

**Din's Quest**

*By: Lucas Harvey*

“This is it. The final battle.” declared Din to his party members after reaching the end of the excruciatingly long and dimly lit hallway. “Everything we have faced up to this point has gotten us to this moment. Is everyone ready?”

Din motioned toward Marsh, his first and closest ally. “Yes.” Marsh responded confidently. Marsh was a simple-minded individual. Once a nameless, lone wolf dwelling in a marsh, he is now a young boy’s companion on a quest to slay a demon. Marsh had an athletic build and was clad in leather armor adorned with various leaves from head to toe, as well as a verdant cloak that casts a shadow over his earthen eyes. Marsh also carried his handcrafted bow with a quiver of specialty arrows.

Din nodded his head at his friend’s answer and turned his gaze towards Anna, his most beautiful ally. “Ready as I’ll ever be, Din.” Presented with their worst challenge yet, Anna kept her calm demeanor. She had her short blonde hair parted to the left, revealing her scarlet cube earring which glowed in the presence of demons. The light from her earring had lit the way for the team as their enemy’s presence caused the earring to emit tremendous amounts of red light several miles away from his throne room. She adjusted her white silk robes and secured her crimson scarf before clasping both her hands together.

Anna had joined their adventuring party one night when Din and Marsh had wound up in an inn bloodied and battered from a gruesome battle. Both of them had passed out moments after walking through the doorway and Anna had been kind enough to lug them all the way to her room, where she proceeded to heal them. Din still wasn’t exactly sure why she had helped them. She could have simply ignored them, but she hadn’t done so and they became friends instead. Din offered for her to join them, although Marsh wasn’t too content with Din’s decision. The aspiring healer responded immediately with a twinkle in her eyes, “It would be my pleasure.”

With a sigh of relief, Din turned his attention to his last and most competent ally, Carla, who nodded in affirmation. She hadn’t been with the team for long, having only joined their team three months ago, however, it felt like she had been with them their entire year-long journey. Carla had long brown curly hair and tanned skin. The skin-tight leather armor that she always wore revealed her arms, stomach, and legs to avoid restricting her movement. She carried her quarterstaff for combat but she more often used her legs and fists, striking swiftly in a fight. She would often swoop in at the perfect time to save Din when he faltered. Over a short amount of time, Din had grown quite fond of her company. “Are you ready Din?” She asked in turn.

Din didn’t respond right away. He had been waiting for this moment for several months and he hadn’t fully realized that his quarry was in sight. Din had gone on this quest to avenge his friends and family. He had been the sole survivor of the demon invasion in Alderwood. Alderwood had been Din’s home for as long as he could remember, until one morning he awoke to the entire town smoldering. Everyone had already been brutally murdered before he awoke on that dreadful morning. Everyone except his mother, who told him the name of the creature who had destroyed their beloved home. *Sirius*. Her soul departed her body as soon as his name

escaped her lips. Din had made it his mission to slay the demon before he could cause any more suffering.

Din ruffled up his bright yellow hair. His chainmail glistened beneath the soft yellow tunic and he wore brown breeches with sturdy black boots that covered his lower half entirely. He flaunted his new steel bracers which protected nearly all of his forearm. In his left hand, he wielded Stormbringer, a magical weapon that conjures bolts of lightning as well as cloaks itself in electricity, while in his right hand he held a circular golden shield known as the Aegis. Typically, Din could never stay relaxed knowing he had a strong opponent waiting for him on the other side of the doorway, but he had complete faith in his team and, most importantly, himself. "Let's kick his ass." Din confidently strode forward and took the first step through the doorway, with his comrades close behind him.

The throne room emitted an amber glow from the torches scattered about, lining the way to the throne. Littered about around the base of the throne were thousands of glimmering coins, and the throne itself was pure black with spikes sticking upwards around the back of the seat. Sitting upon the dark throne, just a way away from the door, was the great demon himself, Sirius. His massive lower body was goat-like with a large amount of black fur around his waist, and his skin looked coarse and fiery red. Atop his bald head, he had two yellow, forward facing horns and a recently stroked goatee. Sirius towered over the average human, as Din would only come up to his kneecap. The hulking demon sat patiently in his enormous throne on the other side of the chamber, resting his head on his right hand and tapping his right hoof on the ground as if he were tired of waiting for the adventuring party to arrive. Once they were through the threshold and in the throne room, Sirius pushed himself off of the throne and extended his arms in greeting. "Welcome! I have been expecting your visit." He boomed across the room. "I am Lord Sirius, your humble host this evening. Care for any refreshments?"

"Enough of the mockery, Sirius." Din proceeded to point Stormbringer at Sirius' demonic eyes. "I have come here to make you pay for the destruction of my hometown, Alderwood, and all the lives you took with it."

"Alderwood, Oakwood, Birchwood, what difference does it make? Destroying small towns like yours isn't even worth remembering." Sirius could see the rage welling up within Din as he denigrated the boy's home.

Marsh clasped Din's left shoulder with his strong arm. "Calm yourself." His friend had seen Din face danger without a cool head before, that was right before they met Anna. They had narrowly escaped to the inn that night and Marsh didn't want a repeat of that night.

Carla placed her hand on Din's right shoulder and squeezed tightly in an attempt to help calm him down. "Don't let his words get to you Din, we are all behind you all the way. Isn't that right Anna?"

Anna's voice had pulled Din out of some serious binds before. Her voice was as soothing to him as his own mother's voice and had always cooled Din off, but at the moment he needed it most, they were met with complete silence. From the other side of the room, they heard a

mocking voice. “Isn’t that right Anna?” The three of them looked to Sirius who pointed past them back to Anna.

Din’s rage swiftly turned to despair as he spun around to see the face of someone he did not recognize standing in the place of Anna. Anna had always looked practically angelic with her golden blonde hair and her light white skin, however, the woman before Din had cherry red skin and obsidian black hair while her white robe had also turned to a dark shade of grey. Marsh seemed unfazed by this revelation while Carla appeared completely baffled. All Din could mutter was “What?” before Anna began to walk across to the other side of the chamber.

“Yes, my daughter. Return to my side. I’m terribly sorry if you believed she was your ally, kid. Anna is a master of glamour magic and was easily able to disguise herself as a mere human. She even insisted on tracking you down and escorting you to my abode before you posed a real threat to us. Nothing can beat the two of us. You see, Anna was the one who discovered that I left a loose end in Alderwood.”

Once Anna had reached the center of the chamber, she looked back at her former companions and sneered. “You know, I found it rather amusing Din, vowing to slay Daddy and all that. Like you would ever be able to accomplish something like that.” She cocked her head back and let out a haughty laugh.

“Anna? What’s going on? Why do you look like a demon? Is this some ploy to trick him?” questioned Carla. The two of them had grown close over the past months, or so they had all thought. “Tell me you’re still on our side.”

“Obviously Anna is just trying to fool Sirius. Come on Carla.” Din looked to Anna for confirmation, but he was met with her unpleasant scowl.

She turned to face her father. “Idiots, the lot of them. Who do they think I am?” She swiftly looked back at the adventurers, “I tricked you three numbskulls. Honestly, you’d think undoing my glamour would have been enough to convince--” Anna stopped in the middle of her sentence thanks to the brand new arrow lodged in her chest.

“Bitch.” Before anyone could react to Anna’s statement, Marsh had fired an arrow that pierced Anna’s heart. Similar to the other demons they had fought along the way, Anna’s skin turned ashen before she crumbled away into a pile of dust on the floor where she had previously stood. The arrow fell into the newly formed pile of ash where Anna had previously stood.

Betrayed by their friend near the end of their adventure. Anna had been the daughter of their enemy this entire time. It was all too much for Din and Carla to take in. On the other hand, it clearly wasn’t very hard for Marsh to take in. Marsh had never liked Anna.

There was a long silence following Anna’s sudden death. What broke the silence was the vehement rage emitted from Sirius’ wailing and the steam rising around him. The demon just saw his daughter crumble to dust before his very eyes and Din knew this would piss the demon off considering the pride he exhibited earlier for her. The battle that they came to partake in was going to be much more heated than they initially envisioned but that could work in their favor.

With the villain furious, he'll likely act more erratic which would give them an advantage should they be able to keep their heads straight.

Din collected his thoughts, he was going to take full advantage of the opportunity that Anna's death had given them. "All that's left is to slay the villain." Instinctively, Din pointed Stormbringer forward, straight towards Sirius' bare chest. "Zap." Triggered by the keyword, Stormbringer discharged a powerful bolt of lightning which connected right where Sirius' heart would be. Sirius staggered backward after being shot by lightning, however it did not appear to deal a great deal of damage to him despite leaving a scorch mark on the demon.

Din followed up by dashing forward. Sirius reacted in kind by rushing forward whilst conjuring an inferno around himself and forming a blade and shield similar to Din's out of the raw flames before letting the blaze dissipate. When the two reached each other, Sirius brought down his blade of flame on top of Din. As quick as he could, Din raised the Aegis above his head. When the flames collided with the gleaming Aegis, they flickered and dispersed as if being dispelled upon contact. Din was amazed that his shield could extinguish the flames of the demon and somewhat upset that he hadn't figured this out before. This wasn't his first encounter since acquiring the shield that he had fought an opponent that harnessed the power of fire. Sirius, blinded by rage, took a second to realize that his weapon had disappeared. He adamantly continued to swing his non-existent blade to no effect. When he finally realized that he had been swinging around nothing, instead of creating another weapon, he decided to blast searing hot blue flames from his palm directly at Din. Whatever flames that did touch the Aegis vanished, but most of the flames blew past him on either side. The heat from the flames was almost too much to handle but Din stood his ground.

Seeing Din and Sirius clashing with each other, Carla snapped out of her daze and was roused into action. She lifted her quarterstaff over her head and rested it on the nape of her neck, firmly gripping it at both ends with her hands. With the quarterstaff balanced behind her head, Carla sprinted forward in an attempt to catch up to Din. The flames surrounding Din made it impossible to get near him to pull him out of the heat but she knew that Marsh and herself would be able to deal some serious damage while Din had the enemy distracted. Carla ran past Din on his left and when she reached the demon's hooves, she landed several blows with her quarterstaff and her legs against Sirius' right ankle.

Marsh followed suit by firing an onslaught of arrows from where he stood directly at the mad demon's face. Luckily, Sirius' gigantic stature made each shot much easier to hit. Marsh took little time to figure out the proper trajectory for hitting Sirius in the eyes. Both of their attacks hit simultaneously. The demon whirled around in pain from the blows to his eyes and ankle before finally falling forward onto his knees.

As the demon fell forward, Din whispered another power word to electrify Stormbringer. "Spark." Din saw, as the demon fell, that he could be crushed beneath him, but Sirius was also in his most vulnerable state. If Din could pierce Sirius' wicked heart as he fell, they would win the

fight. He calculated exactly where Sirius' heart would land, bolted over to it and extended Stormbringer upwards. The demon fell straight onto the electrified blade.

"Why?" Sirius wheezed as the sword plunged deep into his heart. He turned pale instantly. Just as his daughter before him, his body crumbled into ash and accumulated in a pile beneath where Stormbringer had landed the final blow. Amazed that he actually managed to stab straight through the heart, Din let out a laugh of relief.

All Din could now think about was how their victory was only possible thanks to Sirius' poor temperament. He gave a nod of thanks to Anna. Whether or not she had truly been their friend or was playing them for fools this entire time, they owed it to her for shaking up her father before the final fight. Din stood up, sheathing Stormbringer, and looked to his friends.

Carla ran up to Din, embracing him with a bear-like hug. She rested her head on his shoulder. "You did it, Din! I knew you could do it." She whispered to him with tears of joy welling up in her eyes.

Marsh went to pick up his arrows that were scattered about. When they were all collected, he walked up to Din, who was still trapped by Carla's embrace and gave him a thumbs up. "Congratulations. What now?"

Din managed to pry Carla off of him, despite how strongly she clung to him. He firmly grasped their shoulders with his hands. Holding back tears, Din said "Thank you, both of you. I couldn't have done this without you. All that's left now is to head home."

They both exchanged a confused look at the mention of returning home since the reason they tagged along on this journey was to avenge Din's family and friends from the home he had lost. Marsh spoke first. "What home?"

"Din, are you okay? Alderwood is gone." Carla added.

"You're right Carla. Alderwood *is* gone, but I've found a new home already. You two are my home now. As long as I'm with you two I'm already home." Din pulled both of them into his embrace. "So where to next?"