

TREADING THE DARK SANDS.

By Thomas V

My stomach was in knots. Our sand skiff was about to transport us through the dreaded Dark Sands, where terrible, unkillable creatures called Dreghrezu roamed. But that wasn't the scariest part; a terrible creature of stone and fire was rumored to wander up and down these dark dunes. I'd overheard a hushed conversation about a man whose skiff had been half destroyed by the beast known as Greshherg.

"It'll be fine," my best friend Argo said.

"We've never been here, you don't know that!" I responded, my voice wavering.

"You're always so anxious," Argo mumbled, sighing deeply.

"Alright scrubs!!!" yelled our guide, who had a scar over his eye,

"We are about to enter the most dreadful part of Zermo. So get on the skiff, no one wants to be here!"

We all started loading onto the sand skiff. As soon as the last person boarded, the skiff started to move. I looked ahead, and a giant wall of shadows lay before us, frothing back and forth, like it was *breathing*. I shivered. We entered the inky void and all vision faded, all I could hear was my own breathing and the

breathing of others. I heard what sounded like muffled footsteps, but bigger, quicker.

“Do you hear that?” I whispered in the eerie stillness.

“Hear what?” Argo whispered back, but I heard him snap to attention.

Then all sound disappeared, all but the footsteps, everyone was preparing for the inevitable.

A blood curdling screech filled the air. “Somebody! Somebody light the fires!!” I yelled drastically. I heard a clink of flint against steel, as the skiff and everybody around me came into view. Five enormous silhouettes sprang from the darkness, each one has a different head, one a spider’s, another a lizard’s. Speaking of which, possibly the biggest and meanest of the quintet, a large, blue lizard with an ugly glare landed before me, black outlining its eyes.

“Arrgh!!!”

“Everybody run!”

Chaos erupted as the Dreghrezu’s long limbs stretched outwards, wrapping around soldiers and merchants. The lizard reared its head back. SCREECH!!! It clawed its way up the main mast, the others in pursuit, until they left the light’s reach. Everything went still. Argo broke the silence.

“What’s gonna happen now?”

His question was answered when long arms stretched down and dragged people up into the shadows above, their screams suddenly silenced. Then, I sensed movement behind me. A green limb, poised to strike, flew at Argo, gripping his waist.

“NO!!!” I yelled.

Some sort of supernatural instinct takes over as I clutch onto a discarded knife and heave it at the arm of Argo’s captor. It sank into the spot just below its wrist. It released Argo, but then the creature jumped down, the boards of the skiff creaking on impact. It gripped the weapon in its mouth and, when slipped it out, a thin line of green ooze squeezed out from the wound. This creature had the head of a spider, with four arms and four legs instead of two. *Yikes.*

The instinct took over again, and the arachnid's chest glowed a warm, golden glow in my eyes. As it rumbled towards me, I rolled to the side, hearing a loud crash as it connected with a barrel behind me. I take a sword that had been thrown into the deck of the skiff. Prying it from between the floor boards, the beast that was out to get me seemed to find itself, and charged at me again. This time I was ready.

“Arrrgh!!!” I yelled, diving towards it.

It swiped me with one hand, sending me flying towards the secondary mast.

“Maria!!” Argo yelled, but the Dreghrezu brushed him away.

An idea formulated in my head, and as my attacker caught up to me, I put my plan into action.

I dodged to the side, and as it whipped around, I rammed into it. This was an unexpected move. The arachnid tumbled backward with the weight of me on its chest and it slammed against the secondary mast. Thinking quickly, I assailed the beast, swinging my blade in a wild arc. The steel weapon ripped a deep line across its body, coating me in layers of goo. I plunged the sword into the monster's chest, deep through it as it splintered through the mast. As its face flashed with pain, anguish and fury, the terrible beast let out a screech so loud that it swept me off my feet. As I found myself, another screech echoed from the shadows beyond. A creature, bigger than any creature the Dark Sand held, became visible from afar, shrouded in a red tint. It was then I realized that the screaming on the skiff had ceased. Everyone, even the Dreghrezu, had stopped to stare at the fire-like haze surrounding the creature.

"Is that what I think it is?" Argo asked, clutching his side from where the spider-beast had hit him.

"What?" I asked, dazed and confused.

Wait... could it really be it, the mythical beast that haunted all who had heard its name? The thing roared, a deep, throaty growl. *Gulp.* It was impossible, but here they were, it was the *Greshherg*. The creature lumbered forward at an alarmingly fast rate. The Dreghrezu all looked at each other, before leaping off the skiff

towards the opposite direction of the advancing Greshherg, leaving the arachnid-one behind.

“Get this stupid thing moving!!!” yelled our guide.

The crew wasted no time getting the skiff moving, but no one dared get close to the remaining Dreghrezu, which was slowly dislodging the sword! I grabbed a hammer and ran to the end of the sword, where it was sllooowwwlllly retracting into the mast. I swung the hammer repeatedly onto the end of the blade, bending it until it was bent out of shape. *There, that should stop it.*

Glaring out at the Greshherg, I saw it was changing its course, running more into the direction ahead of us. Dim but visible, I saw it was running towards an angled wreck, half buried in the sand – the beast was heading straight for it!!! It was going to use it like a ramp! Before I had time to call out, it had reached the slanted wreck, and leapt high into the sky. Our only guess to its location was the dim red glow in the inky void. Then the light got brighter and brighter and brighter, until the Greshherg ripped through the shadows and the other secondary mast. The entire skiff shook. The monstrosity recoiled, then followed in pursuit, only inches away from the back of our skiff. Light brewed in its mouth as its jaw was unhinged.

Dashing to the back of the skiff, I saw that the monster was slowly catching up. Due to the absence of one of the masts, we were slowing down. Then, to my surprise, the fires cast the same, golden glow.

“Cut the fires! Cut the fires now!” I screamed at the soldiers. “Are you insane!?!” someone yelled.

“Do it!” I yelled back.

The fires were put out, but not before I reached the wheel and turned us away from the monster. Darkness crowded in from all sides, except the light red glow cast from the monster, it looked confused. It couldn't see in the dark. *Perfect.* But just as I thought we were in the clear, the Dregrezu started screaming. *Oh great.* It was luring Gressherg back.

“Get this thing moving!!” I yelled drastically, “But keep the lights down!”

“We're nearly to port!”

“We have to lose it!!!”

“We're all gonna die!!!”

I ignored the screams, and instead jumped down onto the main deck, swiped a sharp looking knife from a soldier and slit the throat of the Dregrezu. With that problem over, I went up to a crate and used the knife to pry it open. New year's fireworks. *Splendid.*

I tied them all together and lit them, one fuse at a time. As I let them fly, one exploded, a pause... then the next and the next and the next and the next. The Grishberg was drawn to each blast of light, and it slowly walked in their direction.

We exited the shadows and came to port, but I looked at the mast, and my stomach filled with dread. The Dreghrezu was stuck fast onto the mast, green goo slowly dripping from its neck. I had killed an unkillable creature, so how would people react?

—THE END—