



The sun was melting into the pine forest, and even though ~~the~~ it was still swelteringly hot, Torak felt a chill run down his spine. The huge crowd of people gathered round. Scruffy children on the comforting shoulders of their fathers. the pretty girl gazed at Hord as he flexed his muscles and Finn Kedinn sat powerfully on a wooden stool.

'What have you gotten yourself into, stupid boy!' thought Torak. He tucked his knees up to his chest and put his head in his arms. A tear ~~ran~~ ran down his cheek, and he longed for the comforting squeeze of his father's hand.

'Pull yourself together.' he whispered to himself. 'You can win this.' But in his heart, he didn't really believe it. He was so intimidated by Hord and there was no denying it. Glancing at the bag which wolf had been so brutally stuffed into, he gave a sigh of relief as he saw it wriggle.

Oslak tugged him aside by his dirt encrusted jumper.

'Do you have any experience with a ~~sword~~ spear?'

Oslak sighed. Torak's face reddened and his palms were sweating. He shook his head shamefully.

'Well, here's your spear...' There was an ~~aque~~ awkward silence. Eventually, Finn-Kedinn pulled them-





Both over. In a steady but stern voice he went through the rules. Torak could feel Hord's eyes burning into him as he stared at the ground, even though he wanted to glare back, he didn't dare. 'Begin.' said Fann Keddin. He stepped back. For a few moments, neither Hord nor Torak did anything. Torak could feel his heart pounding loudly in his chest. Suddenly, someone in the crowd yelled at the top of their lungs 'Go on Hord! Get him!' Hord lunged towards Torak, jabbing his knife forcefully. Torak stumbled backwards, almost losing his footing. He clumsily jabbed pushed his spear ~~is~~ aiming for Hord, it's weight bringing it down ~~at~~ almost instantly. He wasn't thinking straight, all the audience were throwing him off. Torak couldn't think of anything else to do but copy Hord.

'Copying's not going to get you very far!' Hord taunted taunted as they circled each other. Torak tried hard not to blush but the harder he tried the more of a fool he looked. All of a sudden, Torak remembered one of the times when him and Fa had practiced fighting.

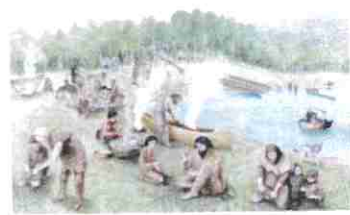
Torak charged at Hord, knocking him to the ground.



Hord sat up, glaring at Torak. Torak now had the guts to glare back. He noticed that the audience had gone silent. Most of them shocked by Torak's surprising comeback, but a few of them overwhelmed with ~~and~~ anger at Hord for failing. Hord, heaving with frustration and blood flooding from his nose, leaped up. Hord remembered his fear of coming 2nd (yet again) and stabbed Torak just about piercing his ~~skin~~ finger.

Wiping the oozing blood from his finger on his trousers, he shrugged like it was nothing. Hord pushed at Torak, sending him toppling to the ground. Torak, more determined than ever to win the fight and head throbbing, clenched his fists and wiped a bead of sweat from his brow. He looked at the ~~to~~ bowl of boiling water, bubbling over the fire. Torak knew one of the rules was you can't use fire and he wasn't the rule breaker type, but did Finn Kedinn mention no water; No. He didn't.

Torak waited for Hord to be in the right position, then he would strike. Eventually, Hord moved just behind the pot and Torak was in front. He shoved the heavy pot into the ~~boasting~~ Hord, and sending boiling water and smoke tipping all over him. Hord shrieked, Torak ran towards him pinning him to the ground.



'You used fire!' Hord yelled.

'No I didn't! You saw!' Torak defended. He had won so fairly his face was pale. To He gritted his teeth and continued.

'Ask your Uncle.' he said staring accusingly at Finn Keddin.
'The boy's right.' exclaimed Finn Keddin 'He won fair and square.'

Torak, a rush of pride and achievement flooding through his body, stood up.

'So, I can I go now?' he asked smugly, even though he knew the answer.

'No.' stated the quiet village mage. This was not the answer Torak was expecting.

'What?!!' shouted Torak, enraged that he had put in all of that effort to be held hostage. 'But you told me that if I won I could go.' he stammered, his voice quivering.

'Finn Keddin gulped 'No, we said you wouldn't die. Yet.'