



## Slaves of Socorro (Brotherband Chronicles Book 4)

By John A. Flanagan



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The fourth installment in the *New York Times* bestselling Brotherband series, for fans of Lord of the Rings and Game of Thrones

Hal and his fellow Herons have returned home to Skandia after defeating the pirate captain Zovac and reclaiming Skandia's most prized artifact, the Andomal. With their honor restored, the Herons turn to a new mission: tracking down an old rival turned bitter enemy. Tursgud—leader of the Shark Brotherband and Hal's constant opponent—has turned from a bullying youth into a pirate and slave trader. After Tursgud captures twelve Araluen villagers to sell as slaves, the Heron crew sails into action . . . with the help of one of Araluen's finest Rangers!

*From the Trade Paperback edition.*

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### Editorial Review

Review

#### Praise for *Brotherband 4: Slaves of Socorro*:

"A sweeping novel of adventure, written with wit and a sure sense of storytelling." —*Booklist*

About the Author

**John Flanagan** grew up in Sydney, Australia, hoping to be a writer. John began writing *The Ruins of Gorlan*, the first in the mega-selling *Ranger's Apprentice* series, for his son, Michael, and is still hard at work on the series and its spinoff, *Brotherband Chronicles*. He currently lives in the suburb of Manly, Australia, with his wife. In addition to their son, they have two grown daughters and four grandsons.

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#### Chapter One

I think we should reset the mast about a meter farther aft," Hal said.

He peered down into the stripped-out hull of the wolfship, rubbing his chin. Wolftail's innards were bare to the world. Her oars, mast, yard, sails, shrouds, stays, halyards, rowing benches, floorboards and ballast stones had been removed, leaving just the bare hull. She rested on her keel, high and dry on the grass beside Anders's shipyard, supported by timber props that kept her level.

A plank gantry ran along either side of the denuded hull, at the height of her gunwales. Hal knelt on the starboard-side gantry, accompanied by Anders, the shipwright, and Bjarni Bentfinger, Wolftail's skirl and owner. Hal and Anders wore thoughtful, reflective expressions. Bjarni's was more anxious. No ship's captain likes to see the bones of his craft laid bare for the world to view. Bjarni was beginning to wonder whether this had been such a good idea. It wasn't too late, he thought. He could always pay Anders for his work so far and ask him to return Wolftail to her former state.

Then he thought of the extra speed and maneuverability the new sail plan would give his ship. He shrugged and looked anxiously at Hal. The young skirl was so . . . young, he thought. And here Bjarni was, entrusting his precious Wolftail to Hal's hands for a major refit. Of course, Anders was a highly experienced ship-builder. He ought to know what he was doing. And Bjarni had seen proof of the effectiveness of the fore-and-aft-sail plan that Hal had designed for his own ship, the *Heron*.

Bjarni took a deep breath, closed his eyes and bit back the request that was trembling on his lips. Between them, these two knew what was best, he thought.

"The mast goes where the mast support is," Anders said doubtfully. "How do you plan to move that?"

The mast support was a squared piece of timber, a meter long, that stood vertically at right angles to the keel. It was used to hold the mast firmly in place, and was an integral, immovable part of the keel itself. When the original shipbuilders had shaped a tree to form the keel for Wolftail, they had trimmed off all the projecting branches, save one. They left that one in place, shortening it and trimming it so that it formed a square section that projected up to support the mast. Its innate strength came from the fact that it hadn't been fastened in place. It had grown there.

Hal shrugged. "It's not a problem." He climbed down into the hull and knelt beside the keel, indicating the existing support. "We leave this in place, so that the strength is retained, and we shape a meter-long piece to match it, and attach it behind the existing support."

Anders chewed his lip. "Yes. I suppose that'd work."

“But why set the mast farther astern?” Bjarni asked.

“The new fore and aft yards will reach right to the bow,” Hal explained, “and that will put more downward pressure on the bow when you’re under sail. This way, we’ll compensate for that pressure.” He indicated with his hand, describing an angle behind the mast support. “We could even slope the edge of the new piece back a little toward the stern. That’d let us rake the mast back and give us even better purchase.”

“Hmmm,” said Anders.

The worried look was back on Bjarni’s face. He hadn’t understood the technical details Hal had spouted so confidently. But he understood “hmmm.” “Hmmm” meant Anders wasn’t convinced.

“Never mind raking it back,” Bjarni said quickly. “I want my mast to stand square. Masts are supposed to stand square. That’s what masts do. They stand . . . square. Always have.”

After all, he thought, a raked mast would be a little too exotic.

Hal grinned at him. He’d overseen the conversion of four square-rigged wolfships to the Heron sail plan in the past months. He was used to the older skirls’ conservative views.

“Whatever you say,” he replied agreeably. He stood and clambered up the sloping inside of the hull toward the gantry. Anders reached down a hand to help him.

“Now, have you made up your mind about the fin keel?” Hal asked. He knew what the answer was going to be, even before Bjarni’s head began to shake from side to side.

“I don’t want you cutting any holes in the bottom of my ship,” he said. “She might sink.”

Hal smiled reassuringly at him. “I did the same to the Heron,” he pointed out. “And she hasn’t sunk so far.” Bjarni continued his head-shaking. “That’s as may be,” he said. “But I don’t see any good coming from cutting a hole in the bottom of a ship. It goes against nature.” He noticed Hal’s tolerant smile and frowned. He didn’t enjoy being patronized by a boy, even if he suspected that the boy might be right.

“I don’t care that you did it in your ship,” he said. “It might just be luck that she hasn’t sunk . . .” He paused, and added in a meaningful tone, “So far.”

Hal shrugged. He hadn’t expected Bjarni to agree to a fin keel. None of the wolfship skirls had done so thus far.

“Suit yourself,” he said. He turned to Anders. “So, can you get your men started on an extension for the mast support? I can send you over a design sketch if you’d like.”

Anders nodded slowly. Anders did most things slowly. He was a deliberate man who didn’t leap to decisions without pondering them. That was one of the things that made him an excellent shipbuilder.

“No need for a sketch,” he said. “I can work out how to manage it.”

Hal nodded. Anders was right, of course. The design work involved would be a simple matter for an experienced craftsman. He had really only offered out of politeness.

“Well then . . .,” he began. But he was interrupted by a booming voice.

“Hullo the ship!” They all turned to see Erak, the Oberjarl of Skandia, on the path that led from the town. Anders’s shipyard was set outside Hallasholm, so the constant noise of hammering and sawing—and the attendant curses as fingers were mashed by incautiously wielded mallets—wouldn’t disturb the townfolk.

“What’s he doing here?” Bjarni said idly.

Anders sniffed, and wiped his nose with the back of his hand. “He’s on his morning constitutional,” he said. Noticing Bjarni’s puzzled glance, he added, “His walk. He walks along here most days. Says the exercise keeps him slim.” A ghost of a smile touched the corners of his mouth as he said the last few words.

Hal raised an eyebrow. “How can it keep him something he’s never been?”

Erak was an immense bear of a man. Slim was not a word that sprang readily to mind when describing him. The Oberjarl was striding across the grass toward them now, flanked by Svengal, his constant . . . companion and former first mate.

“What’s that he’s got?” Bjarni asked. Erak was wielding a long, polished wood staff in his right hand, using it to mark his strides. The staff was about a meter and a half tall, shod with a silver ferrule at the bottom and adorned with a small silver knob at the top. At every third or fourth pace, he would twirl it between his powerful fingers, setting the sunlight flashing off the silver fittings.

“It’s his new walking staff,” Anders explained. “There was a delegation in from Gallica two weeks ago and they presented it to him.”

“But what does it do?” Hal asked. In his eyes, everything should have a practical use.

Anders shrugged. “He says it makes him look sophisticated,” he replied.

Hal’s eyebrows went up in surprise. Like slim, sophisticated was not a word that sprang readily to mind when thinking about the Oberjarl.

## **Users Review**

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#### **Brian Roberts:**

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#### **Earline Shepler:**

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#### **Don Morris:**

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