

The Art Of Breaking

By Bartan Tirix

Trade with Swaggercringe

Daybreak was a strange thing to call it, considering there wasn't a ray of light that could pierce such a dense morning fog. Really containing the creeping chill of a winter that persisted on taking an initiative on the autumn, and making the traveling man wish he got his scarf out earlier.

The road was difficult to trek during this time of year, the dampness in the air sinking into the dirt over time and then freezing over. Making it hard to follow someone else's footsteps without literally stepping in them. It was especially harder to move when it was downhill, attempting to stay balanced on a road that was very worn due to the constant storms now taking quite the heavy toll on his ankles. Making the man question if he should've slept in a little longer, at least until the fog lifted.

There was no telling when such a thing would happen though, especially at such high altitudes and nearing the coast. Able to see the waters of the ocean reflect the moonlight after dusk, after taking a break to write in his journal for the evening. Half wishing that there was something a tad more exciting to write about, whereas things have been quiet of late.

Not that Vedaki didn't enjoy the peace, it was actually quite restful in it's own way. Though he did wish that the scenery could last longer. The green starting to lie dormant in many of the plants within the man's travels south, almost cutting this departure from the northern areas too close. Escaping the harsh grasp of their winters nearly just in time, but there's still so many species up there he never got to see.

Speaking of such, the man felt something shift in his backpack. Smirking and knowing exactly what it was, as a small creature grumbled. Struggling to get comfortable to continue her slumber, only to purr in question and dig into the backpack a little bit. The man attempting to keep a straight face as the creature hissed, breaking him into chuckles. "What the hell is this!?" A small pink snout stuck out of the bag, attempting to undo the buckle strap to it and putting up quite the struggle to get out. "And did you make this tighter than normal!?"

"Yes. Yes I did." The human stated, almost teasing the small wyrm.

"Why!?"

"Because you put rocks in my trail mix yesterday, remember?"

"I did no such thing!" She snorted.

"Ammir." He playfully scolded.

"Define 'Rocks'."

"What you're currently holding." A small pebble was suddenly tossed out to his side, getting him to look at it and almost slip on the steep dip of the road. Chuckling at the small dragon's snort as she dug into her portable home; his backpack. Making cute grumbles as she searched within the blankets, only to release another frustrated purr, then a loud hiss from within. Causing the man to laugh as she found another one. "That should keep you busy for a while."

"Busy!?" The pink wyrm growled, tossing out another two small rocks and still struggling with the tight buckle on the pack. "I had plans for today!"

"Sleeping is not really plans for daytime or travel."

"But beauty sleep is a need-"

"-Want." Veda corrected her.

"-**NEED**." The small one snorted loudly, digging around the folded blanket to find anymore of the objects. Releasing a growl when she found dozens of them. "How did you even manage this!?"

"You've grown to be quite the heavy sleeper, interestingly enough. That, and I couldn't get you up when I started an hour or so ago. So, as usual, I just packed you along with my gear, and set off. After placing the pebbles you threw in my trailmix-"

"I didn't put this many-!" A loud hiss was then interrupted by a slight whimper, feeling the human stop and half look behind, knowing very well what smirk was on his face. "...Shut up."

"So you admit-"

"Shut up!" Ammir grumbled, hearing him chuckle and start walking again as she attempted

to get comfortable. Yet, just couldn't with the damn rocks bulging underneath. Attempting to squeeze out of his pack didn't work quite well either, regardless of how small she was. "Can you open this thing already?"

"Not until you clean that mess."

"A mess that you made." The pink one snorted.

"Considering how often I had to deal with the results of your 'messes', I'd say you're getting off easy." The man teased, hearing her grumbles as she squirmed inside the durable bag and flinging out dozens of rocks. Not without many curses and complaints about such a thing, granted.

"There."

"That was 34/40."

"You counted!?"

"I planned this one out quite well, yes." A louder grumble as he counted aloud each pebble he saw become airborne and land in the grass. "And six. What have we learned?"

"That rocks are bad for your teeth."

"Not... Quite what I was looking for."

"I thought it was *interesting* enough: humans don't eat rocks, unlike me. Fact found."

"You eat rocks?"

"Correct." Such a statement actually got the man rather curious. "I've been eating them for a while now."

"I don't think I've ever seen you eat rocks of any kind before."

"Of course I have. It's called your **cooking**." She snorted, actually getting a laugh from Vedaki. "How much longer until the next comfortable bed?"

"You mean the next town? It's difficult to tell with the fog so thick, but before the sun went down last night, I could see smoke and the faint glow of torches downhill. Nothing alarming at least, but the last people I talked to mentioned it was a fishing town." A grumble of

disappointment. "What's wrong?"

"Means there likely won't be anything of value there."

"Ammir." He playfully scolded.

"What? I wasn't planning on stealing anything. I just enjoy being in the presence of things that shine. There's nothing wrong with that."

"Of course not, but it does make people suspicious."

"It's not my fault my species has a bad reputation of stealing things. Though I still want to set fire to the guy came up with that foolish name." The small wyrm grumbled, still trying to get comfortable. "Klepto Igitus. The nerve-"

"Cleptes Ignus. And there's nothing wrong with that."

"Didn't you say that it basically means Thief Dragon?"

"W-well... Yes. But-"

"My case is rested."

"...You rest your case." He corrected her again, getting a louder grumble.

"Your language is foolish and you should feel foolish about it!" A hiss and a sigh at his chuckle. "Just...! Wake me up when we get there! I need my sleep."

The man arrived in the fenceless village quite a while afterwards. For his legs, it was just in time. His ankles nearly crying out for a break as he wandered through the main path to find a local tavern of sorts. With the fog still lifting, it wasn't too difficult to find the rather crowded place. Loud and vocal, causing Vedaki's backpack to shift and grumble loudly over it (or at least attempt to) while he approached the bar. Setting the pack beside him carefully while getting the attention of the keeper. "Good morning! I'd like to reserve a room for tonight. A bit early but I want to make sure I have a place to sleep."

"Don't worry, we still have several rooms available-" The young woman double took at the

shifting backpack, a little more concerned when it started to hiss against the tight buckle as Veda undid the strap. Getting the small pink dragon's head to pop out and quickly look around, slightly irritated by all the noise. "Is...?"

"Don't worry, she's harmless." A sharp stare from those pink eyes was trying to set the man's messy brown hair on fire from afar. "And by that, I mean she won't harm you." A look towards Ammir. "Better?"

"You got lucky." The small one snorted playfully.

"Don't worry miss, Ammir here knows how to behave herself. She's been in many rooms before without any trouble."

"A-alright..." The young woman said a bit quietly, giving a price and feeling uncomfortable as the small wyrm leapt onto the bar, identifying and following a few scents around before stretching her wings out. A loud purr in curiosity left her throat as her muzzle pointed towards the kitchen.

"Is that...?" The dragon started, adding a few more sniffs. "Smoked rabbit?"

"Y-yes, yes it is. A little bit of curry added to them when served-" A deep rumble left the pink one's throat, slightly concerning the woman but the man's smile slightly put her at ease.

"We can get some for breakfast, providing we make a truce." Those rose discs glared at Vedaki. "No more pranks, and you'll be rewarded."

"But your frustration is my reward." She snorted.

"As is vice versa." The man teased, getting her to growl this time. Letting the keeper hear the difference between the angry noise and the one of pleasure.

"...And you know that since I've caught the scent, I cannot say no."

"That I do." Another clever smirk at the pink dragon's snort, laying down on the bar and facing away. "What say you?"

"...I will comply." The wyrm stated, trying not to look so excited. She heard a plate come around ready to be served, immediately getting her attention, only to see the keeper carry it away to another table, releasing a grumble of impatience as her gaze looked back at the smiling man, snorting at him again as the woman came back around the bar.

"Just be-"

"-Patient, I know. I know." Ammir grumbled, half glaring at the barkeep's giggle while those pink ears flattened against her head.

"I can't say I've ever seen a dragon so tamed before." The woman received a loud growl from the small one. Something that startled her, but the man only chuckled.

"A poor choice of words, my dear. Ammir is not tamed. To say as much would be declaring that I own her." Vedaki stated, giving the wyrm a few pets. "She is... let's call it, willingly domesticated. She chooses to follow me."

"Oh? Why is that?" Veda was just about to answer, only to suddenly stop in place for a moment. Trying to think of exactly why, only to look at the pink dragon. One who was equally surprised at the question and just shrugged her wings at him.

"W-well... I remember that you were curious about my writings and language. But... now?" Ammir tilted her head at him, shrugging once more before bluntly stating.

"Your backpack is comfortable." A slightly puzzled look from the brown haired man as she snorted. "When it's not loaded with rocks, that is."

"Is that why you've come to Fras? You've come to study rocks?"

"Dragons, actually. I'm Vedaki, this is Ammir." The man shook the keeper's hand. "Sorry for the late introductions."

"Likewise. I'm Tiphany, my family owns the tavern." She stated a bit shyly, carefully approaching the pink dragon to pet it, only to get a signal to stop from the man.

"Ask for permission." He whispered to the keeper, getting a slight double take from the wyrm and a very light grumble towards the woman. Leaning her hand closer to Ammir, only for Veda to guide the keeper a bit more. "Lower than her head, palm up." She did so, getting that light red snout to sniff and study the soft hand for a moment, only to snort and nudge it away. "Okay, now you can."

"But he-?"

"-She." He corrected Tiphany rather quickly.

"S-she...?" His gaze and head pointed almost behind the woman, seeing a plate of striped meats ready to be served. "O-oh. Sorry. Usually I see it..." She set the plate on the bar, giggling at the dragon's loud purr and sudden eagerness to eat it. Silently requesting permission to touch the small creature, and getting a nod from the brown haired man this time. Starting with light touches, then flinching slightly while stroking down the neck. "Those... Parts are rather sharp."

"Yes, it's quite interesting. Most of the smaller ones do tend to have a lot of points and spikes around the. Sometimes horns and such as well. My guess is it's a defense mechanic; making them less desirable to be swallowed whole by the much larger species."

"I... suppose that makes sense? I've never really thought about it." The woman giggled. "But..." Vedaki released a noise in question, taking a bite out of one of the slices of meat. "We... the fishermen, I mean. They've recently come across a dragon nearby." A curious light flickered in the man's eyes, though recognizing Tiphany's worried look.

"Has it hurt anybody?" The question actually stunned her a little bit, attempting to remember the stories over the crowded room.

"I... don't think so, no. But winter is approaching soon. The fishermen have a cave they like to store their boats in to protect them from the weather, and..."

"This dragon has moved in." A faint nod from the woman. "Has anyone provoked it yet?"

"We're... we are not fighters, Vedaki. No one around here is a hunter of anything but fish. There has been talks about getting some outside help, perhaps hiring someone-" He stopped her silently by raising a hand.

"Before you do anything, I would like to see this dragon. Perhaps... if we're lucky, Ammir could convince it to leave or even allow storage to your boats." Ammir whipped her head around to look at the pair, a piece of meat hanging from her maw. Those pink eyes shifting between the two of them while those ears perked, once again getting the keeper to giggle at the expression. "If you do, I'm sure these people could reward you with something nice in return." She purred in question while her muzzle was still full, taking a moment to swallow it before responding.

"We'll see. But first: a nap on a comfortable bed." Ammir snorted, looking over at the woman for a few moments, as if to telepathically tell her to get them a room key.

"...What...? What is she doing-?"

"-Key." The wyrm grumbled, getting the keeper to think for a moment, then suddenly understand. Once again finding herself nearly embarrassed at the thought relapse before setting a key on the bar next to Vedaki, watching him pay for such services.

"It will get easier in time, Tiphany." The man assured her.

"Y-yes. I'm sure it will. Thank you for being patient and understanding." A solid nod from Veda. "This also comes with a free bath." She stated out of the blue while another order came up. Tending to it and avoiding the puzzled look from him, a gaze that soon went to the pink one who only stared at him back in amusement.

"What did she mean by-?"

"-Your mane is terrible, and you should feel terrible about it." Ammir snorted, finishing off the plate as Vedaki observed his brown bush of hair in curiosity.

The bedding was better than the backpack, but she's slept on better. Slightly disappointing the small wyrm, but that was to be expected in such a small village. Though one location did surprise her with it's comfort, nearly challenging to that of the finest hotel room Ammir had snuck into. If only she paid enough attention to that village's name, what a shame.

Granted, such beauty sleep was being interrupted by the whispers of children. They were trying to get a good peek into her room's windows, or possibly in a weak point in the wall. Finally, she let out a loud growl when they attempted to climb on some boxes to see through the high window, just as Vedaki entered the door, chuckling at the small dragon's rather irritated expression. "They're just curious."

"Yeah, well doesn't your kind have a saying about that? Curiosity Killed The Feline or something?"

"Cat, yes. But satisfaction brought it back." The man smiled, especially when the small one's eyes glared at him, half puzzled.

"...You made that up." She snorted loudly, getting him to chuckle as he packed a few supplies. Mostly some writing ones. "That was almost as bad as your myth about felines having nine lives."

"Ah, yes. An old poet made up that rumor, but it's not what you think." A slight grumble from Ammir as she felt like she was being patronized. "A Cat Has Nine Lives: For Three He Plays, For Three He Strays, And For The Last Three He Stays."

"So, it's about their actual lifespan, not their survivability."

"Correct. Though that is definitely a feature they tend to possess, yes." He placed a notebook to the side as he organized a few things. Getting her to look at it, and notice several notes taken. Knowing very likely what he was about to do.

"What did they say about it?" The man's green discs looked at her for a moment before thinking back...

"A tall, massive hulking beast of a creature! Arms as thick as a ship's mast!"

"Hundreds of teeth in it's threatening jaws! Each as sharp as one of my pike heads!"

"It was the size of a mountain! Wings that stretched from hill to hill!"

"How... big is your cave again?" Vedaki asked, getting the fisherman to studder before falling silent.

"I've seen the beast, yes. Darkest of blue, much like the night before the storm."

"My young one spotted it whilst picking berries the other day. Said the earth quaked as it walked passed her, thank the gods she was unfound."

"I saw it's eyes, sir! Deep red and monstrous, they were! Eyes set to kill!"

"Has it been seen from the village?" The man asked, still taking notes from each person.

"Well... no. It seems to avoid this place."

"No. Our prayers keep the behemoth at bay."

"Aye, but only from the boat and returning to the pier. I spotted it's blue self out in the distance."

"Swimming?"

"Er... no. It was on the lands. I've never seen it in the water, myself. Such a thing would be too hard to spot."

"Has it disturbed your fishing in any way?"

"I... think not, when you mention it."

"Perhaps it doesn't eat fish then..." Vedaki pondered, still writing notes down. "You mentioned wings before, yes? You've never seen it flying?"

"I... Er..."

"No sir, I have not."

"The wings are indeed real, mister. But I've never seen it take to the skies like your pet-"

"-**PET!?**" The pink dragon hissed loudly, getting the children outside to scream and scamper off. Causing the man to laugh loudly. "I am **Not** your **Pet!!** -Why does your kind always assume that!?"

"That's the excuse they find more comforting: that you're tamed somehow-" A loud snort from her as Veda struggled to hold in his chuckle. "I'm not saying that you are, but it will work better in your favor if they *think* you are." A loud growl from the small one, as she curled back up into a sleeping position. Changing the subject without confirming to such an idea.

"So, they're perspectives are all over the place." A shrug from him.

"People exaggerate when they're afraid. It's a survival response that keeps them in fear, yet out of danger." He packed his gear while the wyrm let out a grumbling sigh.

"And now you're once again going head on into danger, just so people have a place to pack their boats?"

"If I can prevent an attack before it happens, be it against these people or that dragon, then I'll give it a shot." He finished packing and threw the sack over his shoulder. "Coming with me?"

"Might as well." Ammir half grumbled. "Somebody needs to look after you. And before you get any ideas: *you* are *my* pet, if anything." She snorted.

The two left the village after confirming directions for the cave's location. Still being warned to be very cautious about such a beast, but Vedaki ensured they would be. Tiphany was nice enough to make them a packed lunch at reduced cost, making the dragon inside the travel bag purr loudly now that they were outside the village. "You better not be eating that without me." The man teased.

"Not eating, no. But it's nice to have a warmed bed." The wyrm shifted a little inside. "We should get a lunch to go more often...!"

"Heated beds are a luxury. But as long as you keep our dinner warm, I don't mind. Though, I do hope it won't attract predators." The man pondered while walking a somewhat worn path. "The first thing they would come after would be the backpack with all my gear in it."

"And me. Don't forget about the most important thing on this trip." The man did his best to look behind at his bag. "...You suddenly went quiet." She grumbled, not smelling any fear. "Why."

"No reason." A faint growl from the small one. "I just wondered if I should have left my notes in the hotel instead. As much as I do like to keep them with me, they could very easily be lost in a matter of ways."

"Like falling into the ocean?"

"Y-yes."

"Being eaten by a dragon?"

"Yes..."

"Accidentally thrown into a campfire-"

"You're not helping my anxiety on this, Ammir." He teased, getting her to snicker. "But I ponder if there's any way to keep such notes safer. Perhaps making multiple copies, but that's a

lot of time and twice as many supplies I need to pay for. It's not quite something that I can afford just yet."

"Didn't you leave some of your work in that library place?"

"I shared my findings with them, yes. The first couple of my journal entries are stored there. However, I haven't put much else in there. You know why." Veda took a deep breath as he walked and looked over the ocean. "I don't like the thought of suddenly losing everything I've worked so hard to find answers for. I always felt that there was more to dragons than people thought, more than just simple tales of humans overcoming something more powerful than them."

"There is." The pink wyrm snorted. "What exactly are you getting at?"

"There's a... foul stigma towards them, how my kind view dragons as enemies or antagonists. They can be a benefit to mankind, I know it. As well as vice versa."

"Benefit to Mankind?" She quoted, snorting afterwards.

"Not as in tamed, but to live in harmony of sorts." Another sigh from Vedaki. "In the end, aren't we all just one world? It shouldn't take a crisis or a war for us all to learn to work together." The small dragon inside remained silent, but still unable to stop herself from purring. Not really sure what else to add as he walked.

The path lead uphill quite a ways, seeing the water start to cove into the shore as the land went up. It was the shape of the large hill that allowed the cave to reside within, and the worn path lead down to it's mouth with several zig zags in the trail. One that was definitely used by something large, likely dragonkin.

However, it was clear that the dragon's paw was not seaworthy, much like many water-based drakes Veda has encountered, making him wonder why this dragon would have such a location as its habitat? Perhaps the answers lied within the home, but first he would have to make it down this rather treacherous path.

Sharp rocks seemed to line the area, attempting to hold the land and damp dirt in place. Often taking steep steps down that made the man slip a little from time to time, making his

ankles ache by the time he reached the beach. Still wet, but at least the tide was lowering.

However, the waters could still be heard within the deep cave, looking larger up close, and making the man's heart start to race. The noise was too loud for him to make out any possible slumbers as he attempted to look inside the dark veil. Feeling the pink one crawl out of the pack and perch on his shoulder to see for herself, but nothing.

Carefully, Vedaki walked over the uneven path, seeing two long sections of rock with shallow waters dividing them in the middle of the cave. It honestly did look like a good place to store the fishing boats, even still having some gear leftover. A box on the ground looked like it was dropped and abandoned, likely from when the beast was first spotted.

Taking a small torch from his belt, he leaned the upper end of it towards his companion. Minding his own hair as Ammir shot a torrent out to ignite it, he cautiously entered the dark area, watching his step.. They were ready to toss the torch in the water and flee if whatever lurked in the shadows suddenly jumped at them.

Nothing thus far, the stench of raw meat and salt water filled the cool cave as Vedaki felt a little uneasy seeing a body in the dim light. Animal, though. Not human. It looked like it was a recent kill, but there were no signs of it being dragged inside. If the dragon they were seeking was indeed large as the villagers stated, odds are it could have just carried it within those jaws.

It wasn't until he spotted a few more that the man started to become concerned. Once again, fresh; no signs or scent of rot whatsoever. Was this creature gathering and storing food for the upcoming winter? Or was it planning such recent kills to become rotten beforehand. As disgusting as such a thing sounded, there were tales of some dragons doing such things.

The light of the torch eventually reached to the back wall. Revealing a sort of makeshift bedding of a couple of blankets, ropes, and what likely appeared to be a bundle of hay. Well, it was at one point. Now it had all been crushed beneath a startling amount of weight. In any case, there was signs of something living here, but no dragon currently at this location. Meaning it was likely out for the day. "What now?" The pink wyrm asked.

"It has to return at some point. We're better off waiting far outside of its lair for when that happens. Maybe we can catch a good look at it then and see what we're dealing with." A noise in confirmation from the small one, hearing a series of clicks as a shiver ran down her body.

Slightly disappointed, the man left the cave, dousing the torch in the water and making sure it was cool enough to attach it back onto his belt before starting that treacherous climb up

that strange zig-zagging path. Now he understood why the large tracks seemed to be half struggling with such a thing as he focused on where his feet were being positioned.

Once he reached the top, he looked forwards, coming face to face with a large blue behemoth. The sudden encounter surprised all three of them into yelps and steps back, only for Vedaki to trip and fall backwards harshly. The pink wyrm instinctively took flight, unable to do anything but watch in horror as her traveling companion (and their lunch) tumbled violently down the path, hitting sharp rock after sharp rock that outlined the path until he finally landed in the sand, unable to hear the smaller wyrm's cry for him through the ringing in his head.

Ammir reached the man's body, faced up and tense but not breathing. At least for a few moments, realizing that the wind was just knocked out of his chest. That didn't stop her concerns as he nearly growled in pain, reaching for both his lower back and right leg. Neither looked exactly straight anymore. "Vedaki!? Are you okay!?" The small one whimpered, not really knowing what to do. Looking back up at the large blue wyrm they were seeking, and seeing a rather identical form of shock on the large dragon's face as well.

"What are you doing!?" Ammir growled in Thrunst, a common dragon language, not getting a response. "Get down here and help him!" Still, there wasn't much of a response from the large one, but those maroon discs did shift back and forth between them. Seeing her body language nearly demand his scaly ass to get down there, he snorted. He carefully started to descend that horrible path, while hearing the man breathe heavily and hiss in pain.

"You couldn't have picked a better spot to land?" The blue one grumbled, surprisingly, in the common tongue, as he tried not to fall too fast as to step on the wounded man. Getting a curious, but painful stare from Vedaki, who was unable to focus on much else other than the pain.

"That leg looks broken." The small wyrm said worryingly, once again in Thrunst and getting a slight neck curl from the larger one. "We need to get him back to the village!" Those dark red eyes shifted back and forth, before resting on the human and getting into his line of sight.

"You! Tell me that your pet can speak normal!"

"-**PET!**?" That actually startled the larger wyrm.

"Apparently she can." He snorted at her. "Now what did you say?"

"I told you that the leg is broken and that he needs to get back to the village! Don't you

know our language!?" He seemed to ignore the question, but follow her gesture towards the village. Painting a worried look over his face.

"I can't go there."

"And I can't carry him! You did this, and you're able to-!"

"This doesn't make it my fault! Do you two normally go snooping around other people's homes and just *expect* them not to return when you flee!?" The blue wyrm growled, nearly getting interrupted by the man's painful groan when he attempted to speak. "And that's going to get annoying really fast." He groaned, those eyes drifting away in thought.

Don't risk your own life to save the world. They won't remember you for it, let alone appreciate what you've done.

"We can't just leave him here." A louder grumble left the larger one as he tossed his snout and moved closer to Vedaki's sight, only for the smaller one to get between them and hiss. "What are you doing!?"

"Buzz off and step aside, I need to confirm something from him." A growl, possibly from both of them, considering the areas she was putting pressure on. Only to get another snout toss from the blue one, this time a little sharper. "I'm not going to kill him-" A loud groan of pain. "Though that thought is getting more and more alluring by the minute." He slightly aggressively pushed the smaller one out of the way and nearly became face to face with the man. "Hey...! Bush head! Can you hear me?"

"His name is Vedaki-"

"I don't really care." He snorted at the other dragon. "I need you to promise something for me, okay? Do you understand?" A few sharp nods. "You are to tell **no one** of what you've seen here! No matter what! In return, I'll stop the pain-" A hiss from the side as he rolled his eyes. "Without killing or harming you in any way." He lifted up a paw. "On my honor. Do we have a deal?" A more worried look from the man, but he nodded regardless. Watching the blue one gaze over at Ammir as well. "That goes for you too, especially if his whining is doing a number on your ears as it is mine."

"...Fine. I won't tell anyone anything." She grumbled, getting a stare from the larger one for a few moments before he closed his eyes and took a few deep breaths. Honestly reminding her of a wyrm attempting to bring something up it's neck before he exhaled a crystal blue mist over

her travel companion. In moments those heavy breaths of stress and pain were silences, worrying her until the vapor faded and Vedaki overlooked himself. Touching his body and leg without even so much as a flinch.

She didn't even notice the rather foul look on the larger dragons face before he started turning around and heading back into the cave. "There, deal done. Now leave."

"How did you...?" The man started, not getting a response or even a stall from the blue one. Standing up without any troubles, and dusting himself off. Only finding the damage to his clothing with a bit of blood from the fall, any wounds were as if they disappeared.

"Remarkable...!" He looked up, only to find the tail end of the dragon entering the cave, and looking over his companion.

"So, you're alright?"

"Yes, even all the pain has vanished." The man offered her to climb back onto his shoulder, and he took a deep breath. "I feel refreshed, even. Astonishing." Yet, Vedaki couldn't help but be attracted to the cave once more, cautiously approaching and peering into the darkness again. Nearly able to see an eerie green shimmer once in a while on the large wyrm's location. "Excuse me." He called, only hearing a grumble in response. "I would like to talk, if you have time."

"Well, I don't. If you want to talk, I'm pretty certain there's a village around here of your kind." The large one snorted. "I'm sure they're more than happy to chew your ear off."

"Actually, that's what I wanted to talk to you about." Veda stated, carefully stepping into the shadows with his torch once again. Trying to get the pink one to light it, but she was having difficulty with the wet material. "They sent me here in hopes we could discuss-"

"I'm not going anywhere near that village." The male wyrm growled.

"Hm? Oh, no, they're not looking to..." Getting a little irked by the torch not lighting, Ammir shot a long torrent for several moments. Lighting up the cave and getting the man to just stare at it, then her for a moment. Watching those wings shrug, then double take at those maroon eyes just staring at the two in the light. Clearly not impressed. "You see, this is their cave. They use it to hold their boats in the winter, so the weather doesn't damage them too much."

"And?"

"They're... Well, afraid of you. As you must know." A slow blink.

"...Yeah." The blue one bluntly stated. "In fact, I think you're standing in one of their puddles." It actually got the man to look down to see if he was stepping in something, but it was only water. "Look, it took me a long time to even find a shelter that I don't have to squeeze into or risk being stuck inside. Even though that trail outside is the worst thing in existence, and there is sand freaking **everywhere**..." The large one took a breath to calm down. "I am not leaving this place."

"Then perhaps we could make a deal of sorts-?"

"I am not making any more negotiations. Especially with humans." The blue dragon growled. "I'd rather have them fear me than think I can be reasoned with."

"Why is that?" Those maroon eyes just narrowed at the man as he took a few steps closer. "Go on, talk to us." No response for a long while, but Vedaki stood his ground. Finding one of the old crates left behind and turning it over to use as a seat. Waiting patiently for the large one to speak.

"...Why do you care?"

"I'm interested."

"In my cure." The blue one grumbled, seeing a shrug from the man.

"I'd be lying if I said no, but I assure you this: I'm more interested in you as a dragon, not in your talent."

"Why." Another growl, one that was barely a question.

"I've been writing a series of encounters and entries of the many different dragons that I have met over my journey. I want people to realize that they're more than just animals. That they're honestly just as humane as we are."

"And you believe that." A nod from the man.

"People are afraid of dragons, because they are more powerful than them. It is a natural response to spread propaganda of sorts to make anything stronger seem like a bigger threat to be dealt with-"

"And that's what you're doing-?"

"That is what I am trying to undo... Erm." Vedaki offered a gesture, attempting to get the large wyrm's name. However, the blue one just snorted at him.

"We are not friends, human. You are an outsider that has stuck his nose in the business of others and trespassed into my home-"

"Which is subjective, sir. This was part of their village-"

"This is an hour walk away from that village. I'd hardly consider it part of it." Another snort. "Go. Back. Tell them you didn't even find me, and just to be safe, stash your boats on the beach like normal people do."

"But-"

"-You owe me that much, Vedaki." The large one growled.

"For what?" Ammir growled back. "You're the one who spooked him down the cliffside-"

"For not throwing both of you into the waters and let them deal with you!" The blue wyrm started to get up. "I am going to ask you *politely*, one last time: **Leave**." It took a moment for the man to slowly nod. Taking a breath for himself before heading out, snapping the torch in the air to kill the fire and head up the path cautiously.

Yet, there wasn't an expression of disappointment over Vedaki's face like the smaller one expected. Instead... Gears turning? Getting her to grumble and toss her snout. "What are you thinking?"

"Let's find some firewood." Those pink ears suddenly flickered towards the ocean, soon getting the man to pick up the distant thunder that came their way. "And before that storm reaches us."

*Helping them, fine. But **Sacrificing** yourself for them? How long do you think they will appreciate that, hmm? How long until they go about their daily lives and not once think about the extra life that you've given them? Oh, sure. They'll say that they think of you everyday, but*

*the truth is... If you asked for that part of your life back, they wouldn't deliver. That's the way people are, and do you know why? Because they **Want To Live**.*

Echoes of the past seemed to get worse everytime he used that, getting the blue wyrm to once again shift and change positions on his bed. If one could even call it that at this point. Almost missing the soft grass of the meadow he was in earlier, though the distant rumbles in the sky were warning him to return to this dreadful cold place.

And then a growl from his midsection, demanding the wyrm's attention once more to satisfy it. Granted, it also didn't help that his stomach was being picky, wanting anything but raw meat again. The smell of it lingering within the cave nearly turning him off on eating altogether, but it's not like he had much of a choice. For the moment, it was either go scavenging for something warm and get caught in the rain. Likely causing the dragon to become ill in the process, or wait for the storm to pass and go hungry.

Words could not describe how much he loathed this, but such thoughts were interrupted by the sounds of several objects landing in the sand. Getting the blue one's head to shoot up and stare at his entrance, those frilled ears picking out... Wood? As well as the careful steps of someone making their way towards his cave. Instantly getting the larger wyrm to groan loudly before covering his eyes with a paw. "I thought I told you to get lost!" He hissed at the outside, soon seeing a humanoid begin to walk through the darkness a ways and once again ignoring the blue one's warnings.

"I know, but I do owe you for what you've done." The man said, setting the wood down. "I thought we could talk over a nice meal, if that's alright with you." He expected the grumble from the large one.

"And by that, you mean set the middle of my home on fire."

"Do you want something different to eat or not?" The pink one snorted, getting the larger wyrm to curl his neck. "There's plenty of meat around, but no signs of anything that has been burnt. Be it the carcass or the wooden crates that have been left behind. Not to mention that your stomach has been growling *constantly* since we met."

"So?" The blue dragon grumbled.

"So, why haven't you taken a bite to eat then? Prefer the taste of rotten meat instead?" A slight face of disgust was seen on the larger male, but no response. "Let us cook something for

you in return for helping him. Even though you did kinda cause-"

"Ammir." The man playfully scolded, getting her to snort as he set up the campfire. Seeing the blue wyrm get up after a few moments and start to walk around them, sinking Vedaki's heart a little. However, to his surprise, the blue one once again laid down on the opposite side of the camp; his back to the ocean as if to protect it a little. Seeing those curious green discs as the wyrm attempted to avoid eye contact.

"...The wind is going to pick up soon. You're not going to get a fire going without some sort of shelter from it." The blue one admitted.

"An interesting way to say 'you are welcome in my home' -"

"Don't push your luck, human." The large one snorted.

"It's Vedaki. This is Ammir, sorry for the late introductions." No response from him. "And you are? Do you have a name?" An exhale from the large one as he glanced at them.

"...Thea. Thea'daisis."

"Well, Thea. It's nice to meet you." Veda made a gesture to the blue wyrm, an open hand against his own chest then head. Only to get a very strange look from those maroon eyes for a few moments, then shifting to the pink one.

"Is he normally like this? Or only after a large fall?"

"He's normally like this." She grumbled, only getting a chuckle from Veda.

"It's a greeting, a sign for most dragons that I was taught quite some time ago. I guess it's about time I found one that didn't recognize it." The large one just snorted at him. "You are quite different from other dragons we've met."

"And you're some sort of expert on them?" Thea grumbled a bit sarcastically.

"Attempting to be. I've been traveling for quite some time now, seeing what I can learn from dragons."

"For what purpose?"

"Not the ones you're thinking of, I assure you that." Vedaki stated rather calmly, getting a narrow look from those dark red eyes. "So often have I heard tales where dragons are the

antagonist, especially growing up. But I never believed them, I always thought there was something more, something deeper in the minds of your kind. That they don't attack villages at random without being either provoked or lured in some way. That they do not steal specifically to get revenge for someone, or burn down their house." The large one's gaze seemed to relax a bit. "There's always two sides to every story, no matter how often the humans tell tales that try to claim that 'the dragon is evil for the sake of being evil'. You are not antagonists within our world because I've seen man do just as horrible things, if not worse."

"What do you want from me then?"

"Thea, I want to break this negative stereotype between our species. I want for us all to work together, to find the things we're able to accomplish if we merge our cultures." The man took a moment to pet Ammir for a few moments, almost trying to get her to purr. "There's a lot humans don't know about them, and same goes for the opposite. I want to find the good and announce it to the world."

"And if mankind only uses it to find weaknesses?"

"Trust me, it's more about a dragon's strengths than anything."

"Something that could be very easily be turned around." Vedaki shrugged, convincing the pink one to help him get the fire going. Hearing the blue wyrm exhale through his muzzle.

"...Makes sense why you were searching for me, really."

"Believe me, I did not hear of you or what you are capable of until I reached Fras. Even then, they don't know of your talents, Thea. They are only worried about you doing harm to them." A low rumble was barely heard as the wind started to pick up outside, causing howls and whistles to be heard. "And I do mean it when I say I'm more interested in your physical species over your power."

"Of course you are." The large one snorted.

"I won't lie, it does intrigue me, but..." Another exhale as the maroon eyes closed, giving him the impression that the dragon didn't want to talk about it. "Where did you come from?" That got his attention for a moment, suspicious as always. "You may ask me anything you want in return. Even first if you wish." Nearly a minute of studying the man as he worked on keeping the fire growing big enough to cook with. Though it was difficult to tell if the large one was just in deep thought.

"...What do you plan to do with this information." It was barely a question, getting the man to double take.

"I told-"

"When people start taking it the wrong way. Using it for their own gain." That made Vedaki's expression go a bit cross. "People are selfish, they will twist whatever ideas others have to get what they want. Most would likely look at your works in hopes to find some way to domesticate dragons."

"Is that a bad thing?"

"To lure them into slavery?" Thea growled, seeing the man lift a hand asking him to calm down.

"For the price of luxury though." The pink one added in. "To be invited into a society where you put your talents- and by that I mean **Any** talent one might have, into use. In exchange, you are well fed, kept warm in the winters, and sheltered. How is that slavery?" No response besides a low grumble from the large one.

"That's one of my goals; to see if we can live together in a society. But the main one is to just strip this fear and negative stigma that exists within the human side of storytelling. It does nothing more but divide us further, and will only make things that much harder to work together if the time is ever needed." Veda stated, unsheathing a knife and looking over at the closest carcass. "How old is this?"

"Old enough." Thea grumbled. Getting a questionable look from the two at his odd statement as the large one sighed. "...It's not rotten. It can't be."

"Can't be...?" The man asked, rather curious. Looking closer at the meat with what little light source they had. "It still seems fresh."

"Yeah... I dragged that in a few weeks ago." The blue one admitted, staring into the fire. Gesturing another on the opposite side with his wing. "That one about six weeks ago. Still fresh."

"Does this have anything to do with...?" Vedaki started, only to make out a small nod from the larger wyrm. Cutting several slices and setting them on a campfire rack before sitting down. "Tell me about it." He said softly, expecting the hardened look. "I know, you likely have many reasons to be suspicious."

"More than you know."

"But I want to more know about *you*, Thea." The dark red stare didn't lift for several moments. "Where did you come from?"

"...I don't know." A noise in question.

"You mean you don't remember?"

"No. I mean that I've been traveling so long that I've lost my way."

"Couldn't you just fly and find...?" Ammir started, only to see the larger one look away.

"You're not trying to find your way back." Half a groan from Thea, almost making Veda chuckle.

"Am I that easy to read?" He snorted.

"I wouldn't say so, but it would be easier if you talked." He turned the meat over carefully, cutting into it and making a rather surprising noise in question. "This is still quite rare...?"

"Now you see why I never tried to cook it." The large one snorted.

"Because your powers constantly keep it fresh?" Vedaki asked, only to get a sigh of defeat in response. "Please, Thea. Talk to us. Not as knowledge seekers, but as friends." Those maroon eyes studied the two for several moments. "Tell us your story." A slow blink and another sigh. "Maybe we can help."

"I doubt it." Thea mumbled. "You promised, remember that." A solid nod from the man, and a few from the smaller wylm. "I don't remember too much in early life, but I remember a forest of sorts. I remember a meal in a metal box of sorts, and being trapped in it soon after. One set up by a series of old guys."

"They captured you?" A faint nod from the blue one, as he was offered a piece of 'cooked' meat. Taking it and somewhat satisfied with the job. "Go on."

"Again, I don't remember much. But they were rather strict about what I was exposed to. What I was fed, what I drank... I honestly didn't notice it until one of the old ones pointed it out to me. But soon... I was given some sort of strange... Rock. I'm not sure what it was, but I remember being very ill afterwards."

"Rock?" A shrug from the larger wyrm, Veda's gaze moving to the smaller dragon and getting the same response.

"I got over it, but barely. Life in that... 'Cage', as another friend put it, moved on until a stormy day. I wasn't fed in the morning, and I heard no one around. I managed to escape my cage, sneak into the kitchen and raided it. Yet, still no one around." Thea took a breath, studying the two for a moment as they listened. "I searched through the castle for another soul, only to come across that old one I mentioned... His name is Nalgrasha." He looked to see if the name seemed familiar to those green eyes, but they only held uncertainty. Somehow relieving the blue one a little more.

"I found him in bed." Thea continued. "He was sweating, breathing rather heavily, yet shaking like he was cold. Pale, and I could just sense something was wrong with him." A large nod from Vedaki, knowing where this was going. "There wasn't another soul in that castle to help him, but... I wasn't... Afraid? I'm not sure why, but I had this strange instinct to..." Those frilled ears lightly blushed a tint of purple.

"To...?" Ammir lead him.

"Vomit... On him." A bit of silence and a few chuckles from the two. "I know. I know! It sounds weird, but that's what I felt at the time."

"Instead, what came out was... Not actual vom-"

"No!" The large one grumbled. "But... Yeah, blue mist of healing stuff." Thea snorted. "...And in moments, Nalgrasha came to. Perfectly normal. Even younger, in fact."

"Younger...?" A slow nod from the blue one. "Incredible..."

"It's not as glamorous as you think." Thea rolled his eyes. "But the others made a big deal out of it... A very big deal. Security was tighter around me, I was given a bigger cage. I was fed less in the beginning, but Nalgrasha put a stop to it. Something about attempting to keep me weaker, but he stated that if I'm weak I wouldn't be able to..." The man and smaller dragon stayed silent as the blue one continued. "They were keeping me there for themselves. They basically created a form of eternal life by sacrificing another creature."

"A magical one." Ammir stated, getting a nod. "But I've never heard of a dragon with a... 'Healing' breath weapon."

"Hell if I know what's natural and what's not." The larger wyrm grumbled.

"What if..." The man started, thinking back. "What if that's it?" A couple of puzzled noises from the dragons. "I wonder... There's many different types of dragons out in the world, more than I ever expected to find." Vedaki said, turning over a few more strips before going back to the carcass. "I remember reading up on one that might fit you."

"Fit...?"

"Have you ever heard of an Impression Dragon?" A head shake from the two. "It's one that's quite difficult to even find, due to it's nature, and it's only a theory. When they're hatched, they are left to fend for themselves in early life, able to eat whatever they come across. However, *what* they consume does alter who or what they end up as." The large one slowly curled his neck. "It's possible that these older men knew this, purposely seeked out an Impression Dragon, and attempted some strange experiment. Likely trying to create a life battery, of sorts."

"And they succeeded..." The pink one stated, looking over the larger wyrm who was lost in thought.

"How did you get out?" Vedaki asked, actually getting Thea to double take for a moment and become lost for words. "Did Nalgrasha...?"

"He... Released me, yes. Cared enough to let me go out into the world and explore it, but..."

"The wild can be unforgiving." Ammir stated, getting a faint nod from the blue one. "But it's better than being confined."

"I'm... Not so sure about that." Thea mumbled.

"You cannot be serious." The pink dragon nearly growled.

"I am!" The larger one snapped. "I'm going to assume you were taught how to survive out here, be it from any mentors you had or even from solo experience. Ever since I left that damn castle, I've been starving! I've been constantly too hot in the daytime, or freezing at night! Sometimes so much that I can't sleep, and the damn wind doesn't help! Some waters just make me more thirsty, while others taste completely unclean- Even when they don't look it!"

A breath of frustration from Thea as he continued. "I was captured early so they wouldn't have to worry about me longing to get out. I wasn't taught self-preservation, because I was expected to **die** in that cage. The only difference between in there and out here is the amount of **Pain** I have to live through! Hunger, temperature, thirst and injury!" Another breath as those maroon discs looked over at the carcass. "I didn't even hunt that. I just scared away those who did because I couldn't deal with that pain anymore."

The other two were silent for a few moments, as Vedaki offered the large one another piece of meat. Watching him take it carefully and almost growl at its heat. "You mentioned injury..." The man started, not getting a response. "Can't you just heal yourself?"

"It doesn't work on me." The blue wyrm grumbled, though the anger wasn't directed at Veda. "It only works on others... I'm not even sure if it works on the dead." Another breath from the large one as he cursed silently. "It's the only bargaining chip I have, yet I feel like it's worthless."

"Worthless?" The man asked in disbelief. "Thea, you could do a lot of good with your power. It's a complete game changer. You could cure illnesses, you could heal the wounded. Be rid of any possible disease, if it works on-"

"But at what cost!?" The wyrm growled over the harsh winds. "The moment someone says anything about my location, it will attract the worst of the worst! People who will do anything to seize me, hurt anyone in their path! And you **know** that someone will leak it out, to save some person who they deem is '**important**' enough to put everyone's lives in jeopardy!"

"Thea, calm down-"

"You don't understand, Vedaki! What I can do is something that money cannot buy! I can reverse aging, give people years upon years of their life back! What atrocities do you really think any warlord would honestly commit just to have me chained to their side!? To make them practically immortal, to give them an army that cannot fall!" A heavy breath of near heat as the blue one got up. "The more I use this, the more I put everyone else in danger. Including myself. Even more than I already am by talking to you."

"Then we find someone who can protect you." Ammir added, only getting the larger dragon to shake his head. "There are people who can be trusted in this world, even other dragons-"

"It won't work."

"Why not!?" The pink one hissed. "You can do so much good-"

"**At What Cost!?**" The wyrm roared, instinctively raising his wings in the process. "Not only the lives of those who I place any trust in, but my very own as well! Every time I exhale that forsaken mist, I **Die** a little sooner!" The two remained quiet as Thea panted, calming down. "This isn't a gift, it's a transfer. And my... my life isn't worth theirs. I... Am *Not*. **Expendable**."

"...That's why he freed you." Vedaki stated softly. "Nalgrasha. He discovered the toll it was taking on you." A slow nod as that blue head hung in defeat. "We can still protect you. I know there's someone out there who can..." A raised paw from the large one made him trail off.

"You Promised." Thea mumbled, looking over the two. "You both did. In order to protect yourself, you must remain silent." He looked back at the harsh winds. "...I'll leave this place. The village can have this, I'll just go elsewhere again."

"It's not safe for you out there, Thea-"

"It's not safe anywhere. But in the wilderness, they don't know what or where I am." The blue wyrm started to leave. "It doesn't make a difference where I go." Vedaki could only watch him leave, attempting to think of any way or person that could aid Thea in his struggles. However, he was right in many ways. What could be seen as a glorious gift could cause disaster in the hands of those with dark hearts. Was keeping his promise really the best thing him and Ammir could do?

The man looked at his small companion, the same struggles shown in her pink eyes along with a sense of uncertainty. "...We'll wait for the storm to pass." He eventually spoke up, not really wanting to leave the blue wyrm out there on his own. "We'll tell the village they can have their cave back when we return."

"And nothing else?" A slow nod from Vedaki.

"And nothing else."

But it's my life, and I should spend it how-

*And they damn well had their **lives**, and spent it how they wished! What's going to stop them from constantly running to find you everytime they need a refreshment? Would it be worth it then? What about the time after that? What about their kids? What about their friends? Cities? Pets? The old tree they used to play around? If you give in, even just once, they will take **Everything** from you. Get over this sense of Right and Wrong, it doesn't serve a place here.*