

The Thread Of Dawn Act 3 - Eastside

By Bartan Tirix

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Day 1: West

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The red wyrm landed on the edge of a high plateau, one that definitely seen better days. Covered in wet and debris from the forests, he hobbled towards the entrance of a large cave. Doing his best to keep pawful of dirt safe while transporting it inside and hoping the flower that grew on top would still survive at this altitude.

Entering his home, ignoring the mess the winds made and looking through his possessions to find something to place it in. Spotting a golden plate that was a bit faded, but it would work for now. Retrieving it, placing the mound of dirt onto it and resting it on a makeshift shelf that was eye level to the dragon. Taking the time to study the blue flower with his orange gaze... Only to realize: "I have no idea how to take care of this."

A bit of fear began to grow in Zarj'annan's chest, but soon buried it. First thing's first, he had to clean this place up a little bit and then reassemble his telescope. Glad he did bring it inside before that squall came through, likely risking permanent damage to it if the dragon had left it outside. Cleaning up the many leaves, branches, and shards of bark before tossing it over the cliffside.

Looking over the horizon, he could still see the darkness in the distance. The storm still raging and finally being able to pick up the soft rumbles of very distant thunder. Actually missing it at that moment, due to what that force of nature gifted him; a night to remember. But a night to long for, and the beginning of possibly the longest week in the red one's life. Finding himself looking towards the east borders; where the skies were crystal clear. Where the sun continued to rise, giving him some hope.

But what could Zarj do to convince not only his clan, but his entire species that the eastern dragons were not what the stories had told? That they were no threat? In fact, the

western wyrms could learn so much from them? Much like he learned so much from meeting a single one.

A deep breath from the red male as he returned to his cave. Now that the storm was over, he could reassemble that telescope and possibly study parts of the storm from afar. However, his eyes instantly caught the blue leaves upon entering the dark cave. One leaning down, looking quite... Depressed. Much like his own heart ached, less about sheer distance and more cut off due to an imaginary wall. "Is that a flower?"

Zarj's spines raised high as he nearly yelped, almost jumping away from the female voice as a green dragon chuckled at his reaction. Making him exhale in light frustration. "Yes, but ignore it. What do you want, Ho'thara?"

"Just checking to see if you finally came back. Let alone if we should be searching for a body." The green wyrm said rather calmly, looking over his cave and ignoring his narrow stare. "I heard the wyrmlings got you good."

"Well, somebody had to shut them up." Zarj grumbled, moving towards his telescope and starting to assemble the large pieces.

"And that's why A: you should ignore them like everybody else, and B: I don't blame you for your bad mood. How much did they steal?"

"No idea, didn't look. I could care less at the moment."

"Really? You're actually going to let them get away with it?" A shrug from those red wings as the male's head gently tilted for a moment.

"Most of this stuff I barely know what it's used for."

"Something you wouldn't admit towards another adult wyrm, has hanging around with the children altered your perception of the world that much?" The green one teased, overlooking the flower from afar as it started to close up.

"Do you know what these objects are for?" A sudden sharp glare and a snort from Ho'thara in response as the red one continued. "Half the reason for me to keep such things isn't because they look good, it's a puzzle. For me to look at and attempt to figure out what they were made, what the pieces go to, and how it works. Wyrmlings are a fresh pair of eyes and ears, with rather volatile imaginations. You'd be surprised how much they can figure things out or even lead you to a solution."

"They're treasures, Zarj. Items kept for value by lesser beings, who cares what they're for?"

"These weren't found in the wild like this, Ho'thara." He gestured to a piece of the telescope. "They were constructed for a purpose. They were crafted, which is something to be fascinated by, not mock and dismiss."

"Yet, they value them the same way we do, or else they wouldn't defend them to such an extent." The female snorted, taking a step forwards and looking over the larger pieces of the telescope. "Sure, their crafts may have a purpose, but it's for Them. We can already see our prey when we hunt, why would we ever bother to use this cumbersome thing?"

"Because prey are not what they're scouting for."

"Then what use does it have?" The red one remained silent as he put it together. "This is why these things carry omens, Zarj."

"Everyone here thinks that they're omens because they do not understand the purpose of such things."

"And you do-?"

"Yes." The male growled sternly. "Maybe not entirely, but I have a general idea because I have taken the time to actually understand them and their uses. While everyone else mocks and secretly fears these objects because they are too afraid to show any damn weakness in front of others. They're too stubborn to realize that maybe we could actually learn something from these "'Lesser Beings'", things that could improve our lives and perhaps even..." A heated breath. "But why bother trying when no one is going to listen to me..." Zarj trailed off to a grumble, feeling the female's stare on him as he doubled taked and finally met it. Getting the surprise of a smirk over her green muzzle. "What?"

"I'm liking this bitter side of the 'Tired Zarj'annan'." A snout toss as he put together another section of the telescope. "You usually just ignore whatever we say, but now you're... Actually standing your ground on your convictions? Interesting..." Those orange eyes returned to hers, locking onto her yellow ones with slight irritation.

"Why are you here?" He barely asked.

"If you let the wyrmlings steal from you once, they're going to keep doing it." That stare didn't lift, and the green one tilted her head in a shrug. "Fair enough, don't say I didn't warn you. That storm did a number on the nest. A dozen or so trees were actually uprooted and were launched into some caves. Big ones." Ho'thara came closer to him. "The elders are calling for everyone to come help remove them."

"Well, I'm busy-"

"Adding gardening to your list of human hobbies, I see that. Still, I did my job informing you. If Zarj wants to continue to disappoint his elders, then that's his problem." The male snorted in response, focusing on getting his device back together as she left. However... Something the female said swam through his mind. Echoing over and over until he slowed to a stop...

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Day 1: East

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The sounds of the fancy door closing startled the eastern dragon awake, his body jerking and sending splashes through the large bathtub. Exhaling a breath of calm when he recognized his own room and the smaller footsteps of a human. "Forgive me, my lord. I didn't mean to startle you."

"It is okay Mira." Alkardoc took a quick deep breath. "I just had... Quite the evening."

"I imagine. There's been quite a bit of damage to the city and surrounding forests. Many dragons have come to the aid to help replant and move debris." The young woman stated, changing the dragon's bedsheets with a fresh pair. Occasionally peeking inside the curtained-off bathing area, swearing she spotted a pair of spikes within the serpents silhouette. "-Goodness, are you hurt my lord?" The question made Alkar double take.

"Hurt? I just got a little dirty and cold-" The golden snake looked over the waters and finally realized he was erect; having two spires peeking high out of the surface. "Just a trick of the shadows, I assure you." The drake blushed, moving himself so they were hidden again. Now remembering who he was thinking about during his rest. "I haven't gotten any news of the damages yet, has the storm taken anyone?"

"A few pets were unfortunate enough to be caught out in the storm and haven't been seen. Quite a few people have been injured, but I haven't heard of any casualty."

"Hopefully it stays that way. I couldn't believe that such a thing existed."

"There are some that are claiming that it came from the west, perhaps summoning the storm to circle through the waters and hit us from a different direction." That made his fluffy azure ears point backwards. "It was unusually destructive-"

"I hardly believe that was the case, Mira. Please don't spread that rumor around, there's already enough tension between the lands as it is." She nearly whimpered as the dragon realized how harsh his tone was. "I'm sorry, my dear. I've... Just been thinking a lot about this divide within the land to the point where it has gotten me a tad bitter of late."

"What do you mean, Lord Kar?" She heard the long beast exhale through his muzzle as the waters shifted a bit.

"For a land ruled by those so convinced that balance is the key to success and prosperity, they really seem engaged in keeping this feud between the lands. If there's anything wrong within our government that is out of our control; like said storms, the West is to blame for it. Often without any evidence of such a claim." The serpent began getting himself out of the water. "Do you have access to a towel, my dear? It seems in my rush to get cleaned I have forgotten one."

"I do." Some footsteps as the golden one checked to make sure his twins retreated back into his sheath, signing in relief when they were. "Here you are, my lord."

"Thank you kindly." Though he couldn't quite hide away the dirty waters when she peeked through the curtains for the delivery. Lightly sighing at her surprised expression. "I'm afraid that storm snuck up on me, and I needed to take shelter in a cave. It didn't take long for the waters to convert the soils into mud, and in turn soiling me." He chuckled.

"But you remain unharmed?"

"I do, my dear. Thank you for your concern." The much larger dragon touched her forehead with his muzzle, his whiskers gently stroking the woman's jaw. "But I should go out to help the others. I may require an afternoon of rest afterwards, so my thanks for the clean sheets."

"Understood. Be cautious, my lord. Would you like your bath to be cleaned for your return?"

"I'll change the waters myself, but we'll leave the cleaning until tomorrow." Alkardoc

smiled at her. "No need to ruin your labor when I'm likely to just make it dirty again immediately."

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Day 1: West

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Zarj gazed from across the field, feeling silly resting within the edge of the forest line. Almost like a wyrmling spying on one of the 'children' from afar; an anthro civet attending to her garden. Almost wishing he could pace in circles to help calm his nerves as the dragon thought about how to approach the creature easily 1/10th his size.

Was he seriously considering this? Asking one of these lesser beings for help? A mindset he still had a hard time to disengage with now that the wyrm was back home. Even with Conway, Zarj had a difficult time showing any kind of affection or enjoyment with the social interaction. And in the end, look where that got him.

A long exhale through his muzzle, actually being picked up by the female gardener as she started to look around. Instantly making the wyrm lower himself to hide- as if that was going to help at all. Eventually returning to shifting around the large plot of dirt similar to another that held flowers within.

Zarj closed his eyes and took a quiet breath. All he needed to do was go up to her and demand knowledge, that's all. Get his information-... And there it was again. 'Demand'. The western instincts towards them always putting the smaller creatures and their lives below dragon's. Creating a guilt inside of his red chest as his orange gaze stared into space...

A sudden picture of Alkardoc flashed in his memory, fluttering the wyrm's heart for a few moments. Instantly knowing he was right; it was time to change this. But what would the eastern serpent do instead? They treated their "'lesser ones'" as equal, as far as Zarj could tell- though, he shouldn't treat the civet as a dragon specifically. Just... Not less than himself or his species.

With a deep breath... And a second one, Zarj'annan slowly got up and quietly made his way through the trees. Well, as silently as he could. Moving across the grassy field at a steady pace, but about a quarter of the way across the gardener's ears perked up and looked directly at the red wyrm. Yelping and scampering inside the small building before he could call for peace. Awkwardly grumbling but the dragon didn't give up, just patiently approached the small building.

("Just be polite.") Zarj thought to himself, resting outside the building while attempting to look into the half opened doorway. "Pardon me, erm...?" ("Darn, what did Conway call the others? Dancers? Escorts? Ladies! That was it!") "Ladies?" He called, not getting a response but able to hear the panicked breathing from inside. "I'm not here to harm you, I'm actually just... Looking for some advice." Still no response as the dragon looked around the area awkwardly, not seeing anyone else around. Then stared at her garden for a bit.

"I... Recently acquired a flower, you see. I mean, I was gifted one. But I... I don't quite know how to take care of it." The breathing inside stopped, and almost through the wall Zarj could feel her puzzled stare. Turning his own ears purple as he blushed. "I noticed you've got quite the display here, I was hoping you could... Spare some knowledge?" It took a few moments for him to hear steps from inside, slowly approaching the doorway and easily spotting a single eye in the darkness. Using the movable barricade as a shield for a moment as the wyrm looked around again, letting her study him and his more peaceful gesture.

"...Y-you... What?" Her question made the beast slightly whimper in shyness.

"I... Was given a flower by a friend." Zarj admitted again, speaking softly as the civet slowly came out of the darkness. "...A good friend. And, well..." A heavy exhale from the larger one. "I don't want to lose it." He rubbed the back of his neck, digits going through his spiny mane. "I've never done gardening before, nor do really know much about plants and their needs, but." The door opened up a little more and the black spotted furred one took a cautious step forward, still keeping one eye closed as she studied the much larger creature.

A bit of awkward silence as Zarj shifted his body to take a step back, startling the civet at first before realizing what he was doing; giving her room to be more comfortable. "I... Don't think I've..." She started, but trailed off.

"It's not a common thing for a wyrm to ask, I know." The red one lightly whined, getting her to smile and almost nervously laugh. "But..."

"But this is important to you?"

"H-..." The wyrm stopped himself for a moment, exhaling. "He is, yes." Those furred ears

perked up for a moment, studying the red one for a bit again until he cleared his throat. "I am named Zarj'annan."

"Neetu." The civet placed a paw against her own collar, signaling herself. "It's... More than a pleasure to speak to one of your kind. An honor even." The statement made Zarj smile a little.

"I know my kin can come off very... Assertive at times." A faint nod from the small female. "It is a habit I am trying to break out of, myself." The red one half mumbled, feeling her single yellow eye study his large form from the doorway. "But can you assist me?" The civet seemed eager to say yes for a moment but paused, looking a little frightened at a thought that came to herself. Making the dragon's ears perk a bit. "What is it?"

"I... I don't mean to be disrespectful, skykin, but..." A motion for her to continue on. "I'm willing to help you, but I..." A quick breath from her. "I ne-... Would like something in return." The furred creature prepared to defend herself, as if expecting the beast to lash out at such an idea.

"Oh, to barter? I've never bartered before." Zarj pondered quickly to himself, scratching his chin with a claw. "What is it you may need?" The positive response surprised the smaller one, leaving her a little stunned.

"Y-you're not going to...?" Neetu wasn't sure if she wanted to finish that sentence, but the wyrm's curious stare returned again. "You're far nicer than tales describe, my lord."

"Zarj will do fine, no need for formalities, dear. And..." The red one lightly exhaled through his muzzle in slight disappointment. "I'm afraid there are some truth to those tales, Neeta. I'm just... Trying to be better." The spotted one looked at him a bit sadly and with caution, not calling out the mistake of her name. "I promise you that I do not have what's been described as a 'short fuse'." Her own ears perked up. "Something a human friend of mine stated, describing it as one that has being quick to anger or high tempered." The dragon looked away slightly, exhaling sadly out of his muzzle before shaking it, yet smiling. "I miss him." That made her smile faintly too.

"Tell me more about this flower of yours. Most importantly, has it been... Plucked?"

"I almost did cut it without thinking, but no. I dug some of the dirt around it and carried it home up on the plateaus." A wing and his gaze gestured the direction, but she couldn't see over the trees. "It's really not far from here, but I left it in my cave." A double take from the furred one, a look he didn't notice until his eyes returned to hers. Making him curl his neck.

"Y-you... Left it in the dark?"

"It's high up, so it should get plenty of air." A shy whimper from the civet, now noticing the dragon's ears blushing a deep purple. Now knowing that the plant looked 'depressed' for a reason. "W-was I not...?"

"W-we should probably start with the basics. However..." Neetu held up a paw, motioning him to wait here for a moment as she went back inside. Returning with a small clay pot. "I would like to see this flower, if you could come back to me with it." The large one nodded. "Place it in this for now, and..."

"And?" Zarj urged the shy smaller one on.

"I'll... Think of a few tasks you could help me with, perhaps?"

"Of course." He answered quite quickly, now understanding her nervousness; most western dragons would just take what they want from the Children and leave. But the red one just leaned his head down and gave her a gentle nudge with his snout. "I shall return soon, Neeta." That smile returned before he turned about, his tail clipping the side of her building and making him wince in place- not to mention flashing her in the process. Looking back from under his wing towards both the damage, then the female. "I'm... Not used to smaller spaces." However, he did remember how startling it was for the smaller ones when dragons took flight. So the red wyrm hobbled out towards the open fields, pot in paw, and took off.

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Day 1: East

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"All together now!" A human shouted, counting down so that everyone could pull on the vines and ropes at the same time. Focusing all their strength to tilt the tree off the stone

building and back into the ground where its roots belonged. With a mix of eastern dragons, humans, and many other species of anthros, they got the tree moving past the teetering point. Letting it fall in with a lot less effort and the people cheered, even if a few did slip in the half wet grass.

Alkardoc being one of them, chuckling with many others as he took a moment to rest his sore body. "Well done everyone! But we still have 14 more to go. Farla'kar and Ura'kko, come with me and we'll do the setup, everyone else take a small break to rest." A statement the golden noodle's body really needed to hear as he closed his eyes and panted, hearing many casually disperse around him.

He never realized how much his muscles began to ache until he stopped using them for a few minutes, causing his body to send out warning signs for the serpent to not move. "Is everything alright?" Another asked, causing the golden one to nod in response then hear another dragon rest beside him. Opening his eyes to catch a glimpse of a tarnished silver with a dark green mane, worrying Alkar's heart very slightly.

"I'll be fine. I'm afraid my body is not used to such exertion."

"None of us are." The two chuckled. "Let alone getting so dirty, I feel like a snakelet again; playing in the mud after a rainy day."

"Something your mother really did not enjoy." Alkardoc teased the other male.

"To put it lightly. Remember how mad she was when I used her good towels to dry off?" Another set of chuckles. "The entire city could hear her hiss, I swear."

"She was quite intimidating, yes, but you hardly knew better, Octtu." The silver male just smiled at him, but the other could feel a question brewing. Making the golden one sigh and motion him to ask.

"Are you sure everything is okay?" Octtu whispered, releasing a faint sigh from Alkar, saddening the silver one's muzzle as he continued. "You didn't show up at the rehearsal last night, and it is very unlike you to be late."

"I know."

"Cold paws and frozen tail?" A faint head tilt made the golden head shrug, barely enough to move his azure mane. "I expected this to be hard on you, I know what it is like, Alkardoc... To a degree." Octtu's face soured a bit. "You've got the excuse of the storm preventing you from attending at least, however..."

"It is only a delay, I know." The gold serpent exhaled again. "Is she... Upset?"

"Your mother? She looked Disappointed, yes-"

"O-oh, no. I meant..." He trailed off, the two hearing some more trees being moved nearby without any instructions being called. Ignoring it for now, the two returned to their conversation; now noticing the silver snake's mixed look.

"That's... The strange thing. She doesn't seem to be upset or even worried." The statement perked those blue ears up. "Almost... Unphased by it, even after being informed that you were caught in the storm." It actually started making Alkardoc's heart worry a bit more, less about the female but... Something else? "Regardless, you should talk to her, Alkar." Those blue eyes locked onto his silver friend's, revealing that light fear. "Come on, I know she's a little scary, but I highly doubt she took it that personally."

"Easy for you to say." The golden serpent snorted playfully, but took a breath. "However, you are right. I can't keep... Running away from this commitment." Against his body's wishes, Alkardoc got up and stretched his sore muscles. "Did you happen to see which group she was helping in?"

"Truth be told, I haven't seen her since this morning-" Another series of moving trees got the two's attention. "Perhaps...?"

"I'll check it out regardless. It may just be a small group." The golden serpent gave a quick nuzzle to his silver friend. "Thank you for checking in."

"Anytime."

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Day 1: West

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Zarj landed safely back at his cave, still struggling to hold back the smile on his red muzzle. Hobbling over and placing the gifted pot down before taking a moment to look through his telescope. The very far away storm was returning to the ocean at least, now done with it's destruction and he made some notes, but the dragon couldn't shake this little flutter in his armored heart. Much like when he began to feel at ease with Alkardoc, yet that was still different. The serpent was indeed a friend, but there was something more to that one.

Still, the civet was a new friend, something Zarj felt like he needed in his life to give it... Well, extra life. Rejuvenation. For the first time in a while, he felt happy. Excited to see someone else, both dragonkin and non. Even though there was still this anxious worry in his heart...

But it was soon distracted when his red muzzle picked up a few scents. Ones of trouble. Grabbing his attention as Zarj turned about and searched his surroundings. Some wind blowing towards him, saturated in that smell that led him inside his home. Scanning the area with those orange eyes, spotting a faint trail of things very slightly moved, leading up to a shelf.

A bare shelf.

Those red spines slowly raised up in anger as that scent spelled out Troublemakers to him. Those damn wyrmlings, and they stole his flower!? It nearly enraged the wyrm, venting smoke out of his nostrils and the corners of his maw as he whipped around and bolted out of his cave. Taking to the skies and heading towards the nest.

"What do you think it's for?" A yellow wyrmling asked the others.

"Likely some obscure use that the children require." A grey one lightly yawned.

"Look at you, using fancy words." An orange grumbled, getting a glare from the other two as they sat around the old spyglass.

"Require isn't a fancy word, buu'tha. Your family's vocabulary is just so limited you haven't heard it before." The grey female got a hiss, snorting back in response.

"I think it's used to make things appear farther away." The yellow one stated, oblivious to the argument.

"I didn't mean Require, I meant Obscure! And Velaa, you're looking at it the wrong way-!" The three suddenly perked up their heads, detecting heavy wingbeats and a sudden growl. Crowding around the object to hide it as a much larger red adult landed and approached them.

"Where is it." Zarj demanded, nearly spitting out flames from the corners of his maw. And while the yellow wyrmling did flinch slightly, the other two just snorted at the adult.

"We don't know what you're talking about. Besides, weren't you supposed to get our Sadifruits?" The grey one somehow braved the much larger wyrm.

"You sent me to take down the tarp in your little treehouse so it wouldn't blow away." The adult growled back, clearly much more intimidating.

"...Well, did you do that?"

"I didn't reach it in time before the winds got too bad, so no- Nevermind that, where's my flower!" Another demand causing the three heads to tilt in confusion.

"Flower?"

"We didn't steal a flower." The grey one received a slap from the orange wyrmling.

"He means to say: we didn't steal *anything*. And you wonder why I questioned your use of language earlier." She snorted.

"Then what are you hiding." Zarj grumbled, looking over them and getting his view blocked by their wings. However, catching a glimpse of it. "Is that... My prototype!?"

"Prodo-wha?"

"What are you doing with my spyglass!?" The red adult hissed, stepping forwards and causing the grey and orange wyrmlings to stumble backwards. And though the yellow one did cower, he stood his ground. "In theory, this honestly makes a lot more sense."

"We were just curious about it, aroa'thath [A respectful term for someone older than you.]"

"And to be fair, we thought you were dead-" The grey one got a glare from both the yellow and the adult.

"We'll give it back, but we didn't notice any flower. However..." Zarj gestured him to go on. "We did spot Tix'gharr leave your cave holding something carefully." Though he did get a nasty glare from the other wyrmlings, the adult eased his gaze and sighed.

"...You look through it." The three tilted their heads. "From the small end, and it helps you see things from far away. That's what the Spyglass is for." Zarj half grumbled at himself, knowing the dragon the yellow one was talking about. "Be very careful with it, it's a fragile device. Return it to me by the end of the day, understood?" Their faces brightened up and the adult took to the skies once again.

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Day 1: East
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The golden serpent floated through the forest where the noises were coming from. Swimming inbetween trees as the large snaps of branches and creaks of wood echoed through, being cautious to make sure Alkardoc was in a safe spot just in case. Though oddly enough not spotting anyone else around; human or dragon kind.

Eventually seeing a shimmer of red through the layouts of brown and greens, needing to stop and collect himself before approaching the female through the layouts of trees and thick roots. A deep breath before silently approaching and peering through the walls of leaves, flicking a blue ear at some whispers or mumbles, thinking perhaps the red serpent was with

someone he could just not detect. But all he made out were... Calculations?

Then some large vines erupted from the grounds nearby, wrapping over some larger and thicker branches before coiling around a fallen tree. With a mere hand gesture, the thick plant-based appendages began to actually uplift the decades old tree and teeter it back to where it first bared roots. Stunning the golden dragon for a moment before slipping out of his hiding spot, barely getting the attention of those golden ears while she ordered the vines to retreat back where they came. "I'll be out to assist with whatever you find too difficult soon, but I still have 17 more trees in this area to replant." She spoke rather bluntly. "I did however find 4 that are too far gone. I've marked them, those can be harvested and used for repairs."

"You...?" Alkar softly spoke, finally getting the attention of those yellow discs. "You're able to do this by yourself?"

"Oh. I thought you were someone else." The female's gaze was not of anger, but still rather unsettling to the golden one. "Yes, I am. However, only through the help of mathematics, physics, and the structural aid of the surrounding trees." She pointed out a few very thick branches that were used for leverage. "I've been making pulleys out of vines in order to do the heavy lifting." The red one returned to her work, not really minding the azure's impressed gaze.

"Pulleys...? That method the humans tend to use on occasion?"

"I got the idea from them, yes. I noticed them when visiting a harbor semi-recently and studied how they functioned." Another blunt statement as she looked over another tree from afar, then began to move towards it. "I attempted to apply that knowledge here where no one could possibly get hurt, and it has been very effective-" She stopped when her tail brushed against Alkar's body. Instantly grabbing the red dragoness' attention towards him and his rather shy look. "What is that? Guilt?"

"...Yes. Valla'sha, about last night-"

"You were late." Another statement that held no real emotion. "Understandable, considering the storm's magnitude." She resumed her examination towards the tree, looking for the best places to gain leverage from others nearby. "Such warnings did not come about until it was nearly too late to safely deliver goods, leaving quite a few stranded in other places to take shelter."

"It... It is partially due to that, yes." The gold serpent admitted, trying to gather up his words.

"State your feelings however you wish, Alkardoc. I won't be offended." That didn't make him feel reassured, but the male took a breath.

"I... Valla..." No response, she just continued her work and summoned more vines from the ground. "Why, erm... Are you happy with our... Arrangement?"

"I am, to be honest." The red one stated, leading the vines to grab hold of the fallen tree. Taking a deep breath before using her magic to manipulate the vines overhead and return the tree back to where it was. "Are you not?"

"I..." Alkar trailed off, getting a slightly puzzled stare from the female and not notice her approaching until it was almost too late. Even so, his lean back could not escape the red paw against his chest. Causing their eyes to lock onto each other as his feelings were exposed. "Valla'sha-"

"You are not." She stated, actually a little mixed about the discovery. "There is something missing between us, but something... You recently found?" The male exhaled heavily in defeat. "I have detected this feeling in others before, but I have not really felt much of it for myself." A surprisingly calm statement from the crimson serpent as she studied the feelings and waited for his response. "Relax, Alkardoc. This is only expected for arranged marriages."

"About that..." Alkar started, taking another breath before looking her in the eyes again. "Why did you choose me? Out of everyone there-?"

"Because your genes will fit perfectly with mine." The golden one curled his neck as she once again went to work. "Perhaps it is a bit unorthodox, but the purpose for marriages is to produce offspring, correct?"

"P-partly, yes."

"Then that's what I based my decision around. And our genes are incredibly compatible." It hurt a bit to hear the red one state that, but she was too far away to feel his heart sink. However, the silence did get her attention. "Please don't take that negatively, it is just how I see the purpose of what our parents have decided. However, is that why you were missing last night? Before the rehearsal dinner?"

"...Yes." The gold male admitted, getting a nod in response. "I suppose I was just hoping to get more... Affection out of our relationship."

"That is not something I am used to giving, but I can try to provide such support if you feel you need it." A gesture to follow her deeper into the forest towards the next fallen tree. "Granted, you've recently found a replacement for that, if I'm reading your feelings correctly."

"You are, yes."

"Tell me about them." That made the gold one freeze in place for a moment. "What are

they doing that I'm not currently providing? I imagine there is quite a difference between me and them."

"M-more than you expect." Alkardoc lightly whimpered, slightly worried about how she would take that statement but had no response to it. "They... He." The gold one corrected himself. "He is..."

"It is a difficult thing to put into words, isn't it?" A slow nod in response as Valla continued to work. "That's reason why I never persisted on learning was due to the fact that I could do the action, but people still stated something was missing. Yet, they couldn't explain to me what it was, a feeling within that I suppose I could never imitate-" She felt a paw on her shoulder, grabbing the red one's attention as the male whispered to her.

"Can you keep a secret?"

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Day 1: West
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The red wyrm landed outside of a smaller cave, spotting two other dragons talking and looking somewhat relieved as Zarj approached. "Our scholar lives." An older navy one greeted, while a lime green one looked a bit guilty; wings and head lowered, tail curled around his paws. "Stories were circling around saying that you did not return last night. Let alone your sudden disappearance this morning."

"I assure you that rumors of my demise have been greatly exaggerated, elder." The red male grumbled. "To the point where people seemed to deem it appropriate to raid my hoard." A slight whimper from the green.

"I-it isn't what you think, Zarj'a-"

"So I've heard." The elder interrupted, narrowing her yellow gaze at the other one. "I'll see to it that your items are requested back and you are... Compensated for such swift behaviors, Zarj'annan."

"Actually, I was hoping to get an audience with the elders about a matter unrelated to this, if I could." The older wyrm's ears perked up, returning her look towards the red one. "In the future, of course. There's a few things I must do beforehand, including preparations."

"Very well. I'll see to a time in the future." She shared another look with the two males. "Can I trust you two to be civil for now?"

"Y-yes."

"And Zarj?"

"There are no hard feelings, so long as he does still have my flower." A shy whine from the green one but he nodded, confirming such a thing. Though, not quite getting relief from the questionable stare of the elder. "We will just talk things out, no need to worry Illa'kaa."

"Very well." The navy one responded and took off, leaving the males in silence.

"It... Isn't what you think, Zarj'annan." The lime green one lightly whined, getting half interrupted by the lifted red paw.

"Is the flower in tact?" A bit of a worried look from those cyan eyes.

"The wyrmlings... I spotted them going in your cave and came to chase them out into hiding. I wouldn't have been able to guard everything, so I took the most delicate thing I could find-" A low growl as Zarj jaw tensed. "-I retrieved it before any harm could be done to it, that was all-"

"Where is it." The larger red one stepped forwards, trying not to be intimidating but his irked tone leaked through. Getting lead slightly inside and retrieving the plate with the flower on it, now looking a little squished while the dirt seemed to be more scattered than before. Unable to hold back his saddened expression, letting the other male sigh quietly.

"I didn't take it for myself, Zarj. I thought it may be important to you, it's the only reason why I..." No response as the green one trailed off, watching as the larger wyrm very gently cupped the flower's 'head' with a single digit.

"...Most here wouldn't give it a second thought if it was in their path." The red dragon

looked at the other. "Thank you. Sincerely, Tix." That made the green one smile. "...Providing that was the only thing you took-"

"Promise. I absolutely swear it." Zarj half narrowed his gaze, not really believing the other one but didn't question him further. "I swore to you before that I wouldn't steal from you again, and I mean that. But... What's the story behind this? It looks new."

"...It was a gift from a friend, but I sadly do not know how to take care of it... Yet."

"Yet?"

"I met a gardener this morning that said she could help me."

"She?" Trix perked his ears a bit. "You met another dragon who gardens?" A double take from the red one.

"Dragon? No, no. One of the children." A head tilt from the green one, who then chuckled.

"Now you're giving them pronouns? You're a strange one, Zarj." The red dragon chuckled in response, smiling at Tix who gave a sad one back. However, sensing something else from the other wyrm, almost like an apology that was caught in that green neck. With a deep breath, Zarj shuffled closer and placed a paw on the smaller one's shoulder... A bit awkwardly but he attempted.

"Thank you. For taking the time to care about this, Tix." That morphed the green one's expression into a much brighter smile. "I'd ask you not to take my things again, but... This was the right call." The red wyrm lightly chuckled, easing the tension a little more between them. Still, Tix couldn't shake off his guilt completely, nodding faintly then watched as Zarj hobbled away; plate and flower in fores, before taking off.

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Day 1: East

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A loud slap echoed through the forest, followed immediately by a yelp and the red serpent nearly screaming. "Are You Out Of Your Mind!?" Making the golden male nearly cower while holding the side of his snout.

"P-please, let me explain-"

"Not only did you risk your life going out into a storm-" Alkar attempted to interrupt, but she only got more assertive. "That everyone could feel was coming! You...!" A very low growl from Valla'sha as she whispered. "You crossed the river into the western lands!?"

"I was forced into them by the winds, I didn't decide such a thing!"

"And you were somehow not slain!? How were you not spotted?"

"Valla, please take a breath."

"Let alone not poached for sport!? Is your scrotum still intact?" The red one started to look under Alkardoc's tail when he gently took her by the shoulders.

"I am fine, madam. I assure you. But..."

"But what?" She felt him struggle with feelings and words. "...You... Met someone? -Did they put you up to this?" The golden one's signal for her to stop was ignored. "Is that why you missed the Dinner last night? Did they ask you to meet-?" The male placed a hand on the side of her muzzle, slowing her thoughts down enough to listen.

"You're half right, I did meet another dragon, but not an eastern one." Valla's ears perked, only to fall as her expression filled with dread. "Last night I... Got taken by the winds with no way to retreat. I managed to find a small cave to take shelter in instead, but I was past the rivers at that point. Absolutely drenched and shivering..."

"Then... They found you." Alkar exhaled quietly and gazed away.

"It only took a few moments after getting in there and trying to keep myself warm. A few gusts blew against the rock walls outside, uprooting trees possibly larger than our own. But one of them... Growled." A worried look from the red dragoness. "Soon it started crawling in the entrance I used, thrashing and clawing into the mud as I froze with fear. Keeping low, hoping that it couldn't detect me..."

"But it did."

"Yes. Their perception is quite unmatched, as the legends say about such hunters. He moved to the other side of the small room, away from me. I remember hearing his scales click, much thicker sounding than ours and very likely from the cold rather than sensing me." The male was quiet for a moment as the red serpent moved in a little closer.

"Then what? What did it do? Threaten you?"

"He asked if I was 'okay'." A long puzzled stare from the female's purple eyes, making the golden one smile a little at her expression.

"No...?"

"No threats, no attempts at my life. However, he did assume I was another westerner at first. Yet, when I confirmed that he was from the forbidden lands, he offered to leave. Thinking that he crossed the rivers instead." Valla couldn't help but look in the direction of the rivers. "He went by the name of Zarj'annan, and he was very kind."

"But they're monsters, are they not?" The male took a breath through his muzzle, not really sure how to answer that.

"I cannot speak for all of them, my dear. But the dragon I spent the night with, getting to know and asking questions- while he did the same, very curious about our lands and culture-" A sharp double take as the red one's gaze returned to Alkardoc's and nearly hissed.

"You told it about our lands!?"

"Valla'sha, you must relax-"

"Relax!?" A whispering growl that time. "You committed a taboo, Alkardoc! Anything you revealed to them could be used against us!"

"Madam, please return to calm. We're not at war-"

"But that does not mean one cannot start from this event. We have these rules for a reason!" She released a stressful hiss as he attempted to comfort her, though in reflex Valla jerked away. Looking at the male with a very cautious gaze, but taking a couple of breaths to calm down. "Alkardoc... What you've d... Witnessed." She stopped herself. "It is exile-worthy. But I would wish that it did not come to that. Despite my own motives of choosing you as a mate, I do care about your well being and presence." The golden one frowned. "I will not bring up your experience to another, however... If I am asked about it, I will have no choice-"

"But to tell, I know." They looked into each other's eyes for a few moments. "They are not what we have been raised to believe, my dear."

"...I would like to believe that." She whispered a bit coldly. "But it is more than likely that you struck in good odds; meeting the one in a billion who is willing to speak before violence."

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Day 1: West

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"It..." Zarj'annan whined a bit shyly, as the civet looked over the flower in rather poor condition. "It looked a lot better this morning."

"It is natural for them to close up when there is a lack of sunlight, though..." The small female studied it up close with her single eye. "This is a flower I have never seen before myself. Where did you find it?"

"I'd..." The red one awkwardly rubbed the back of his neck. "Rather not say, Natla."

"Just that a friend gave it to you as a gift?" A nod in confirmation from the beast, but the smaller one didn't pry further. Only take it out of the pot, set the flower down, and retrieve a watering can. "I would like to remove this grass that you've taken with it first, but can you prepare the flowerpot by adding in more soil?" She gestured a pile of dirt off to the side, only to half worry if it was a mistake to 'command' a wyrm.

"Of course." His rather cheerful response did surprise the smaller one, watching as the creature nearly the size of her small house gently take the clay pot and begin putting in dirt.

"N-not too full, we still need to set the flower in it."

"Oh, right. Of course." Zarj lightly chuckled at his mistake, making her smile in the process and feel more at ease. "What did I do incorrectly though? Does a flower not need air?"

"All plants do, yes. But most need sunlight as well, and water."

"Water." The red one lightly groaned. "I do not know why that never came across my mind. It's so painfully obvious. But sunlight?" The smaller one nervously chuckled.

"Y-yes, almost all plant life requires it. Outdoors ones, at least, like flowers and trees. It is one reason why they open up." The beige furred one explained. "Light, good soil, and a little water every day. It should keep you." She planted it into the pot as the beast watched her a bit nervously, knowing just how gentle he'll have to be to take care of such a thing. "Is something wrong?"

"I'm just... Worried." A noise in question from the civet as Zarj took a breath to continue. "We're... Not known for our restraint or softer touch. I've learned how to do some of it by working with glass lenses and small metal pieces, but nothing as delicate as a small flower."

"You'll rarely have to touch it, sir. You may have to add it to a larger pot if it does continue to grow, but you can always bring it back to me if..." She trailed off, seeing those orange discs stare into space. That anxiety building up almost visibly in his eyes, was the dragon really able to take care of this? What would happen if he couldn't? If someone else decided to ruin it? His only connection to the east side and the dragon he befriended, it would be completely lost save for his memory-

It took a few touches on his forearm, progressively getting harder to snap the wyrm out of his sea of worries. Looking over at the one-eyed furred creature, and following her gesture towards the flower. The azure pedals now completely facing the red beast, a warm breeze blowing and letting the blue lightly wave, somehow calming his heart. Yet slightly aching it, longing for the touch of that mane again.

But all was not lost. Not yet. Taking a deep breath and long exhale off to the side before nodding. "I'm... Alright. Thank you, Natla." The small female smiled sadly at him, but still stroking the armored scales gently. "But I... May have to ask you for another favor."

"What is it?"

"Where I'm from... Where I live... Delicate things are not safe. Unless they are made of hard metal or steel, and even then..." A worried look from that single eye. "It would do me a great service by allowing me to keep this flower here, where it is safe, if that is possible." A light chuckle from the civet. "I will still do my best to take care of it, of course-"

"That's a strange way to ask if you can visit every day, dragon." She joked, causing his neck to curl to an S. Not expecting such a response and only making the smaller one laugh louder at such a reaction. "I am only joking of course, sir."

"P-please, feel free to call me Zarj." The wyrm lightly blushed. "That wasn't my intention, but... I wouldn't mind." The two smiled. "I would be happy to visit you daily Natla, and help you with any request you can think of."

"Ah, yes. I've been so focused on your return I completely forgot about our barter." Neetu nervously looked around her home, trying to think of something. Though attempting to hide them, her whimpers did slip through her breaths. Soon feeling a strong nudge on her back from the dragon's snout, getting her attention and seeing the beast smile at her; likely just not knowing his own strength.

"Relax, we are in no rush. Just look at whatever comes to mind, and I will... Try my best not to destroy anything." His orange gaze shifted to the slight damage his tail did earlier to the smaller one's home.

"Well... I do need firewood, but it is too far away from winter for a lot of it."

"That's a start." The red wyrm nodded. "Wood from any tree will do, correct?"

"W-well, the further away from the home the better." The small one explained, a bit nervous about correcting such a large creature until those ears perked and that red head tilted. Making her smile and almost chuckle at such a cute sight, even if it was towering over her.

"Is that so?" Zarj curiously asked.

"Y-yes. However, I can't really be certain why-"

"Perhaps the quality of wood is better further in the wild?" A sudden small gasp from the red beast as a thought returned. "Children do have a harder time with travel in the winters as well, so getting the wood from further out while movement is easier in the warmer seasons should be the better choice." He pondered aloud.

"I..." That curious gaze refocused on the civet again, making her a bit nervous. "I always thought it was in case things go awry." A purr in question. "W-well... When trees are cut down, they plan where it's going to land, yes?"

"That is very possible."

"But not always, and if there's something you don't want a tree to fall onto..."

"Like another person, yes." The dragon answered, but double took at the now silent female. Watching her look over her house, making Zarj look between her and it for a moment. "Y-your home! Of course! Does it not stand up against such things?"

"I-it will not, sir. It may break most of the wind, shelter us from the rain and snow, but anything very heavy..." Neetu sighed heavily, crossing her arms as if she were cold or worried.

"Is... Something wrong, Naeela?" A faint moment of a sad smile from her but she looked over the house before back at the red behemoth. "I recognize that pose. A friend of mine often did it when he was troubled- though there were a few times he used it when he was angry." Zarj's random side remark made her lightly chuckle.

"I... I'm not going to lie to you, sir-"

"Zarj." He corrected her, smiling softly.

"I've... Only been out here for a winter."

"Alone?" The small one nodded. "And you built a home in that time?"

"Hm? O-oh, no, no. This wasn't..." That puzzled look returned to the dragon's face and the civet exhaled. "N-nevermind. A different time perhaps, Si- Zar." Another gentle-as-can-be nudge against her torso to return eye contact to that large smiling face. "I'll think of something for the firewood, maybe. But for now, I should get some water and start my supper-"

"Oh! Let me help you carry it. Perhaps we can even mark trees you would like to cut down for firewood?" The wyrm nearly chirped, making the small female chuckle.

"That sounds like a brilliant idea, thank you. Let me grab my buckets."

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Day 1: East

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He could detect the aroma of incense before the golden thread got to his chambers, his sore body nearly collapsing after a day of work and cleaning up. That storm really did a number on the city but with the combined help of everyone, both dragon and smaller kind, the restorations were nearly complete.

Now it was time for Alkardoc to relax, as the smoke urged him to do. Entering his room, empty of visitors and with the burning whisks in a safe spot, the serpent just floated himself towards the tub once again. The waters clean, the fire for it already started, even though he urged the helper not to due to the amount of work it would cost them. But it made Alkar smile brightly as he lowered his body beneath the suds. Not realizing the aches until the warmth began to withdraw it from his scales.

The eastern male let out a long sigh of relief as he rested his head on a nearby pillow, built into the side of the tub. Giving him time to relax and close his eyes, smiling at the first image that was formed within the void; the red wyrm. Not a vicious predator or hunter, but just sweet and kind Zarj. Smiling. Resting on his haunches, not shy about showing off that sheath and plump pouch. Opening up those arms to invite the serpent in.

He remembered that feeling vividly; to be held tenderly by something much larger than himself. The strength of those arms, even if they were barely trying to squeeze. The large membraned walls that made wings; wrapping around Alkar to create a shelter. A Home. Though the armored body was a bit more discomforting, there was a heat underneath it that was just... Inviting. Like the warmth of a stove as it nearly finished a home cooked meal.

The golden thread missed that wyrm dearly, and it had not even been an entire day. Yet, as soon as a blink, the vision of Zarj'annan in his head vanished and transformed into Alkardoc's arranged mate. As well as the conversation they had earlier. ("But they're monsters, are they not?") Valla's vocals echoed within the silence of his mind. Yes. All snakelets were brought up believing that the west and beyond were occupied by beasts. Waiting to ambush any who dare cross the rivers so they could be sniped from the sky.

Others tell of drakes that burrowed deep into the soils of the earth as well; able to sense anyone else tunneling through. Surrounding them from all sides; even if the eastern one didn't detect them. Cutting off the exit before going in for the kill. The golden one remembered having a dream like that once, swearing it was a vision of someone passed. The fear of being in tight enclosed spaces haunted him for ages...

The serpent sighed heavily. The more he thought about the past, the more he recognized such propagandas against the west. It is true what Valla said though; he only spotted and conversed with a single wyrm, and that the others may be vicious by instinct alone. However, Alkar could... Feel it through Zarj; an identical fear and a loneliness not only to the serpent's self, but to many other easterners as well. Amplified further with a heavy loss of a friend with no one to console with.

Alkardoc could see beyond that though, or at least he swore he could. A dense tangled jungle of emotions that were likely just told to be buried and forgotten about. Uncared for and left unresolved, leaving the wyrm in a state of... Heavy. Those dragons were strong, yes, but they carried a lot of weight on those paws, not all physical...

It made the serpent's heart ache, worrying if perhaps Valla's theories were correct: that the westerns were indeed immune to the detection. That maybe Alkar's readings were... False, and somehow the wyrm was preying on him instead. Plotting a long-term game with the golden one to somehow ambush his kind into a trap? If so, what did they want?

But the serpent detested thinking in such a way about Zarj'annan. He knew it in his golden chest that his feelings and instincts were real; that the red beast had a very kind soul. And what he shared with Alkar felt like the truth, that the pain in Zarj's heart was real... As well as his intentions, passions, and willingness to abandon his life on that west side.

However... Was that how Alkardoc felt? Uncertainty swirled around in his mind and heart, which is one reason why the serpent denied such an offer to just leave with Zarj. There were people he lived with here, and though some aspects felt a bit empty, the serpent did enjoy his life. Not to mention, he was betrothed... For lack of a better word.

A heavy sigh left that bearded muzzle, wondering what he was to do. Sinking into the waters and causing an azure ear to take a small dive for a moment, flicking to get the tickling liquids and suds out of the fluff before perking high. Detecting the door closing. "You made it back, did you dear?" A near deflated but quiet breath left the golden one.

"Yes. I was out helping with the clean up."

"And still in one piece? You didn't make it to the rehearsal dinner last night." A near rust-colored eastern dragon let herself in and rested on the lip of the tub. Waiting for a moment for him to respond, but when none came... "You had me worried that you were caught out there in the storm."

"I... Actually did get carried by the winds." A slightly surprised look from her. "I barely managed to find a cave to spend the night in."

"You got extremely lucky then." She stated, not even attempting to touch any part of the golden one to confirm such a story. "Though, you cannot hide it from your mother, dear. I know you are not fond of this arrangement."

"Then why did you pressure me to go to the Courtship?" The older serpent gave him a sour look. "This isn't what I needed in my life." A moment of silence.

"When is your life going to start, Alkardoc?" The son's gaze drifted to the side, not wanting to answer that. "I left you alone to court a few on your own, but each one never seemed to last more than a month. You're an adult now, at your age I was carrying you while Aetan was building your future laws."

"Please don't bring father into this." The two frowned, as a rusted paw gently entered the water to offer a comforting pet.

"...Depression can create blocks in our path in life, Alkardoc. I just want to make sure yours does not fully stop in your tracks before you can make something of it."

"And marriage was your first step?" The mother's face lightly twisted in discomfort, trying to think of a good response.

"To be honest... I was not expecting you to be picked." A deflated grumble from the golden one, nearly sinking when he heard that. "I wanted you to be part of the event to know how we traditionally did things. For when your time came it would be easier than our own, which was an absolute disaster." She chuckled, making him sadly smile.

"But it was adventurous, was it not? That's what I was looking for... Hoping for. Instead..."

"As the stars so tell it..."

"I happened to be chosen. By the most blunt, ruthless female in this city."

"You met her alone, did you?" Her son nodded. "She cannot be that bad-"

"She literally told me the only interest she had was our future offspring." The parent curled her neck in response. "And now whatever future I had left blank is now occupied by an emotionless marriage and offspring."

"Prodigy offspring, Alkar. Perhaps you can find some love in that?" That deflated him even further, making the mother sigh. "...I am sorry things turned out this way, but tradition is tradition. The stars have made their path for all of us to follow, they did this for a reason."

"...Perhaps." The golden serpent distantly answered. "I... Think I'm going to go to bed early tonight. It has been a long couple of days for me."

"Indeed. I'll get back to you on the next rehearsal dinner, the other got interrupted by the storm as it were."

"I don't suppose you believe that is a bad omen, Zhoe?" The son teased, getting a playful snout toss from the elder one.

"Only if it happens again." She leaned in and gave his azure mane a kiss. "Sleep well, my Thread."

"You too, mother."

=====
Day 1: West
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The evening after. The red dragon never thought it would feel so hard to return to normal after just a single night in the presence of another. Having to rest back in his own pile of hides and blankets, the occasional set of trinkets or gold about; now much smaller due to him purchasing such luxuries through that old friend. One now lost and gone, aching his heart quite heavily as Zarj'annan attempted to rest.

But he did make a new friend today, which helped soothe the emotional pain. The one eyed critter named... Natla? Neetu? Neeval? He could never quite remember it when the time came, reminding the beast of the many many many names he ended up calling Conway before finally getting it right. At least the civet found it amusing...

Thinking about her for a little bit put a smile on that red muzzle. He missed such a feeling; making people happy. Usually by such unorthodox methods such as 'Dragons going out of their way to ask Children for assistance', the first time he's ever done such a thing. Conway came up to the nest and eventually got pawned off to Zarj through rejection. It was odd at first, still having a very fixed mindset towards the lesser creatures in the lands, but... The dragon eventually swallowed his pride and began to open up more and more towards the inventor.

Inventor... His gaze moved towards the large telescope in his cave; one ready to be moved and gaze outside. The red dragon longed to look through it, even though he was supposed to be sleeping. Restless, he got up and began moving it back outside under the clear skies. The stars looking so vivid and sparkling, making Zarj smile as he gazed at them through the device. How strange it was to see them much closer, but still having no idea how far away such things were.

He knew very little about the lights beyond the skies; The Stars of Heaven, he believed that's what the humans called them? Something like that. All the little names they had for each one, then their clusters. As if to sketch lines between each light to make some sort of drawing, claiming that 'this looks like the front half of a horse'. Something so beyond Zarj's understanding, making him sadly smile but coming brighter when he spotted a moving one streak across his view within the telescope. A long tail of light following it for only a fraction of a moment...

He wished Alkardoc could see this. And that heartache returned heavier than ever, missing the thread of dawn he met for only one night. Swearing at that very moment he could still feel the serpent coiling around him in an embrace, studying the wyrm's form like before. Remarking about how much better Zarj looked while not being covered in mud, making the red one chuckle aloud.

But the beast's dark orange gaze couldn't lift off from the East. Doing everything he could to root himself, but ended up taking to the skies in that direction. His instincts took over, flying faster and higher over the forest. One he barely recognized under the bright moonlight due to the damages. Able to see the river from a distance and fear struck sense into his urges, forcing the wyrm to slow down and glide to a landing. Touching down in the soft grass that leads up to the river, a tall forest providing cover just beyond it. Knowing that the dragon he longed for was just across that river, but Zarj couldn't reach him.

Caution made his scales click loudly, his imagination flicking wildly like it did in his wyrmlyng years; dancing with the flaming tales of deceptive vipers that stalked those trees, how they preyed on foolish creatures who dared break the taboo. But... Alkar was right there, just a bit across that invisible barrier of sorts. Restless wings wanting to embrace the golden one tightly, but those red paws knew better. Clawing into the ground to better root himself for the

dragon's own safety.

His heart thumping loudly in his ears, fluttering with the thoughts of azure beard and ears, while powered by the fright of breaking such a truce. He couldn't, Zarj knew that. He just hoped... That some part of him could communicate with Alkardoc and wish for him to come here too. Even if none of them specifically Crossed The River, they could see each other!

Wingbeats! It wasn't just his heart drumming, making the red one double take behind him as he saw another wyrm touch down. "Zarj?" The green male from before, the one who took in his flower for safe keeping. "What are you doing out here-?"

"Tix!?" The red wyrm whispered in both surprise and near scolding. "No no no, you can't be here."

"What? Why are you so close to...?"

"You must leave this area immediate...ly?" Zarj trailed off, noticing the cyan eyes of the smaller one suddenly grow wide with fear, following the gaze to the other side of the river to spot something long dancing in the skies. Only for it to gaze upon the two beasts on the ground before diving into the forests for cover! "No...!" The red one clenched his jaws hard, knowing it was the golden serpent he longed for, but denying his heart's will to rush after it! Nearly hissing, the red one returned to Tix and commanded in a low growl. "We need to leave!"

"I-is that-!?"

"Now!" Panicked, the green one took off, and Zarj spread his wings. Looking back at the forest one last time, swearing he spotted something watching them... Slumping those wings down in apology before taking off into the skies and returning home.