

ENGLISH LESSON – 1.7.20

TIME TO FLY



“I shouldn’t think so,” Anna said. “For a thing their size, being hit with a harpoon’s like being bitten by a gnat.” From the footlocker cupboard, she produced a steel frame, like a heavy metal coat hanger with welded-on wheels, and a harness.

“What’s that?” Robert asked.

“It’s called a death slide,” Anna said as she clipped it over the length of taut rope.

Robert bit his lip as Anna checked the harness and wheels on the death slide, testing they would run along the quivering line. He felt a knot in his guts, and a sudden sickness welled up inside him as he realized just what he’d have to do.

“We’d better hurry,” Anna shouted at him through the wind. “It’s like hooking a whale on a fishing wire – if we’re not quick, their ship will drag us down.”

As she buckled him into the harness, Robert glanced down the vertiginous slope cutting between the two airships; his belly spasmed and his head swam. “I don’t think I can do this,” he said, “I can’t stand the height.”

“Nonsense, Robbie.” Anna secured various safety buckles around his waist. “At this altitude, the terror becomes abstract.”

“Abstract? How can it be abstract?”

“It’s a one-minute journey. Your brain won’t even have time to register it.”

“Until it’s smashed into the ground, or *Behemoth’s* hull, or—”

“Trying to leave without me?” the mechanimal said. “I’m coming too. I’ve lots of experience of being thrown out of moving airships.”

“Do you think it’s wise,” Anna asked, “adding your extra weight to the slide?”

Malkin gave a sniff. “I know Lily’s scent. I’ll be able to find her quicker.”

“He’s probably right,” Robert admitted.

“Fair enough.” Anna tightened the last few chest-buckles around them both. “Oh, I almost forgot; when you need to stop, squeeze the brakes – here.” She reached above Robert’s head and tapped a silver lever on the frame that looked like the brakes on a bicycle. “Once you’ve found Lily and her father, get to *Behemoth’s* escape capsule. Lower it down on its rope and I’ll fly past and grab you. Oh, and you’ll need this.” She took off her flying helmet and stuck it onto Robert’s head, strapping it round his chin and pinging the goggles down over his eyes. “Ready?” she asked.

Robert nodded, and gave her a half-hearted salute. Tucking his head down, he clutched Malkin against his chest. With his other hand, he grabbed the crossbar of the death slide, and shuffled his feet to the edge of the doorway.

“No going back now,” Malkin muttered.

And, for a second, as Robert dangled half over the deck, half over the river, a fragment from his da came back to him: *No one conquers fear easily, Robert.*

Outside, the curved earth and the darkening sky butted against each other.

“Time to fly!” Anna gave him an almighty push and he zipped off down the line, leaving his stomach behind.

What name do we give to this thing called the ‘Death Slide’?

Why do you think Anna called it a ‘Death Slide’?

Think back to our work on Author Word Choices on Monday – how does this name make it seem more dramatic?

