

CHAPTER 1

(I'm holding up a finger.)

It was a perfect evening for monster slaying. Bogbrush, the mighty barbarian hero, was ready. He was hunched behind the barnyard wall, a gigantic sword gleaming in his huge fist. The night was dark, but not so dark that the warrior couldn't see his own feet; he recognized them both at the end of his legs. It was cool, so he wouldn't be sweaty, even with all the hacking and slashing he'd have to do. It was dry, which was good because nobody likes to be out in the rain, horrible man-eating creatures included. And tomorrow was laundry day, so his mother could get the monster blood out of his trousers.

He had only one pair, and his mother washed clothes just twice a year.

The young barbarian thought about all these things, one by one. He was a slow thinker. Big, blond, rippling with muscles, but not quick between the ears.

His grandfather, Bumrash, had been a great slayer of foul beasts, vile things from the marshes and the smaller, less athletic sorts of demon. The people of the village spoke of the old man, now dead, as a great swordsman, a mighty hero. He'd

been killed by a snake when he was ninety-four; he didn't cook it properly and got food poisoning.

Bogbrush had heard the men talking about his grandfather.

"That Bumrash. He was an idiot as a boy. Later on, he grew into a lunatic," said old Bedsock.

"I remember him as a raving maniac," recalled Lardgut the Elder.

The young man didn't know exactly what it meant to be an idiot or a raving maniac, but he thought these were high compliments. His grandfather must have been greatly admired. And now he, Bogbrush, a boy of at least fifteen and maybe even eighteen summers (none of his family were good at counting), held the mighty sword once carried by Bumrash. The sword was called Headlopper because it was made for lopping. Heads, mostly, although Bogbrush was only allowed to practice on turnips. Still, the lad was ready for heads. Monster heads. Big monster heads. The kind with horns.

Suddenly a sound pierced the air. A terrible scream of evil. It went "Mooohh! Moooh!"

Bogbrush shivered with a jolt of fear but — being a mighty barbarian hero — he jumped up onto the wall. Headlopper was in his hand, the massive blade shining in the moonlight. He stared into the field and saw the bright (and clearly evil) eyes staring back. The monster had big savage horns with which to stab and gore and . . . stab and gore. There were probably other words for it, but

Bogbrush couldn't think of them. The vast beast paced fiercely, its wicked, poisonous breath making fog in the cold air. The moon disappeared behind a cloud. He had to strike now!



"I must cleave this foul thing in twain!" said Bogbrush to himself, but quite loudly. "I shall smite it ere it knoweth I am here!" Luckily, the monster showed no signs of understanding any of this. Almost nobody understood Bogbrush, exactly.

He always spoke as his grandfather had taught him — like a barbarian hero. He used complicated sentences full of important-sounding words, sometimes with strange *eths* on the end of them. It was hard for him to remember how to talk like this, and often he even confused himself.

WORD OF THE DAY: twain means "in two pieces." Use it in conversation with your brother or sister, as in "I shall cleave this mushroom and sausage pizza in twain, and thou shalt choose which bit to take."



The rest of his family (who, as you'll remember, were yokels) didn't even try to understand what Bogbrush meant when he said things like "I hadst closeth the pigsty ere bedtime, yet forsooth I hast forgeteth to shuteth yon gate!" They just followed the squeals of the pigs he had let loose in the flower beds.

Bogbrush leaped forward, sword in hand. The huge blade swung through the night, slashing into the monster's hide before the savage beast could strike against the hero. The fiendish creature toppled with a grunt.