

Rain fell in a torrent, the pouring water obscured my vision through the visor of my helmet. I wasn't sure if the source of the shaking ground was the rolling thunder or the heavy footsteps of Y Ddraig Ddu, The Black Dragon. My heart rattled in my chest, blood thundered in my ears, deafening me to the sound of bloodshed. Maybe I was already deaf. Perhaps I'd never hear my darling Branwen laugh again or little Cariad sing from the cottage window. That life seemed so far away.

I pulled the helmet from my head and threw it to the side as I stumbled forward. The rain fell freely over my face, into my mouth, down my neck, and under my steel armor. I savored the cold rush, mingling with the hot and sweaty skin underneath. My feet carried me forward, over the nearly barren, scorched landscape, and they sunk into the black earth. This field was once a wildflower meadow where children played. A sound leaked into my awareness, past the ringing and pounding, I heard a whimper. I halted my march and peered down to find tangles of limbs and bodies, burnt and broken. Entire squadrons and battle formations were decimated. My numbness subsided and my senses awoke in a flood of stimulation. My breath caught in my throat as I locked eyes with the pleading soldier. His face was untouched, unmarred by the horror of our enemy. But he was dying, it was clear. He lifted a bare, trembling hand towards me. Bike clawed at my throat. Like lambs to the slaughter, thousands of people were sent to fell the beast. At what cost? I didn't have time to comfort this man in his last moments. I knew that if I stopped, if I did as I should have and fell to one knee, took his hand, and sang the final rites... I would have followed him to Annwn and not seen my beautiful Branwen and Cariad again. So, I closed my eyes and continued walking. His cries followed me through the rows of dead archers and spearmen.

A roar echoed over the battlefield, followed by an inferno that blossomed in the sky, lighting up the darkness of the storm. The blacks and grays of the rain-stuffed clouds were painted in burnt pinks and reds. I quickened my footsteps, forcing myself into a limping run. I vaguely remembered being thrown from a horse, the recollection brought out a dull ache in my hip. Thankfully that was all I could feel, a dull ache, the reality of the injury needed to wait. I was keenly aware that once this battle was over, when the thrill finally leached away, I would never walk unaided again.

I approached the crest of a hill, towards my foe, when there was a desperate cheer. The sound of men and women screaming in relief, followed by horror. The closer I got, the more chaotic and frantic the energy felt. The air was hot and unstable, like the seconds before a

lightning strike. I scrambled up the remainder of the hill on all fours and was met by the sight of the Dragon. It was facing away; I stood behind it gasping for air. Its sleek black scales were peppered with arrows and spears, jutting from its pale flesh underneath. Its horned neck moved like a striking snake. It was thicker than any tree trunk I'd ever seen. With a head even larger than my quaint cottage, its mouth held teeth longer than any man. Crimson blood dripped from its maw as it roared at the meager remains of the Cymru Army. It shot out a line of hot Dragon fire and the soldiers scattered like ants in its wake. The leathery wings were tied down with heavy rope. The Wing Piercer mercifully worked. I looked towards the large, newly constructed crossbows mounted to the hilltops, loaded with steel arrows longer than a banquet table and ropes tied to the end. The ropes threaded through the creature's wing webbing at multiple points and pinned them both down, they were fanned completely open, revealing the breathtaking wingspan of the beast. More ropes pinned down its tail, which ended at a dangerously sharp point.

Soldiers were trying and failing to anchor the beast's head, it continued to snap and bite at anything it could reach. There wasn't much time. I had to do something. I pushed myself to my feet and rushed toward the monster. A short distance away, a long spear poked from the ground. The handle was a strong wood with a polished steel tip. My hand wrapped around the shaft and I hefted it from the ground with a grunt. My mind emptied as I bounded towards the captured foe, approaching its ripped left wing. It twitched and pulled uselessly at its restraints.

I scrambled up a pile of my fellow soldiers and threw myself onto the wings of Y Ddraig Ddu, landing awkwardly, I almost lost my grip. The skin was rough and wrinkled, tough under my weight. I pushed myself up and ran without stopping towards the spine of the colossus. The spine was armored with spikes, hard as bone. Every movement from the Dragon underneath almost sent me tumbling off. I stabbed downwards with all of my remaining strength, pushing the spearhead into the flesh of the animal. In and out, I drove the spear home. I made my way towards the neck, digging as deeply as I could, stabbing wildly as I went.

I stood tall on the back of the Dragon, ready to lunge for the neck, when it swung its pendulous head towards me. I stood face to face with the bloodied beast, its growl sending hot steam across my body. I felt the sweat sizzling under my armor as steam rose in wisps around me. I took a hot, almost searing breath, and screamed as I drove the spear into its eye.