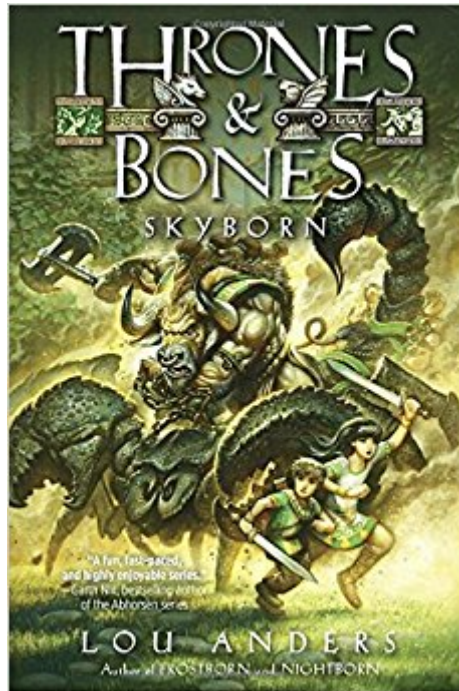




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Skyborn (Thrones And Bones)



Synopsis

For fans of Lloyd Alexander and Brandon Mull comes the epic conclusion to the acclaimed Thrones and Bones fantasy-adventure trilogy that began with Frostborn. Find the Horn. Free the City. The chase continues for the legendary Horns of Osius. Thianna and Karn's quest to retrieve the horns from those who wish to abuse their power takes them to Thica, an ancient land where two tyrant queens reign supreme and where years earlier Thianna's mother was labeled a traitor. Soon the two heroes are caught up in an epic battle for control of the kingdom, one that puts their very lives at stake. The only way to overthrow the queens is to beat them at their own game. But with an entire empire against them, how can Karn and Thianna hope to compete—or better yet, survive? The novel includes instructions for playing the board game the Queen's Champion, a Thican timeline, and King Herakles Hammerfist's recipe for the Best Spanakopita Ever. Visit ThronesandBones.com for additional games, maps, character profiles, and more! Praise for the Thrones and Bones series "Future fans of Tolkien and George R. R. Martin can happily cut their serial-fantasy teeth on this first book of an eventual series." "Kirkus Reviews" "A powerful, fast-paced tale. . . . The setting is rich, the characters well-defined, and the danger ever-paramount." "Publishers Weekly, Starred" "Good pacing, well-drawn characters, and engaging action scenes. And yes, there's the promise of more to come." "Booklist" From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

Lou Anders drew on his adventures traveling to Greece in his twenties to write *Skyborn*, combining these experiences with his love of adventure fiction and games (both tabletop and role playing). While he has yet to ride a hippalektryon, creating his own board games for *Frostborn*, *Nightborn*, and now *Skyborn* is one of his favorite indulgences. Anders is the recipient of a Hugo Award for editing and a Chesley Award for art direction, and was named a Thurber House Writer-in-Residence. He has published over 500 articles and stories on science fiction and fantasy television and literature. He resides with his family in Birmingham, Alabama. You can visit Anders online at louanders.com and ThronesandBones.com, on Facebook, on Tumblr, and on Twitter at @Louanders and @ThronesandBones. From the Hardcover edition.

Chapter One
The One Truth
The javelin flew with lethal speed. A long, thin messenger of death in an otherwise blue sky. It was fast, but Sirena struck even faster. The young girl's blade sliced the wooden shaft in half. The two pieces clattered on the polished marble squares of the courtyard. Then everything was still except for the noise of waves crashing on rocks far below, the beating of hearts, and the rushing of blood.
"Well done," her opponent said.
Sirena narrowed her brown eyes.
"Of course it was," she replied. "Compliments are a waste of breath. You tell me nothing I don't already know."
Her opponent nodded grimly and drew her sword. She was close to Sirena in size and age. Both wore bronze breastplates molded to the contours of their torsos above tunics hung with strips of black leather. Both carried shields, while their heads were protected by bronze helmets with proud black plumes.
"Is your mind as sharp as your weapon?" Sirena's opponent charged as she spoke, sandals pounding on the smooth stone of the courtyard.
"What is the One Truth?" the soldier asked.
Sirena shifted her own stance to meet the assault.
"War is the mother of all," she replied, catching the blade on her own. With a twist of the wrist, Sirena opened the soldier's guard, driving her shield hard into the armored breastplate.
Stunned by the blow, the soldier fell to the ground. Sirena pointed the tip of her sword at the girl's throat.
"I yield," her opponent said.
Sirena hesitated before withdrawing her blade.
"You yield," she said. The word was like dung in her mouth. She would never speak it herself.
Sirena didn't spare the fallen girl another glance. She adjusted

her grip on her pelta, the distinctive crescent-shaped half shield of Calderan soldiers. The hot sun beat down on her as she squared her small but muscled shoulders. She gazed for a moment at the bright stone columns of the Twin Palaces where they gleamed in the noonday sun, but she didn't look to the stands where her audience of one watched. Then Sirena advanced to the next challenge. "What is Damnameneus's theorem?" A harder question from a tougher warrior. This opponent was taller than Sirena and older than her own twelve years. She would not be so easily bested. "The square of the hypotenuse," replied Sirena as she swung her blade at the patch of bare neck between the woman's helmet and armored torso, "matches the total of the squares of the other two sides." "Correct," the woman said, stepping out of Sirena's reach and bringing her own sword around in a sweeping arc. Sirena dropped to the ground and rolled under the woman's attack. Then she came to one knee and drove her sword between the black leather straps of the soldier's tunic and into her thigh. "I know it's correct," Sirena said. "I don't need you to tell me that. I only require that you fall." Admirably the woman did not cry out as her leg collapsed. Better yet she did not waste words spinning flattery or admitting defeat. She lay still, appraising Sirena with hard eyes. "Good, Sirena thought. She is a proper soldier. I shall remember this one when I am a queen. She should be promoted. But not too high." "Describe Metarchus's thoughts on justice?" the third opponent asked. Sirena turned just in time to avoid a searing bolt of flame. She leapt aside, landing in a crouch. "Nothing is straighter than that which is straight. Nothing is juster than that which is just." Sirena stayed low, racing under the long fire lance and tackling the soldier around the legs. They went down together, but only Sirena stood up. She could not deny that she was proud of her performance. Philosophy, mathematics, combat—she had mastered them all. But the day was not yet won. Almost. The cliffside courtyard was laid out in a grid of eight-by-eight squares, with opponents waiting on alternating rows. It was a giant game board for deadly play. Sirena had advanced past the midpoint now and had only one challenge remaining. "Who said, 'There is nothing eternal except for change'?" the last soldier asked. "Lanera the Playwright, in her first tragedy," Sirena replied. She disarmed the woman in two moves, stabbed her through the shoulder with a third. "But she was a fool." Sirena looked to the stands now, to her single observer. She called across the intervening space, "Caldera is eternal. Thica is eternal. We make it so." The sound of clapping rang out over the hilltop. "Bravo!" Queen Melantha shouted. "Bravo!" Sirena sheathed her sword, then removed her helmet and shook out her long black hair. She moved to join her aunt, the Land Queen of Caldera. "Your mind and your body are in top form," Melantha said. "You will make a fine champion this day. And a finer

queen when the time comes. Your mother would have been proud.â•Â Sirena nodded, her cheeks reddening from something other than the hot sun. She might refuse compliments from an inferior, but the praise of her aunt she would accept.â•Â âœWe will crown you champion properly tonight, then,â• she said. âœBut letâ™s take refreshment together now.â•Â Sirena smiled. So much that she had always wanted was hers now. But her pleasure was to prove short-lived.â•Â âœPerhaps I will join you in that celebration,â• said a newcomer. âœThough weâ™ll raise our cups to something other than what you have in mind.â•Â Queen Xalthea, the Sky Queen, stepped out from between marble columns. Together, Xalthea the Sky Queen and Melantha the Land Queen ruled the island-continent of Thica. One commanded the forces of the ground and the other the forces of the air.â•Â âœGood fortune to you, Xalthea,â• said Melantha. âœIf you had come just five minutes earlier, you wouldnâ™t have missed my nieceâ™s performance.â•Â âœIt hardly matters,â• said the Sky Queen dismissively. âœSomething far more important has occurred.â•Â Sirena glared at the co-monarch. What could be more important than her lifeâ™s goal? Ever since her own motherâ™s death, her aunt had groomed her for this day and all the days to follow.â•Â Ignoring the angry eyes of the young girl, Xalthea turned to the Land Queen.â•Â âœTheyâ™ve found it,â• she said.â•Â Melantha didnâ™t understand what the Sky Queen meant at first. But Sirena did. She knew exactly what âœitâ• was. The knowledge descended on her like a boulder dropped from a tower.â•Â âœThe Horn of Osius,â• she whispered.â•Â âœYes,â• said Xalthea. âœThe Horn of Osius has been recovered. Our empire is secure.â• She turned to Sirena. âœOr it will be. If you do your part correctly.â•Â âœMy part?â•Â âœYou are the closest in blood,â• the Sky Queen said.â•Â âœI donâ™t know anything about the horn,â• Sirena protested. âœIâ™m a soldier. Iâ™m the Queenâ™s Champion. Iâ™m going to beâ•â•Â âœNot anymore,â• interrupted Xalthea. âœMy needsâ•our needsâ•are more important. You will leave your auntâ™s side and take your place by mine.â•Â âœNo!â• protested Sirena.â•Â âœNo?â• said Xalthea softly. Sirena froze. When the Sky Queen spoke so calmly she was at her most dangerous.â•Â âœPerhaps there is another way,â• interjected Melantha. But her voice was tentative, hesitant. She lacked the determination of the Sky Queen. She lacked the fire.â•Â âœYou know there isnâ™t,â• said Xalthea. âœOr are you challenging me?â•Â Sirena looked at her aunt, daring to hope. The two queens of Caldera rarely disagreed, but there was a precedent for resolving disputes when they arose. A deadly precedent.â•Â Melantha dropped her eyes.â•Â âœNo,â• she said. âœNo, of course not.â•Â Sirena felt cold despite the midday sun. How could she stand by her aunt if her aunt would not stand by her?â•Â âœButâ•â•butâ•â• she stammered. âœBut this is everything.â•Â âœThica is everything,â• said Xalthea. âœCaldera is everything.â•Â Sirenaâ™s aunt laid a hand on her

shoulder. "Remember the words of Lanera the Playwright," said Melantha. "Take some comfort in her advice: 'A ship should not be secured by a single anchor; a life should not be tethered to a single hope.'"

"I already told you Lanera was a fool," said Sirena. She met the Land Queen's gaze. "Go to the crows." Watching the hurt swell in her aunt's eyes, Sirena almost took back her words. But what was said was said. She allowed Xalthea to take her arm above the elbow and lead her away from everything she had always wanted to whatever her new life would be. It was a treasonous thought, but she wished the horn had never been found. Wished it had stayed lost on the other side of the world. But how had this come about? She wanted to know who was responsible for undoing her happiness.

"Tell me," asked Sirena as she entered Xalthea's wing of the Twin Palaces, "how was the horn recovered? Has Talaria finally been captured?"

"That traitor died long ago," said the Sky Queen. "But apparently she had a child. A girl of mixed race who blew the horn and alerted us to its presence. My soldiers have been after it for some months, and it's finally come back to us." A girl. A child of Talaria.

"This girl," asked Sirena, "what's she called?"

Sirena wanted to know her name, this half-breed who had inadvertently ruined her life.

"Her name isn't important," replied Queen Xalthea. "Though you might find it amusing 'Thican and barbarian names cobbled together.'"

The queen chuckled. "I'm told she is called Thianna Frostborn."

"Sweet Ymir's feet," said Thianna Frostborn with a whistle as she slid from the wyvern's back. "I don't know how sweet his feet are," Karn Korlundsson said from where he still sat atop the reptile. "But if yours are any indication of what frost giants' feet smell like, I think I'd choose a different word. Now move over and let me down."

Thianna chuckled as she stepped aside, then reached a large hand up to help her best friend dismount. They stood together on the hillside and looked at the lights of the coastal city before them, though, as a half giant, Thianna stood a head and a half taller than Karn.

"Thica is a big land to find one horn," Thianna observed. "I wish we'd had time to learn a bit more about what we're in for."

"You're not tackling it alone this time," Karn replied. "Don't think I could?"

Her eyes had that glint in them that they always got when she contemplated a challenge.

"Don't worry," she said, breaking into a chuckle. "I've learned my lesson."

Thianna was referring to their recent adventures in which they had fought dark elves and other dangers in a race to find the lost Horn of Osius, a powerful weapon now in the hands of their enemies in Thica. She had set off alone on a quest to find the horn at the behest of the dragon Orm. Then Karn had been sent to rescue her. Now, together, they were going to get it back.

"No more adventuring without my trusty NorrĀnboy," she continued. Karn was from

NorrÃ,ngard, the source of the nickname. It was better than Short Stuff, her other name for him.Â â œGood,â • he answered. â œBut itâ™s not just me coming with you. Donâ™t forget; weâ™ve got Desstraâ™s help now too.â •Â Thiannaâ™s dark eyes clouded.Â â œI donâ™t know how much help sheâ™s going to be,â • the giantess grumbled.Â â œYou donâ™t mean that,â • said Karn. â œSheâ™s already proven herself.â •Â â œTo you maybe.â •Â Karn winced. True, the dark elf had opposed them for most of their quest, even tricked and betrayed Karn to her superiors in the sinister organization known as the Underhand, but when she had switched sides at the end, she had sacrificed everything to save them.Â Karn thought to say more, but then the shadow of a giant bat swooped low overhead. Desstraâ™s mount, Flitter-mouse, glided to a nearby tree, where it grasped a branch and hung upside down. Karn watched as Des-stra somersaulted from her saddle to land nimbly on the ground. He wondered how much of their conversation the elfâ™s keen ears had picked up.Â Despite Thiannaâ™s feelings, Desstra had proved very helpful getting here. Choosing a night when both the moon and her satellite were invisible, her giant bat had guided them in the dark to this coastal city. But now that they were in Thica, they couldnâ™t risk traveling overland in the sky where the only fliers would be Thican soldiers wielding deadly fire lances. Not that the surly wyvern would carry them any closer to the home of its once-masters. And Flittermouse wasnâ™t large enough to carry anything heavier than one small elf. Theyâ™d have to make their own way from here on out.Â The elf ran a hand through the fur of her upside-down mountâ™s cheek.Â â œIâ™m sorry to say goodbye to you again, boy,â • she told the bat. â œI wish I could take you with me.â •Â Flittermouse squeaked sadly, as though it understood. Probably it did.Â Desstra stood on tiptoes to hug the animal around its neck.Â â œDonâ™t go back to Deep Shadow,â • she whispered, speaking of the underground city of dark elves. â œThereâ™s nothing for either of us there. I hope you find a new home where you fit in, one where they treat you nicely.â •Â The batâ™s eyes said it hoped the same thing for her. Desstra sighed. Then she let go of her mount and approached Thianna and Karn.Â â œSunâ™s coming up soon,â • she said. â œWeâ™d better get inside the city before it does.â •Â â œYeah, we already know that,â • said Thianna. â œSo not very helpful.â •Â â œGood thinking, though,â • said Karn, glaring at the giantess. Thianna shrugged. Beside her, the wyvern hissed.Â â œI guess this is goodbye to you too,â • Thianna said.Â If you expect me to shed any tears at our parting, it spoke into her mind, youâ™re going to be sadly disappointed.Â â œI know youâ™re really crying inside,â • Thianna said with a chuckle. Then she surprised the reptile by hugging it around its long neck.Â Get off! Get off! Get off! its thoughts screamed. It tugged its neck in a useless attempt to dislodge the frost giant, but when Thianna released it, the wyvern added, For what itâ™s worth, I hope you succeed at your

mad scheme. "Sure you won't come?" "Bringing you here to the coast was risk enough. I'm leaving now, before the dawn arrives. Live well or die well, Thianna Frostborn." Then, without another word, it flapped its wings and rose into the night. Flittermouse squeaked once, then the bat too flew away into the darkness. "A tearful farewell?" asked Karn. Lacking Thianna's ability to communicate with reptiles, he had only heard the frost giant's half of the conversation. "What do you think?" she replied. "Still, I guess that wyvern was as sentimental as they get." She chuckled. "I must be growing on it." "Kind of like mold on cheese?" teased Karn. Thianna punched his shoulder playfully, then guided by Desstra's night vision the three companions began making their way down the hill.

The penalty for treason was being chained to marble columns. For many years, vicious captors had tortured the rebellious dragon, burning it with fire lances and shredding its wings. Yet its words only grew bolder as it faced Sirena, keeper of the Horn that controlled its mind. Though one of the most fearless fighters in all the empire, Sirena had yet to unlock the key to the precious Horn of Osius. She had less than five days to learn the secrets of wielding its power—to enslave an entire generation of dragons. Thianna Frostborn and Karn Korlundsson awoke in an elegant cage, flying south under the wings of angry dragons. Vast forests and ancient ruins spun away beneath them as they approached their destination, the Court of Land and Sky. Raised in the frozen lands of the frost giants, the half-giant Thianna knew little about her mother's native country. Using one of her unique gifts—a hoarfrost chant—Thianna froze her way to freedom. Recapturing the powerful Horn from an elite force of furious women would require more than brute strength and quick wit. It would demand every gift her allies possessed. Brash minotaurs and leafy dryads soon found themselves fighting for something far greater than their own kingdoms and narrow ideals. Skyborn is the third of Lou Anders's Thrones and Bones series. Wonderful new characters charge through his colorful landscapes, ice blocking down watercourses and gliding over molten lava. Mysterious doors open up, allowing passage to ethereal corridors. As Thianna realizes the decisions she makes have far-reaching consequences, the frost giant who's always struck the fastest blows suddenly finds herself unsure of her path forward. Tenuous friendships develop between hardened enemies; impossible alliances become reality. The momentum drives the story at a quick pace towards an arresting climax. Skyborn pulls you into a space you weren't expecting to be in—a place of wonder and higher dreams.--Kate Calina

This is the third book of the Thrones and Bones trilogy and lives up to the previous books. I won't

give any spoilers, but suffice it to say that I enjoyed the many twists and turns, memorable characters, and world building. Lou Anders's books are like reading Tolkien and R.A. Salvatore for the younger crowd. Can't wait to see what else he writes!

Lou Anders concludes his THRONES & BONES trilogy for middle graders with Skyborn, which follows Frostborn and Nightborn. Skyborn begins as our three young heroes have just lost one of the Horns of Osius which are able to control wyverns and dragons. To free these creatures from the empire that controls them, they must travel to Thica to find and destroy the horn. Our heroes couldn't be more different from each other. Karn is the human son of a well-to-do farmer. His family expects him to take over the farm, but Karn is more interested in strategy games. Thianna is a half-giantess from the frozen northern lands. She has been bullied all her life because she is of mixed races and looks different from the rest of the frost giants. Desstra, a dark elf who was not ruthless enough to pass her final exam to become an elite soldier, is now an outcast from her society. These three unlikely allies will team up with even more unlikely allies to try to bring down the Thiccan Empire and save the dragons and wyverns from slavery. Thica is a matriarchy with a culture similar to our mideast cultures (they eat a lot of spanakopita and the book even contains a recipe for that tasty treat). The Thican dynasty keeps power by using the horn to enslave the dragons and wyverns who help them keep control over the entire continent. When Thianna realizes this, she is greatly disturbed to realize that she is genetically related to bullies. She hates bullies! The matriarchy will try to tempt her into joining them, as is her birthright. Can Thianna resist the allure of power and the royal lifestyle? Meanwhile Karna and Desstra will have their own unique challenges, as will other characters who will join them such as the minotaur prince and the cowardly dryad. Thrones and Bones by Lou Anders Similar to the previous books, Skyborn is nonstop adventure and it's full of strange sights such as a minotaurs riding scorpions through a labyrinth city. Our spunky sarcastic heroes meet automatons, dwarves, a mega-hydra, a sphinx (which of course asks riddles), an Arachne (eek), and other sorts of oddities. I found this aspect of the book to be a little jumbled and chaotic, but kids will probably love it and at least they will learn a lot. There are some really sweet spots in this story such as when Thianna meets the dragon who carried her mother to the land of the frost giants in the opening scene of the first book in the trilogy. A theme throughout is the idea that travelling and meeting different types of people broadens the mind. Young readers will be challenged to realize that their own heritage and customs are not superior to others. As a parent, I can whole-heartedly recommend this trilogy to middle graders and young adults. The action is fast-paced and exciting, the characters are loveable, kids

will learn quite a bit about different civilizations and about mythical creatures, and the story extols the virtues of friendship, diversity, teamwork, kindness, and mercy. The audio versions of the THRONES & BONES trilogy are terrific. They are produced by Listening Library, are each around 9 hours long, and are read aloud by Fabio Tassone. This would be a good trilogy to listen to together as a family. Originally posted at FanLit.

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