

# Fenn Halflin and the Fearzero

Halflin huffed and dug deep inside the bag, pulling the other papers out and passing them over. Viktor scrutinised them carefully; nodding, holding them up to the light, one by one, checking each watermark. At last he stuffed both permits into the top of his jacket, thrust the ID back at Halflin and nodded curtly to Fenn. Then he gave Halflin a quick, strange glance; half smile, half scowl, and disappeared back up the gangplank.

Now alone, Fenn turned to Halflin, a quizzical look in his eyes.

It had come. The moment of truth. He was sending the boy away and he must never return. Halflin never wanted him back; it was too dangerous on East Marsh. It was more than the right time; it was the perfect moment to tell him he wasn't his grandfather and that they meant nothing to each other. Now was the time to say he was just an unlucky Sunkyard owner who saved a lucky child, kept him safe and hidden as best as he could, made him strong and healthy, taught him as much as he could to survive, but did not mollycoddle him nor weaken him with love. The time had come to cut him – like he'd cut his webbed toes thirteen years before. It would be for his own good.

Cut him loose. Cut him free. Cut him clean away forever.

*Say it!* Halflin thought. *Say it!*

But he couldn't. His throat had turned to lead and his tongue seemed to shrivel in his mouth, shrinking from the words it had to speak. On board the crew were preparing to cast off and whistled at them to hurry. Fenn looked at Halflin expectantly, but the moment had gone.

"Do we board?" he asked, searching Halflin's face for answers. A sudden scatter of icy rain speckled the water and his teeth began chattering. He was frozen and exhausted. Halflin tucked the ID card in Fenn's shirt pocket and patted it to make sure it was safe.

"Grandad?"

"Warm enough? It'll be clap cold offshore," Halflin said gruffly. Something cracked in his voice. "Best ter keep warm."

Halflin shrugged off his heavy reefer jacket, hanging it on the twigs of Fenn's shoulders. It was damp from the marsh and weighed a tonne; Fenn's puny frame buckled beneath the load, but it was warm. As he dipped under its weight, he felt the truth dawn on him.

"You're not coming are you?"

Halflin concentrated on jamming the buttons through their holes.

"Pigs'll nee feedin'."

His voice had taken on a different tone; lighter than usual. He squeezed the last button into its place and jerked his head towards the boat. "Viktor'll take yer to our kin. Won't take long; four weeks if the weather holds. Bit longer if yer hit storms."

"I'm not going without you!" Fenn said stubbornly. Halflin glared at him.

"You'll do as I tell yer!" he said, trying to keep the shaking out of his voice. "Don't yer see? I've never left the Sunkyard, not fer one night, not in thirteen year. If I come wiv yer, Chilstone will smell a rat! Then they'll be lookin' fer an ol' man an' a kid. We'll stick ou' like a shark's fin. Yer safer alone."

Halflin managed to winch the sides of his mouth up to make an almost convincing smile.

"An' I'm safest stayin' put," he said, knowing that was what the boy needed to hear.

"Anyhow, won' be forever," he finished with a nod.

It would be forever. Halflin would make sure of that.

For a moment Fenn looked like he was about to cry and for a second Halflin softened, but he shook it off as quickly as it had come. He took Fenn's shoulders firmly in his hands.

"Now don't go blubbin'; it'll jus' make yer feel worse... Viktor's all right. Do as 'e tells yer," Halflin said, staring hard into Fenn's eyes. Fenn nodded, though his lips were quivering. The boat's engine suddenly snapped into life again and the *Panimengro* shuddered and rattled as the propeller turned.

"Spies are everywhere, throw 'em off the scent. Tell everyone yer fifteen! Best ter go older; folks will jus' think yer a runt. Don't forget wha' I told yer, but bury it! Bury it deep. Chilstone will hunt yer down and kill yer if 'e finds out, so trust no one an' nothin'... 'cept yer instinct. Got it?" With each instruction he roughly shook Fenn's shoulders.

Fenn nodded obediently and reached out to hug him, but Halflin held firm against affection; it helped no one. Instead he put his arm out, like a battering ram, and pressed the flat of his huge hand on Fenn's chest as if trying to drive caution into his very heart. Before Fenn knew what was happening, Halflin had spun him on the spot towards the ship and pushed him along the gangplank.

*Fenn Halflin and the Fearzero* by Francesca Armour-Chelu

# Questions

- 1 Which of the following words or phrases are synonyms for 'mollycoddle'?

pamper    neglect    wrap in cotton wool    indulge    protect    [1 mark]

- 2 Complete the table about characters in the story. [1 mark]

Name	Description
Halflin	
	Halflin's 'grandson'
Viktor	
	Fenn's enemy

- 3 Read the paragraph beginning: '*It had come...*'. Write down **three** things that we discover about Halflin. [1 mark]

- 4 What evidence is there to tell us that Fenn was thin? Find **three** examples. [1 mark]

- 5 '*Halflin managed to winch the sides of his mouth up to make an almost convincing smile.*'

What does this phrase imply about Halflin's feelings about Fenn's safety? [3 marks]

- 6 What does '*Something cracked in his voice*' tell us about how Halflin was feeling? [1 mark]

- 7 Do you think that Halflin will feel upset when Fenn has gone? Explain your answer by referring to the text. [1 mark]

- 8 How does the phrase '*his tongue seemed to shrivel in his mouth, shrinking from the words it had to speak,*' describe how Halflin was feeling? [3 marks]

- 9 Across the text the author uses words such as '*Halflin said gruffly*', '*Halflin glared*', '*he roughly shook*'. How do these words reflect how Halflin cared for Fenn? [1 mark]