the gunwale against the rain of arrows.

With a crack of thunder, it begins to rain and lightning sears across the sky. Advait lifts his head and peers over the gunwale at the pursuing vessels, now almost upon them. He crawls forward and grabs the central seat of the boat and with one mighty yank, separates it from the floor and gunwales. He sets it up on the transom to act as a shield against the steady onslaught of arrows.

Vikkama, once again, forces his attention on the torches of the nearest pursuing boat. There is a sudden flare-up and the torch flames leap onto the wooden mast, setting it alight. The occupants try to lift the mast from its step in a desperate attempt to throw it overboard before the entire boat is consumed in flame.

Advait sees a disturbance in the water. A boarding hook comes over the side, despite Pradaa's efforts at repelling, it almost skewers Vikkama as he lay in shelter at the bottom of the craft.

Another flash of lightning and Advait can't believe his eyes. A large naga rises out of the water and crashes its upper body against the nearest of the pursuing vessels. The boarding hook is shattered. Vikkama gets up from the bottom of the boat and the trio watch in disbelief as the lightning continues to crackle all around while another, naga raises its tail and slashes across the bow of a second pursuer, then a third and fourth. Soon there was nothing in the water but men screaming for help, then in a moment, not even the screams could be heard, as the naga pulled the men under suffocating them or lopping of their heads with their scaly tails. In less than three minutes, those in pursuit were completely destroyed at the hands of the naga.

Advaith and Vikkama are clinging to the side of their boat, fearing for their lives.

An ancient, bearded naga slowly raises its head near their boat. Large, fierce eyes, stare at them with anger, but the gaze softens as he inspects the mariners. Water drips from his chin, into their boat. “I am Alban, eldest of the Keshod naga. Are you unharmed?”

Pradaa faints and is caught by Vikkama, who gently lowers him to the floor.

Both Advaith and Vikkama are speechless, but manage a nod.

Alban turns his head from one side to the other, inspecting the travellers. He seems to let out a sigh. “That is well. We have been asked by Eldaü, the Northern Queen to watch for you. We, and others, have followed your movements, waiting for word to be of any assistance.”

Advaith and Vikkama get to their feet, steadying themselves against the mast and gunwale. They look around and see four other naga swimming nearby, turning up pieces of broken boats with their snouts or tails, tossing them into the air. The rain continues, but the lightning has moved further westward and now seem centred over mouth of the Mur Valley.