

The logo for Star Stable, featuring the words "Star Stable" in a stylized, white, sans-serif font. The word "Star" is positioned above "Stable", and a small white star is placed between the two words. The background of the entire cover is a dark, atmospheric illustration of a forest at night or dusk, with gnarled trees and a cloudy sky. In the center, a young woman with long, flowing pink hair is riding a white horse. She is wearing a dark, form-fitting outfit and has a glowing pink orb of light in her right hand. To her left, two other riders on brown horses are visible in the distance. To her right, another rider on a white horse is also visible. The overall mood is mysterious and magical.

Star
Stable

Soul Riders

D A R K N E S S F A L L I N G

HELENA DAHLGREN

Soul Riders

D A R K N E S S F A L L I N G

HELENA DAHLGREN

TRANSLATION BY
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Andrews McMeel
PUBLISHING®



Rockville

Pine Hill

Pine Hill Manor

Meander Village

Bastion D

WINTER VALLEY

Cape Point

Dark Core Headquarters

The Secret Stone Circle

NORTHERN MOUNTAIN RANGE

Goldenleaf Stables

Cauldron Swamp

Observatory

Valedal

GOLDENHILLS VALLEY

Goldenleaf Forest

Everwind Fields

VALED

Cape West Fishing Village

Scarecrow Hill

Silverglade Manor

Marley's Farm

Hollow Woods

Silverglade Village

Will's Mill

SILVERGLADE

Forgotten Fields

Steve's Farm

Silverglade Castle

Moorland Stables

Mrs Holdsworth's house

Devil's Gap

Lisa's house

Jorvik Stables

Jarlaheim

Greendale

Old Hillcrest

Fort Pinta

Paddock Island

HARVEST COUNTIES

Harald's Vineyard

EPONA

Shipwreck Shore

New Hillcrest

Fort Maria

South Hoof Farm

SOUTH HOOF PENINS



SOUTHWEST



le

Hill Forest

The Great Reservoir

CRATER OF JOR

Ashland

Valley of the Hidden Dinosaur

GE

le Village

ALE

Firgrove Village

FIRGROVE

Jorvik City

South Link

MISTFALL

Dundull

ULA

SOUTHERN JORVIK

Other *Soul Riders* books
by Helena Dahlgren

Jorvik Calling
The Legend Awakens

To my readers, a constant source of encouragement even when the going gets tough (and sometimes it does, not just for the Soul Riders).

I'm sure all authors think that THEIR readers in particular are the best readers in the world. In my case this just happens to be true.

When I think of you, it just makes me happy.
Thank you!

*“Good friends are like stars. You can’t
always see them—but you know they’re
always there.”*

—Anon

A decorative header featuring several circular symbols and stars. The symbols include a spiral, a star, a lightning bolt, and a circular emblem with a star. The stars are of various sizes and orientations, scattered across the top of the page.

Prologue

Sometimes people say, “It must grow dark before it can become light again,” but what does that really mean? Could it mean that the really challenging parts of life are necessary in order for hope to return—and with it, light? Or is it just something we say to comfort ourselves when our lives feel tough?

When darkness falls over the earth, giving up feels easy. What if it’s already too late to do anything about it? On an island called Jorvik, four girls take fate into their own hands. They’re doing something about it.

They are the last Soul Riders, and this is the story of their first big battle against evil.



1

“Don’t you understand? We caused this!”

The words rang in their ears as they galloped across Jorvik’s desolate plains, the horses kicking up clods of dirt in their wake. Beyond the field where no flowers grow, at least not this late in the fall, a big, black raven rose from a tree. It emitted a guttural caw as it flew away.

The four chosen ones watched in silence as the bird rose into the sky. They had hardly spoken a word to each other since they left the Secret Stone Circle. There was no need.

What was left to say? As they stood there among the runestones, absorbing just how bad the situation really was, Linda had said what everyone else was thinking.

It was us. We’re the ones who did this. We rushed it. We were too impatient, and now all of Jorvik will pay the price.

When they teleported themselves back to the Secret Stone Circle, a strong, rare magic was released, affecting the nature of the island. Now that magic was about to cause a disaster, and it was all their fault.

Because of them, the large Bastion Dam, the one preventing Winter Valley from flooding with water, was on the verge of bursting, putting an entire village in danger. This was hard to accept, especially considering the fact that there was a chance that

they would fail, but they were heading to the dam now in hopes of making things right.

Lisa took the lead on her horse, Starshine. Even though the sky was a dismal gray, like the color of dull, old pencil lead, Starshine's coat gleamed white. His glorious blue mane and tail shimmered under the heavy cloud cover. Even now, when everything around them had turned into chaos and they were under so much pressure that she thought she might break, Lisa was grateful for her horse, grateful that it was the two of them to the end.

She shortened the reins and closed her eyes, shutting out the world for a moment. Her red hair danced in a gust of gathering wind. *This has all happened so fast*, she thought. Not that long ago, she was just Lisa Peterson. Now she was a Soul Rider. Would her life ever return to normal? Was there even such a thing as normal anymore?

She closed her eyes tighter, feeling the rustle of the wind. Sometimes it felt like everything that had happened to them was just a fairy tale, but not a pleasant, warm fairy tale. Sure, there was plenty of happiness, friendship, and kindness in the story, but there were also other, darker things. Far too many other things that threatened to extinguish the light.

With her cold hands pressed into Starshine's warm mane, she thought about how it had all started. It really wasn't that long ago at all.

A decorative header featuring a central large number '2'. Surrounding the number are various symbols: a four-pointed star in a circle, a spiral, a lightning bolt, and a circular emblem with a spiral and triangles. The background is filled with smaller stars and dots of varying sizes.

2

It had all started when Lisa and her father arrived in Jorvik a few weeks into the fall semester. Of course, it had really started long, long before that. The girls just hadn't been aware of it. The legend of the Soul Riders was already written into the island's rich soil, into the ocean's whitecaps, into Goldenhills Valley, where the fall leaves crunched and blazed vivid colors all year round. The sleeping legend was there within Jorvik's special horses, the Starbreeds, which weren't found anywhere else in the world, and it was there at the Secret Stone Circle, of course. There, high up in the mountains, the druids had helped new Soul Riders find and refine their powers for generations. The druids were wise men and women with close ties to nature. They were a natural part of Jorvik, if you knew where to look.

The Soul Riders were four young girls with magical powers. When they stood united, together with their Starbreeds, those powers were brought to life. The Soul Riders' job was to protect the delicate balance between good and evil so that Jorvik could continue to be the very special, magical place that it was.

But over the millennia, an evil force had been at work to do all it could to disrupt that balance of power, and that evil had a name: Garnok. Old ghost stories told of fishermen who had been shipwrecked at sea and devoured—not by the powerful waves, but by a

fiendish beast who lured them to the bottom of the ocean. It was said that he could control minds, that once you sensed his presence you would never be yourself again. Garnok was still there, still being held captive just outside of our world. The island's forces for good sought to ensure that he never managed to escape, while the forces for evil sought to free him from his captivity.

The evil forces were led by a man named John Sands, the owner of the mysterious company Dark Core, who had been poisoned for several hundred years by the dark influence and promises of Garnok. Together, these forces wanted to release the dark magic and share in Garnok's power, while Mr. Sands also dreamed of getting revenge on the people of Jorvik for everything that had been taken from him so long ago.

The Soul Riders' horses possessed a powerful magic, and in the wrong hands that magic could be used to release Garnok once and for all. That was why Mr. Sands had kidnapped Lisa's horse, Starshine, and sent Anne's horse, Concorde, to Pandoria, a warped, nightmare-like parallel world where thoughts became fragile and everything pulsed pink.

It was all so new. It really hadn't been that long since the four Soul Riders had first come together. As they started to understand their mission, they grasped that this wasn't the kind of job they could just turn down. They were Soul Riders, regardless of how they felt about the matter, and they had to work together if they were going to succeed.

Yes, it was all so new, but they had already accomplished more than they could have ever dreamed of. They had succeeded in rescuing Starshine and Concorde, and they had convinced the witch Pi, who dwelled in a swamp deep in Goldenhills Valley, to give them the Light Ceremony book. They had managed to shake off the Dark Riders—Sabine, Jessica, and Katja—who had chased

them in the woods. And most importantly: they had reunited. Because the Soul Riders had to be together; they understood that now. Together, with their horses, they were at their strongest, just as Elizabeth, their beloved friend and mentor, had said.

But the Soul Riders had already faced a heavy loss. Calliope, Elizabeth's horse, had drowned in Pi's swamp. Lisa could still hear the terrible sounds from that fateful day. They echoed inside her, the shrill shrieks that had slowly subsided until the only sounds remaining were sobs of grief.

As they tried to escape from Cauldron Swamp, the witch Pi had transformed Elizabeth—the friendly wise druid who had taught the girls so much about the Soul Riders' mission and the wisdom of the Keepers of Aideen—into a will-o'-the-wisp. She still remained in the same fluttering, flickering form, waiting for someone to change her back. She couldn't comfort the girls and tell them that everything would be okay. She couldn't take the lead, riding off on her beautiful, dapple-gray Calliope.

The Soul Riders had experienced both success and loss in the brief time that they had known each other. Now, all of their focus was on saving the dam and preventing this disaster. They had to keep the dam from breaking like it had time and time again in Linda's awful visions.

But the dam wasn't their only problem. Lisa and the others were slowly starting to realize that something more was happening on Jorvik. A darkness was gathering. The island itself was in jeopardy, and saving the dam was only a small part of the threat that the Soul Riders were facing.

Lisa was having a hard time focusing on their mission at the dam. She was having a hard time focusing on anything at all, actually. She was too distracted by the most important thing of all: her father, Carl, who was being held prisoner inside Dark

Core's headquarters. He had been captured by Mr. Sands and his henchmen, the Dark Riders. For a brief moment, Lisa had been Mr. Sands's prisoner herself, and she knew that he was prepared to do whatever it took to get his way. He might torture her father, or possibly even kill him. What was a dam crisis compared to the threat of losing the only parent you had left?

Don't think like that, she told herself. First the dam, then Dad. It has to be that way.

Yes—it had to be that way, but that didn't mean that it had to feel right.

Lisa opened her eyes and sat up straight in the saddle. She felt the impatience crawling under her skin and blistering there.

"Hurry up!" Lisa called to the others, urging Starshine along. "Come on, you guys!"

The other riders picked up their pace and they all galloped onward in the direction of the dam. Starshine puffed out his nostrils and shook his head back and forth. It was almost as if he was trying to warn her about something. Lisa shook her head in an effort to force away the thought. They didn't have time for that now.

A decorative header featuring a central number '3' surrounded by various symbols including stars, circles with geometric patterns, and a lightning bolt. The symbols are arranged in a scattered, starry pattern.

3

They rode on at high speed. The fall air was chilly, but none of them were cold anymore. Their faces looked determined. In the pale gray light, the four young girls galloped side by side, just as the old stories had foretold. Linda, Lisa, Alex, and Anne rode together just as they had so many times before.

And yet something was different this time. *Everything* was different. The river ran through Winter Valley just like it always had, but the water level was so high that big, wet pools of mud had formed along the riverbank. The horses' hooves squelched as they neared the river. They were forced to slow down to keep from slipping.

"Is it going to be like this the rest of the way?" Anne asked, making a face.

Linda shortened her reins and shook her head.

"We just have to move farther away from the river," she said. "Then we'll be able to gallop on firmer ground again."

She hoped that what she said was true. They didn't have time to do this at the leisurely pace of a walk or trot. They really needed to be able to gallop now. She gave a deep sigh of relief when they moved farther away from the riverbank and the ground stopped squelching. The water wasn't a problem anymore, not for the moment at least. Linda straightened up in her saddle and let Meteor

choose how quickly he wanted to gallop. Strong, sensible Meteor. A wave of gratitude flowed through her as she thought about how perfectly they understood each other, how she barely had to give him cues in order for him to understand what she wanted. Where would she be without him?

They heard the sound of thundering hooves in the woods behind them as a herd of wild horses fled in panic. The Soul Riders' horses heard the wild horses fleeing and seemed ready to bolt themselves. Their eyes bulged and their muscles tensed beneath their sweaty coats. There would be no slowing them down now, even if the girls had wanted to. People say that animals can sense when something terrible is about to happen, that they have a kind of sixth sense that allows them to pick up on impending danger long before humans can.

The girls had been riding with a sense of dread in their stomachs the whole time, but when they heard the wild horses panicking, that feeling of dread dissolved, turning into sheer, wild desperation. The animals knew that the rising water level in the river wasn't coming from the rain.

All magic has consequences. The girls knew that now, far too well. The awful words that no one wanted to say echoed through the empty space between them, rising up into the gray, rain-laden sky. Maybe the words were in the blackbird's song—was that why it sang out so mournfully?

It was us. We caused this.

Linda already knew how it was going to happen. She had seen it play out in her visions too many times to count. At first, she hadn't understood what she was seeing. It was impossible to sort the images, to see how they were connected. For a while, it was all just dark water and muffled cries, a heavy pressure on her chest that made it hard to breathe. But now she knew what it all meant,

and that icy certainty made her press her hands firmly into Meteor's thick, rough mane for comfort. She felt his warmth underneath her hands, as well as how fast he was breathing. A small part of her wanted to disappear into this moment. Into a *before* that far too soon would turn into an *after*. She didn't want to think about what would follow. As long as they were still riding, as long as they were on their way there, they might be able to prevent this disaster. As long as they continued to ride, she dared to hope.

In spite of everything.

When it happened—if it happened—the water would race straight down the valley toward the houses in the village below. There would be tremendous devastation. Linda sat up straighter in her saddle. She let the rhythm of Meteor's gallop wash away all of the haunting echoes of panicked horses, terrified parents, children crying for their mothers, that awful gurgling before everything went silent. The silence might actually be the worst of all.

Linda blinked several times in an effort to clear the terrible images from her mind. Then she turned to Alex, who was riding closest to her. "We need to warn them, make sure that they get out of their houses—all the people living along the river below the dam, I mean. If . . . if this doesn't work, they can't be there when the dam breaks."

Alex nodded grimly and urged Tin-Can on. On the other side of her, Anne did the same.

"This *has* to work!" Lisa half-whispered. Linda caught her eye and gave her friend an encouraging smile.

"Almost showtime," Linda said.

"Argh, we've hardly had any chance to rehearse," Alex mumbled. And then in a louder voice, she said, "I think the druids should have come with us. Are we sure we can do this ourselves?"

“You know very well that we didn’t have time to wait for the druids,” Linda said, shaking her head impatiently. “They’re not exactly the fastest-moving bunch, and we didn’t have a second to waste.” She was quiet for a moment, brushing away a dark strand of hair that had come loose from her thick bun. Then she continued. “I mean, after all, this isn’t *that* tricky! We’ve got this. All we need to do is stop the magical cracks from growing, and then shrink them using the magic of the Light Ceremony. And we have everything we need right here.”

She gently patted her saddlebag that contained the Light Ceremony book. For centuries and centuries, the book had helped to guide young Soul Riders in Jorvik. Now, it was their turn.

Linda suddenly had a flashback to the time when she was at the local swimming pool and had to jump off of the ten-meter diving platform. It was several years ago, and her parents were still living in Jorvik. She could remember it all so clearly, that tickling sensation in her stomach, the way she held her breath in fear. Everything had just stopped as the diving platform seemed to give way beneath her. All other sounds disappeared until all she could hear was the intense pounding of her heart.

Thump, thump, thump.

And then when she finally jumped: butterflies had spread throughout her entire body. She had done it!

She felt like being a Soul Rider was a little like standing up there on that diving platform and daring to jump into the water below. Except for the fact that as a Soul Rider, you had to be prepared to dive in over and over again and there was no guarantee that there would be any water to soften your landing.

Alex looked at Linda. Her friend’s eyes glowed behind her fogged-up glasses and Alex couldn’t help but feel some of her confidence.

“Okay,” Alex replied, picking up the pace of her gallop.
“Here we go!”