



Jin Dragonborne

Dragons are extinct. That was the message passed down from generation to generation and had been since before the elders were born. Jin Dragonborne had grown up listening to stories of when dragons filled the skies with their beating wings and scorched the earth with their flames.

And then they had died.

Or so they said.

Far out to sea, a storm was brewing. Jin stood atop a crumbling stone tower, high on the cliffs above the White Bay. He braced himself and closed his eyes. The biting wind swept in ahead of the main storm and pulled and grabbed, toying with his robe like a puppet. Jin ignored the playful mood of the weather. He wasn't distracted, quite the opposite.

Something squawked high overhead, and a thousand other birds took up the call. The tower was too exposed for anything meaningful to call it home, but the spiders and insects were scurrying away. Something was coming. Jin's wizened hands danced, almost playfully, over a pale, grey stone. Years of erosion had left it shaped like a slightly deformed egg, but the surface was worn smooth. Faint white lines gave the impression of marbling, or of veins pulsing just beneath the surface.

Now, the puppet master picked up its performance. The tang of salt-water stung Jin's face as the roaring waves grew taller and thrashed themselves against the ragged rocks. Jin leaned forwards and back, battling against the howling squall, now more foe than friend. It threatened with each gust to pitch him over the edge, but his feet were planted firm, like roots.

Jin could feel a heat radiating from the stone; he reacted with renewed vigour. His hands blurred over the egg and he started to mumble under his breath. It was happening! He could feel something building inside him, urgently trying to escape. He held it, deep within himself. It wasn't quite time yet.

The raging swell beneath the cliff reached its tumultuous climax, and the crushing crest of a wave crashed over the tower but still, Jin stood firm. His lungs burned for air and his eyes stung but he knew it would be worth it. Far beyond the terrible sea, he heard the sound he had been waiting for. He strained to hear it

again, the soft crack of leather against the fighting wind.

CRACK!

There it was. It seemed to echo across the water; was it one beat echoed a thousand times, or a thousand beats in perfect unison? Under his hands, the stone grew hotter still. Jin felt it searing his palms, but he didn't dare withdraw them. The white veins started to glow; the grey surface bubbled and cracked; a thousand shards of stone slowly split apart from each other. The egg turned to dust.

Now it was time. Jin opened his eyes and screamed. He felt something leave his soul and swim away on the wind. The wind calmed down to a mere gust, and the clouds on the horizon brightened. Faint black dots floated across the sky and converged on each other like starlings in the spring. These were bigger than starlings, though. A lot bigger.

Jin felt a warm breeze waft over his neck. Slowly, he turned. A pair of green eyes, each bigger than his head and split by a black pupil filled with a galaxy of stars, looked down at him. Pale smoke lazily drifted from two nostrils that rested on the end of a long, scaled nose. The creature stood up, taller than a house, and lowered its head in a deep bow.

Jin bowed his head in return and reached out to stroke the creature's head. The dragons were back.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. What does the word "extinct" mean?
2. Find a word or phrase that describes how the dragons would use their flames.
3. How do you know that there is a storm building up? What phrase has the author used to tell you this?
4. What does the word "wizened" tell you about Jin's hands?
5. If Jin had dared to withdraw his hands, what would he have been doing?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

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| I | When Jin ignored the mood of the weather, why did he do this? |
| R | What ran away when the wind picked up? |
| I | Who or what is the puppet master? How do you know? |
| S | What does the author mean when they say the squall was "now more foe than friend"? |
| P | Write the next paragraph in the story. Think carefully about how the dragons might react to somebody who brought them back. |