

Anthem Of The Lonely Act 2 - Vendetta

By Bartan Tirix

The wild screams came all too familiar to him. Matching the voices to people he knew almost instantly, but unable to fully comprehend the events. Not until the door was nearly broken open, followed by the faint snapping of flames. "Richard! Craig! Daniel! Get your asses out there!!" A male roared, finally getting the man back into reality as if he were out of his very own body. Nearly feeling a whiplash of sorts, stunning Daniel until the Captain threw his shield on his bed. "No time to don your armor! Get out there!"

"Are we under attack?" One of the others asked, responding faster than Daniel could. Unable to completely escape fatigue for the last three nights. Regardless, several frightful shouts and loud snarls came from outside. "Who...!?"

"The infected ones have gone completely rabid! Now Get Out There!!" The Captain shouted before leaving the room, only to do the same to another. Quickly, the other two roommates charged out of the room before Daniel could strap on his shield. Nearly giving into a strange sickness himself, but not like those poisoned from the waters.

Just my luck, he thought as he battled to walk straight. Leaning up to the door for some support. *The night when I'm too ill to show what I'm worth, and we get attacked*. Everything felt hazy to him, a mask of warped transparent clothing like a flag whipping in the wind. The ground seemed to shift under his brown feet, the surreal sounds were constantly morphed. Cries of fright, vigor, and screeches of madness assaulted his sensitive ears as several soldiers rushed down the hall in front of him.

When the way was clear, Daniel attempted to take a step inside. If only such a leg could support such weight as it did so often before, forcing the feline to collapse. Hearing the Captain once again curse at him. "Private! What are you doing!? Get Up!" A few harsh pants was all the brown one could muster against the canine's bark. Giving the sigh of disappointment. "I told you that you should've gone home." At least his voice was softer. "There's no room for a sick soldier in war."

"I just need..." A few more heavy breaths were wheezed out, but the larger one was right. Daniel couldn't keep denying the fever that haunted his now frail body.

"Come on, let's get you down to the infirmary." He grabbed a brown paw and wrapped it around his black shoulders. "The fires are probably going to spread here in a matter of minutes. To leave you here is to turn you into ashes." Lifting the feline up and walking him down the hall a bit. Seeing the

younger one finally start to regain some balance. "Can you walk?"

"I think so, yes." Carefully, they let Daniel on his own, amazing how such a crutch could help heal such sickness. "Thank you, Captain. I owe you one." His eyes squinted at the harsh glow of the fires nearby. Seeing the canine take lead through the doorway outside.

"You can thank me b-" A rabid snarl came out of nowhere, slamming the Captain to the ground. Several claws and a heavy bite against the black one's throat ceased his voice almost instantly, getting Daniel to panic while struggling to draw his sword. Only to find it completely snared within the leather belt from being put on backwards. A rookie mistake that caused the Captain his life.

Suddenly, the loud sound of something piercing fur and flesh nearly made the feline gag. Barely being able to make out what seemed to be a red gemmed staff that was coming out of the rabid infected, as well as the late canine. Something unworldly then landed near it heavily, a being very identical to the weapon.

It was almost dragonkin. Upright, yet still a bit feral by nature. A ruby-like glow seemed to illuminate the creature as it stood inbetween Daniel and the distant flames, as the devil started locking eyes with the brown one. Eyes that burned with a strange rage.

Another infected came after the dragonkin from a distance, as it leapt at the gemmed one in a vicious pounce. But with a single touch of the red staff, the creature vanished, leaving the mad one to land in the dirt. Once again, the dragonkin reappeared in mid-swing and slammed the ruby pole on the rabid one's back. Hearing that horrible noise once again and making Daniel whimper.

As the gemmed one stood up, it studied the feline again for a few moments. Until a second Dragon landed behind it. "He's not one of them. He's just sick." Though this one did not look like a golem of gemstone, the heavy armor-like scales were still intimidating. Covered in an abyss black, it was hard to make out what was part of the being, and what was shadow. However, the bits of a silver-like metal here and there, as well as its underside, did help.

Several screeches from afar got the red one's attention, and it charged towards them, making feline almost frightful. "Hey!" The black one shouted at him. "You need to get out of here, the fires are spreading. Can you walk?"

"Y...Y-yes." The dragon offered a paw, and Daniel cautiously took it. Finally stepping outside and seeing the massive blade in the other paw. One that had what could only be described as cannons mounted on the side of it.

"Exile." The large creature offered his name.

"D-Daniel."

"Alright, Daniel. We're here to help, but it's not safe to stay here in your condition." Those emerald eyes held a strange kindness for such a large creature. "Several groups of people have already

made way to the western city safely-"

"Vestarro!?" The dragon nodded at him and a morbid look painted over Daniel's face.

"What is it?"

"That bridge there is weak. It can barely support a single small wagon, but with several groups of people...!" A warm exhale of thought left that black muzzle, then several more wild roars from nearby where a few soldiers were fighting. Barely holding back the enraged townsfolk until the dragon aimed the large blade at a distance. A faint squeeze of the strange grip made the weapon release two loud bangs, like that of a musket. Seeing the infected be taken down the roads from the sheer force of the projectile.

"You two! Come here for a moment." The black dragon ordered, though cautious as Daniel is, they did come. "I need you to take him to the west, and you: get everyone to head there as soon as possible. We're going to fix the bridge so it'll be safe for them to cross!" They nodded, and one took the feline over her shoulders. "Flyare!" He shouted at the gemmed creature, causing it to finish the infected it was fighting and teleporting to the black one.

"I heard. Let me stay." A slightly worried look from those green eyes. "You don't need me to make a bridge."

"That's not what I'm worried about." He said, almost sadly, causing the other to close her eyes. The baubles that made the darker red gems rotated to hide the black pupil for the moment. With a faint sigh, the black one placed a paw on her shoulder. Getting a few of the red shards to move out of place. "I'm trusting you." She nodded, and quickly took off into the smoky night.

Even with the storm nearby, it wasn't difficult to find the river through the forests. As well as see the torches through the path. The first group nearly making it to the bridge, the black one threw his current weapon at the center of the wooden structure. Getting them to at least halt their withdraw for the moment while the dragon landed heavily in front of them. Of course scaring them at first, and a few guards to arm themselves. "Wait. I was told it wasn't safe, so I'm making you a new one!" The dragon said, leaving his paws opened as a sign of peace.

When there was no objections from them, the dragon then turned to the waters with one paw up. Then dropped it quickly. A moment later, several very large swords started falling in parallel. The blades cutting into the waters and separating them with ease. Then one last massive blade came down, pummel first on the other side of the river. Letting it gently fall on the other sword's handguards like a makeshift bridge.

As the people looked at the black one with both awe and fright, the sounds of explosions were heard from the city. Getting the dragon to half grunt and turn to them. "Cross it carefully! It's still sharp, but I curved the side of the blade, so you shouldn't slip off of it easily." The guards gave a quick nod, and

the black one took to the skies.

Their screeches made her gemmed ears flick in every direction from where they came. Constantly alerting of a danger that posed no real threat to her current form, but it was not something she could simply ignore. With every pounce, they met with her spear, in one form or another. With every impact, the redness of carnage and darkness of a familiar void stained her. Even if such liquids would simply wash off of her most luxury form, it also painted against her instincts.

The cries and savage roars became more frequent, as the red dragon cycled between forms and stances with every assault against her. Resorting into a form of teleportation when they got too close. With every taste of their insides her weapon lapped, it seemed to feed directly into her very own bloodlust. And soon enough, she could no longer tell the difference between them. Infected or Soldier. Enemy or Innocent. Her instincts only came to one conclusion: Slaughter Them All.

Within only a few shades of black and red, her vision was no longer reliable. And within a minute, the only things left alive were the flames. As soon as the larger black one landed, her ears identified him as a threat, and charged at it without warning. Swinging the gemmed polearm wildly at head level, and not stopping the rotation when she felt it being parried. Striking down at one hind leg, then the other after feeling the block.

Every deflect fueled her rage against the other dragon, making her start and overhead swing, then teleport behind the black one. Yet, still feel the spear get almost parried by his larger blade, then snared between it and the pair of small cannons on the side. Forcing the two into a deadlock. Getting the red one to snarl in anger as they stared into each other's eyes. "It's been a while, Freayha..." The black dragon muttered, now understanding the carnage that surrounded them.

Chapter 1

The resting place felt unusually warm and itchy, only noticing it when someone near him moved. For a moment, he almost felt frightened. Lost. And perhaps threatened, until the footsteps were moving away. As much as he wanted to open his eyes and look around, the blue one's head just hurt too much

with a slight aching pain. One more of annoyance rather than trauma.

It was then he noticed the strange texture, no longer within his cool home with the smooth rocks. But on something he couldn't quite place, not even with scent. Making him grumble and get a bit more awake with every long breath of slumber.

Some part of the large one wanted to explore where he was, in case that nightmare of him being imprisoned once again came true. If so, he would need every moment he could spare alone to devise a form of escape. But his body was in a brutal denial, ignoring all demands of instinct and just wanted to sleep off the pain.

Eventually the footsteps returned, along with a familiar scent to them. One of alliance and trust, until it started tapping him on the snout. Making him growl loudly at it. "Come on, wake up. You've been moaning for at least an hour." Another long grumble that was almost comical as he got a few more taps, this time more assertive. Eventually turning into shoves against his shoulders and moving him out of his comfortable, yet uncomfortable, spot. "Up."

A slight stretch ended halfway in laziness, the same with a yawn as he started opening his eyes. The bright outdoors ached his head once again, even if the light wasn't completely in view. He could pick up some horrendous scent nearby as well, nearly the worst thing he's ever picked up. A few more grumbles, and something black sat down in front of him. "Mm..." He started to speak, but groaned again instead.

"Drink this." The smell got closer, and the dragon tossed his snout away from it. Then a smack on the muzzle shocked him more awake. "Drink."

"...What...?" Thea mumbled, barely making out the bowl of a light brown substance. Nearly making him sick from the sheer sight of it.

"I'm not going to tell you until you drink it." The black female demanded. After a long pause, she raised her paw again for another snout tap, making him half yelp at the pre-action.

"Okay-okay." The blue one groaned, taking a large swallow before lapping at the strange substance. The taste was beyond hideous, making him cringe before he could even retreat his red appendage and nearly gag.

"Quit being a wussy and drink it. You don't have to drink all of it, but if you cringe like that again, this will be your only breakfast." A large mix of an unpleasant groan and a whimper as he went back in. Forcing down a few laps, and started... Chewing? Bubbles and lumps that contained something squishy turned his stomach, as his instincts demanded for him to spit it out. Like it was unsafe for consumption.

But he managed. Granted, not without vocal complaints. "You'll live." She said, pulling over a large bucket of water and letting him lap at it desperately. Taking a few breaths after about twenty drinks and nearly finishing the bucket.

"What the...!?" He coughed, barely making out the badger's smile.

"Old family recipe for hangovers. Garlic, Yellow Friday herbs, Jelly tissue, Oatmeal, Boar liver-" A slight gag from him. "Sheep testicles-"

"Okay-"

"A dead man's toe-" The dragon nearly vomited, grasping his muzzle with both paws to keep it inside. Barely making out Zeltra's smirk through his teary eye.

"Why...!?" He hissed in a whisper, getting her to chuckle.

"You'll see in a minute or two. But for now, I'll check on our breakfast." It took him several moments to get composed enough to start looking around. Instantly spotting the large bowl of horrid ingredients and immediately turning away. Rather than make sense of why the Northe was attempting to feed him such a thing, Thea slowly got up. Only to bump his head on the wooden floor above him and hiss loudly.

Closer, and more careful observation told him he was in some sort of storage area. Most likely a barn, but he wouldn't know such terminology. Bundles of hay were around, explaining the itchiness, and making him wonder if he was supposed to spend the night on one or not. Regardless, it was now... 'Misshapened'.

Cautiously, he half crawled out of the small area where he could get up and stretch. Getting the several kinks out of his back and spreading his wings as far as he could. Though the sprained one did hurt a little, the dragon could move it much easier. Feeling their smaller end claws scrape against the walls of the wooden building a bit effortlessly, he started studying such a structure in order to get his mind off the pain and unpleasant taste.

It seemed recently constructed, yet often used. Rather massive, but barely able to house the large creature within it. Granted the second story where the dragon slept under could be removed to make more room, it still seemed to take a lot of effort to make such a thing. And the shelter the blue one demanded last night in exchange for his aid would probably be bigger than this.

Guilt washed over him, wondering what his master would of thought of Thea'dais now. Barging into a town filled with both the ill and refugees, then demanded such things in order to save their lives. It took so much courage to confront them, but some part of himself felt like it was wrong.

Though, the dragon had his own motives. Ones that were interrupted by the wonderful smell of breakfast and the badger coming with a large plate. Holding it above her head like it only weighed a fraction. He could only imagine the looks on the people's faces, trying to convince the female that for safety, they would need four people carrying such a thing. Knowing the Northe would argue against the help just to prove that she could do it herself easily put a smile over the dragon's muzzle, without him even noticing. "What are you so happy about?" The female teased, getting him to double take and shake himself out of a daydream.

"N-nothing." The large one said a bit awkwardly, rubbing the back of his neck while the badger offered him to hold the plate for a moment. Taking notice to how heavy it actually was, with a massive bowl of watered down oatmeal, some freshly cooked meats, and sliced fruit. Once again, he felt guilty accepting such meals as a demand. Especially after the city just got some refugees that were most likely starving.

A semi-playful swat on his side got his attention, as Zeltra set down a large stump between them. "Quit being a wussy." She said, almost expecting the dragon's silent monologue, as she motioned him to put the plate down on the log. "You wanted this."

"I know, but..." A near scolding glare from the black one lowered his ears.

"Just be thankful they're meeting your demands, let alone so quickly and at such a dire time." It made Thea lower his head and slightly look away. "If you tried that in the Northe, it probably wouldn't have gone so well."

"Meaning what exactly?" The badger didn't answer, but just divided the breakfast. Motioning him to just eat and accept the city's gift. With a heavy sigh, he started lapping at the oatmeal. Purring at the maple taste it seemed to house and lightening up his mood a bit more.

"I'm surprised you even tried the oatmeal." A noise in question forced him to a halt, still getting a bit of a pale brown mustache over his lips as she motioned back to the barn. "Usually anyone who tries that won't touch the stuff for weeks after the first time."

"It's..." He started, glancing over towards the bowl of makeshift medication. "It's not as bad as raw meat for the past three decades." Thea mumbled, licking off the maple from his lips and getting her to chuckle. "I guess I'm just that hungry... Or thankful to finally get something different."

"Couldn't find any fruits or vegetables out there?" He snorted at the black one's question.

"Vegetables were a complete pain to find, and always tasted like dirt. No matter how much I attempted to wash them." He grumbled. "And fruits..." A heavy sigh. "I ate them occasionally... Mostly for a snack. But if I attempted for a meal..."

"It would take too much to fill you up?" She teased, but he nodded sadly.

"And in doing that, many of the animals went without food. Leaving for the rest of the season, barely any of them returning for the next." Zeltra stayed quiet for a moment. "I remember noticing that, and knowing that I caused it. All because I was tired of meat." A heavy sigh as he stared at the cooked slices, almost sick of their smell already. "Last night was probably the best meal I've ever had, including whatshisface's bribe." The badger stayed quiet for a while as they ate their breakfast.

"How do you feel?" The dragon made a noise in question, rather surprised at her studying him. Half wondering what she meant until she tapped her own head.

"Oh. Fine now." The blue one admitted quietly, not even noticing when the hangover vanished.

"I guess your strange concoction actually worked."

"Passed down from generation to generation. Never failed me in the slightest, nor any other Northe that was brave enough to try it-"

"You mean Stupid, I'm sure." He smirked, getting an equally proud one from her. His sights began to search around what little of the city he could see from here. "What happened to them?"

"Who?"

"Your... Northe Kind." A look in question. "I don't remember much from last night. I don't even remember meeting..." He trailed off, noticing the black one's expected expression. "What happened?"

"Nothing bad." She half said, but there was something off in her voice. "You went to cure the ill with the shifty fox, then met us back at the tavern. I gave you my ten pints as promised."

"And?"

"...You went quiet. Unusually quiet, but not like you were shy." The large one's sights drifted away. "You listened to the stories that we shared, but never engaged in them. It was almost as if you were sleepwalking. But as the night went on, and the others passed out, I lead you back here and..."

"I went to sleep?" She shrugged, half nodding.

"I mean, you were a bit tipsy, but it half ruined the fun of seeing someone get drunk for the first time." Thea's head lowered, and she tapped the table. "Hey, don't get sappy on me. We've got things to do, and people to find."

"I suppose you're right. But..."

"But what."

"Am I... Keeping you from something?" An eyebrow from her made him a bit uncomfortable. Rubbing the back of his spineful neck a bit as he awkwardly looked away. "Y-you were here to... Fight, right? Or just to find me?"

"One after the other, yes."

"Yet, now there's no more fight whereas..." The black one motioned him to go on. "And then you already found me, so..." A slow nod. "I guess, what I'm..."

"Out with it."

"Did you want to go home?" Another strange look in question made him whimper. His ears tinting to a deep purple. "I mean, am I stopping you... From going home with my...?"

"No?" She asked, somewhat confused about the situation.

"Are you thinking that maybe she is to be dismissed?" The grey fox asked from around the corner, getting a louder whimper from the large one.

"Great." Thea mumbled. "Like this could've gotten anymore awkward."

"But I'm assuming the answer is No. Mostly because-"

"Northe are not commanded by others." She interrupted him, glaring at the fox for a moment. "We don't get Dismissed, we Decide when our job is complete." Her sights returned to the dragon. "And you want my aid to find someone, so no. I'm not done, and I'm not going home." The blue one's ears fell a bit, getting her to half growl. "You are not keeping me from my return to the Northe, Thea. I'm choosing to help you."

"Granted, we're going to need some information about this Muugyn." A sad nod. "Did you get enough to eat for breakfast?" Roe asked, still seeing quite a bit left on the tray.

"N-no. I'd like to finish before..."

"We're not traveling today, so rest up. Tomorrow morn is where we should set off though." Another nod, and the fox started to turn away.

"Roe?" The grey one halted. "Did... It work?" Thea asked a bit shyly.

"They wouldn't be well enough to feed you if it didn't." The canine half joked, giving the dragon a smirk and letting him release a small sigh of relief. "Take it easy. I told them you need your rest, but that probably won't stop all of them from giving their thanks personally."

"Wonderful." The blue one half tossed his snout, getting the badger to smile.

"There's the Thea I know."

"You want to know what?" The black tiger question rather seriously, making the dragon whimper in embarrassment for a moment. Wanting to hide behind some of the bushes a ways from the grassy lands they were relaxing on. "Why?"

"I'm..." Thea swallowed while rubbing the back of his neck. "I was just curious."

"But you can see it for yourself from here." Krow muttered, gesturing the city below, a few miles

away. "How it works is just boring. Trust me, you're not missing anything but pointlessness by questioning how it functions."

"What makes it pointless though? Especially if they've been doing it for so long?" Krow rolled his eyes.

"You know, you could always just go down there and ask them. Observe how things work, etc. Make a friend or two who actually enjoys explaining how their societies work." A sad look from those maroon eyes got the black one to sigh. "I didn't mean it like that. More like, you're better off seeing it for yourself, first hand. Or in this case: paw."

"Oh, N-no. I wasn't because of..." Another awkward whimper. "I just... Can't."

"Why? Shy about it?" The large one looked away. "Grow some balls. As long as you tell them you're peaceful, there's no reason to be afraid of the guards. They're social animals. Literally." He rested his canine muzzle on his paws, following the awkward silence.

"...Can I tell you a secret?" A very uncaring noise of question. "I was in one once..." A flick of the black ear. "But I was... A prisoner."

"For what?"

"I never knew... I was told they made me Special. And because of that, they imprisoned me." The tiger's purple eyes were studying him, as the dragon took a deep breath. "I can... Heal people by breathing on them. Essentially making them-" The black one got up and gave the blue one a thick stare, silencing him as Krow walked closer. Leaning in for an intimidating whisper.

"**Do Not. Ever. Tell Anyone That.**" It made the larger one whimper, lowering his ears. "I don't care if it's true or not, never say it. And *Deny* it if people ever accuse you of being able to do that." The two locked eyes for a long time, until Thea nodded shyly. Getting the Tirix to exhale and once again lay down in the grass.

"...My Master said the same thing when he freed me."

"Yet, you broke that rule on your third day out. And I thought *I* was insubordinate." The black one grumbled.

"I didn't mean..." A slight breath. "You saved my life, Krow. I just thought you should know." No response from the feline. "But, why would you...?"

"Tell you to shut your maw instead of asking for, I donno, immortality?" He grumbled, getting up once again to a sitting position, then tapping one of his wrists. Four long claws extended out from his fist, worrying the blue one. And yelping when the black tiger stabbed himself in the belly with those claws. Ripping out the weapon and letting a massive amount of red drain quickly.

"W-why would you-!?" Thea yelled, horrified and stepping back. Yet the passive nature of the

black one told him something was off. Soon enough, the blood dripping began to drastically decrease, and the wound sealed itself in a matter of seconds. It stunned the blue one for a few moments. "You...?"

"Know from experience, yes." Another tap on the same wrist and the blades went back into hiding. "And an Immortal doesn't need Immortality, consider yourself lucky that the first time you made that mistake, the listener isn't plotting against you." He grumbled, getting the dragon to lower his sights.

"...Where did you come from?" The tirix looked at him in a bit of annoyance. "I'm just-"

"Absolutely brilliant at choosing conversation subjects, I've noticed." The sarcasm made Thea smile. After some grumbling exhales, Krow laid his head back down. "Alright. Fine. If you want to hear this, get comfortable."

Chapter 2

The war room was silent with near vacancy. Though some things were still needed to be discussed, most of the room's occupants were gathering information about what happened at Lhosaka. But as soon as reports came in that the dragon cure was successful, everyone seemed to breathe easier. However... "I don't think we can possibly get enough resources to keep such a creature around." A consultant of his stated, getting the General to grumble and press into the bridge of his woolly trunk. Hoping the Ram would get the hint and just the commander enjoy some good news for once.

"We will manage."

"But how? With the several dozen refugees and something that size, we will run out of food in a week. Let alone safe waters in days-"

"Then send word back to the kingdom. This city isn't poor, you know."

"Are you suggesting we take its valuables from underneath them-?"

"No! But explain the situation first. With the Eastern City no longer a threat, let alone a position the East can no longer obtain to their advantage, our soldiers no longer have to be here. That can make up for the refugees-"

"You cannot be serious. They won't accept us just picking up and leaving them defenseless! Such a bold tactic can only-"

"You didn't let me finish. We will leave enough for defense-"

"Which doesn't solve the Overpopulation issue. Let alone the dragon!" The mammoth almost growled at him, covering his eyes and resisting the urge to just dismiss the scholar.

"Who says all the refugees are even going to remain here? Once they're fit enough to travel-" The Consultant opened his maw. "-Which will only be in a few days at most, they will leave to other towns."

"What about the Eastern Soldiers that were escorting?"

"I've gotten word that they've been taken as P.O.Ws. [Prisoners Of War]"

"Yet they're not in chains." A harsh glare from the General.

"Do they really need to be?"

"I'm sure you would agree not to be too lenient when it comes to the Enemy, Sir. They are still capable of damage-"

"They are literally surrounded, entrapped, and unarmed by us. No one is stupid enough to try anything. And if so, they still have that Dragon to worry about, let alone the Northes." A suspicious look from the ram when they were mentioned. "And before you open that hole of yours, let me remind you that they are *Eger* to fight. I'm pretty sure they'll be the first one in the brawl against the enemy before our own soldiers."

"But they also add to the overpopulation issue-" A loud growl interrupted him for a moment. "Might I suggest something, General?" A few moments of silence and the mammoth rolled his eyes.

"Fine. I'll hear you out."

"We have already gotten everything we need out of the dragon." A cold stare at the ram. "To be rid of such a creature would definitely relieve us from its burden-"

"Meaning what, exactly?" A sly look from those yellow eyes, still half disturbing the larger one with its horizontal pupil.

"What if we simply... Refused those demands, hmm?" The General went quiet. "A structure for such a thing to live in, especially with such luxuries could house two dozen people. The food it would possibly consume would feed them as well. And, by the sounds of it, that animal isn't going to be put to

work, whereas-"

"So, you're suggesting that I go against my word and agreement. Is that it?"

"I'm a Consultant, General. I'm here to give you the best ideas of how to go about keeping a civil society-"

"By doing something Inhumane?" The ram's face went cross, but stayed silent for a few moments.

"Perhaps it is the better solution than to keep such a monster as the town's pet."

"You mean, the Town's Healer." Another silence. "I'll report back to the King of the events that happened, and consider telling him of Thea'd...a?"

"Theo'dacous?"

"I don't even remember. Theo-something. And see what the kingdom wants of him. We might even use it as a demoralization tactic against the East. But if that is all your suggestions, you may leave knowing that they are being... Considered." Though the ram didn't like the choice of wording, he left the room. Finally giving the General some time to breathe. Getting quite famished, he got up to leave the room. Only to meet up with the grey fox when entering the hallway, spooking him.

"Do not do what I think you're considering." Roe whispered harshly, still walking around with the firearm on his shoulders.

"Is that a threat, mercenary?"

"Just a warning. Do not go against your word, especially when there's a dragon involved. It will not end well for you, or this entire city." The two glared at each other for a few moments. "It took him over thirty years to finally enter another society, do not give him a reason to distrust your people. Let alone, the entire world." Another cold silence and the grey one walked away.

"Yes, yes. You're welcome." The dragon grumbled at the avian before him. "Just as much welcomed as the last six times you've thanked me." His gaze darted towards the chuckling badger, finding the irritated one rather entertaining. "And you can stop making that noise everytime someone visits me."

"I warned you he was cranky." Zeltra told the bird, who only rubbed the back of his neck.

"I'm **Cranky** because I've had the worst bowl of oatmeal in my life this morning, and I can still taste it." A rather hurtful look from the rooster, and Thea grumbled loudly. Covering his eyes with a paw and muttering. "You're the damn cook, aren't you?"

"Y-yes, I made y-your-" The badger burst out laughing heavily, only adding more groans from the large blue one.

"It wasn't your oatmeal-Hey! **You. Listen.** It wasn't *Your* Oatmeal, it was *Hers* that was awful. Okay?" The avian sadly nodded, but the look in his eyes said he didn't believe Thea, getting his ears to fade purple. "J-just go. Please."

"He's right though, healing takes alot out of him."

"Which I'm sure he's been told before he even *Came* here." Another muttering grumble. "And how are your sides still attached?" The blue one snorted at the black.

"It takes more than Sarcasm to down a Northe." She said bluntly, as the rooster bowed out. Granted, not without thanking the dragon another four times, and getting a very long groan once he was out of sights. "There, there."

"Why." He grumbled. "Do they even."

"They're just thankful, so I'm told."

"Indeed! They're broken records of thankfulness. Apparently something that's impossible to cure, even with my power." He snorted loudly, flopping his head on the grass and groaning at the pain it gave his sensitive head.

"You'll live-"

"Doubtful." Another grumble. "No more 'Drinking' after this."

"Don't say that."

"After such torture, I cannot imagine anyone possibly wanting to attempt doing so ever again."

"It's usually more fun with better company and tales. But it's unlikely the drinking gave you the hangover." The large one raised an eyebrow and flicked an ear. "My cure works on anything, but not for everything. I wonder if this is your healing power withdraw." Only a groan in response. "Has that ever happened before?"

"How should I know?" Thea snorted. "Yesterday was the most I've had to use it."

"Didn't have to use it much with your friends?" That opened his eyes a bit, staring straight ahead in a bit of sorrow.

"No."

"Never had to use it on this Muugyn?" A look away from the badger.

"...No. He was always careful." The dragon started, getting really quiet when footsteps were

approaching around the barn. Seeing an Lhosaka soldier on a crutch and another one helping him, instantly getting the Blue one's spines raised. "Oh, for the love of-! Leave me alone, Damnit!" He hissed, startling the two and getting Zeltra to chuckle again.

"O-oh wow, it does exist." The more healthy one said.

"W-we're not here to... Bother you, sir." The injured feline said. "We were just looking for something in the barn." The large one stared him down to the point the cat whimpered a bit.

"You're limping. You sure you're okay to work?" The badger asked.

"Y-yes. The guards here want us to-"

"The guards here are not doctors." Roe came around again giving a faint salute to the group, but noticed the dragon's glare didn't move.

"It's not life-threatening, is it?"

"N-no-"

"Life-threatening or not, I'm not healing you." Thea snorted loudly. "So get what you came for and move along. I want my rest."

"No need to be like that. Daniel, right?" A double take from the feline.

"Y-yes sir... Do I know you?" An awkwardly quiet moment from the fox got the other two companions suspicious again.

"We played a card game last week."

"But I don't gamble-"

"I swear that was you-Your head must still be a little foggy from the heat. The city was on fire after all." An odd stare from Zeltra and the blue one. "If you two don't mind, we have to discuss a missing person." The two soldiers nodded and got their tools from the barn. Leaving quickly while staring at the fox, as well as the other two never releasing their gaze. "What?"

"I'm beginning to think you're some sort of spy." The large one grumbled, getting a raised eyebrow from the grey canine.

"Not this again. I assure you, I'm only looking out for what's best for you-"

"Why though?" The badger asked, getting a neck curl from the dragon. "Not that Thea isn't worth it, but why go out of your way to... What are you doing exactly?"

"Protecting him, same as you. Just more on the political side at the moment." The blue one's head was swinging back and forth between the two until it began to hurt again. "I guess I can't save him from himself."

"Go eat a bag of dicks." A double take from the other two at the odd phrase. "It means-"

"I can take a guess at what it means, but...?"

"Where did you learn that?" Roe tilted his head. "Muugyn?" The slight shrug of his wings caused a little pain, but the large one remained silent. Until Zeltra gave him a few taps and sat on his arm, almost invading his space.

"Tell us about him." The dragon sighed, overlooking both of them before taking a deep breath.

The blue one groaned loudly, holding his head in the grass while the tirix overlooked him. "It's not that complicated." Krow grumbled.

"For you, maybe. But I'm still not understanding this Enlightenment thing. Why is it so important?"

"That's the Arroch in you." The large one snorted at him. "Do not underestimate the importance of Faith, Thea. It does alot for a person, though not all of it good."

"Still, this is a little..."

"Farfetched? Yeah, I got that alot."

"So you've said..." The dragon said quietly. "But where were you before... Here?" An annoyed stare from the Tirix made the blue one's head and ears lower.

"**Really?**" Krow grumbled. "I just spent two days talking, and you Still want to listen to me?" A slight whimper from the large oner. "Why don't you do some talking for a change?"

"About... What?"

"I don't care. How about where *you* came from?" Krow laid his head down again, closing his eyes.

"M-me...?" No response. "I... Don't recall too much about it. My masters said they found me in the forests and took me in. I remember being... Really sick. For a long time, before I got better. I was kept inside a stone building, and this place was massive. They called it a castle."

"Probably that one over there." The tiger muttered, but didn't show any body language. Regardless, Thea did look at it from the distance.

"Yeah... I never did explore much of it. They didn't like me scampering around and getting into things. I was mostly around my bed and pen-"

"You mean: Cage." A long silence between the two, and the blue one sighed.

"...That's what my master called it too. It's probably what it was. But one day that I didn't get fed, I managed to get out of it. The lock was made of a softer metal at the time, and... I didn't realize my own strength back then." A deep breath of remembrance, and he chuckled. "I remember exploring the kitchen then when no one was around. Usually there were people who kept me out of the storage rooms. The cabinets, shelves. But this day, nothing. Something was wrong about it, I didn't realize it until I got my fill."

"Wrong how?" It got the attention of those amethyst eyes, and the dragon lightly shook his head.

"I don't know, but I just... Sensed it. The weather was a little gloomy, but no storm coming. The halls were so eerily quiet, that I became a bit scared. Chirping for anyone in those rooms. Eventually, I came to Nalgrasha's room... He was my favorite master." A deep breath as the large one struggled to hold himself together, fighting off the pain of homesickness.

Regardless, he continued. "I found him in bed, panting like he was too hot. But he was sleeping, almost like he was in a nightmare. Like the many I had when I was sick."

"So, you thought he was sick as well." A sad nod.

"And I wasn't sure what to do... But... *I* was." A noise in question. "I can't explain it, it was like an instinct of mine to just... Vomit on him." An awkward silence, and the Tirix began to laugh, making Thea smile.

"So, your first instinct to save a dying man was to throw up on him?" They shared a chuckle.

"That's what it felt like I was doing. But that's not what came out, instead of my... Lunch, it was some strange blue mist. It felt cold, almost harsh against my body... But it seemed to help his. Within moments, he looked that much more healthy, almost younger. And maybe a minute later, he awoke from his nightmare." A long silence, but the black one wasn't looking over the dragon like he expected.

"Go on. You saved his life."

"Yeah... I almost lost him that day. The old rat that would often give me extra treats on those good days. Who would read me stories, play out in the courtyard, and tell me tales of the outer walls. He even gave me my name."

"He treated you like a person, while the others..."

"...Barely acknowledged I was even there. They would toss my food in the cage and just shut the door. They would do some checkups like I was some sort of..."

"Experiment?" The dragon looked at him, not knowing the word. "You were something tangible to them. A Job. Something to keep..." Their eyes met one another. "They were keeping you alive so that they could use your breath weapon. For immortality?" His blue ears dropped.

"...That's what Nalgrasha said too. And why he snuck me out of the walls."

"Why?" A sad look from the dragon, and Krow rolled his eyes. "*Besides* the cruelty factor. Why not give you humane rights?" His ears perked, and the Tirix half groaned.

"Oh... Nalgrasha eventually discover something about my... Cure." A motion to go on. "That everytime I use it, I get... Bigger."

"So, increase in size. Big deal."

"As in... Older." The large one said quietly.

"...So, physical maturity?" A shrug of his wings.

"My master was worried about that consequence, and when the others didn't care about that discovery... Nalgrasha feared that it was transferring my own life into theirs."

"So, a living battery." A sad look of non-understanding. "They drain your life to keep it for themselves." A slight nod and the dragon looked away. "...You said you were sick when you were younger." Another nod. "Did they do this to you?" Krow asked thickly, only getting a deep breath of composing in response. "Selfish bastards. Go on. He busted you out, then what?"

"...I wandered around here, but I don't know the first thing about..."

"Is that why you've been clinging to me? You don't know how to hunt or survive on your own?" Thea's head sunk, no longer responding. After a deep breath, Krow looked off in the distance. "I was human." A surprised look from those maroon eyes. "Well, kind of. It's a real damn mess, but the earliest I can remember, I was human."

"Someone close to you?" Roe questioned the dragon, sitting on a nearby step ladder and being patient with his answer.

"So far, you've gotten pretty quiet whenever we mention him." A slow nod from Thea as he took another breath. "Is he your lover?" A sharp whimper got the blue one to completely freeze, his ears turning purple. Those shy red eyes meeting the badgers as he stuttered a bit.

"N-no. He wasn't my..." Seeing Zeltra struggle to hold in her chuckle. "He was just... I guess you could call him a Mentor. My only friend that wasn't my Master."

"A Mentor is kinda like a Master." The fox stated. "But you're allowed to have multiple. What was he?" A slight shrug of his wings gave off a little discomfort, but he just took another breath. His eyes scanning almost invisible thoughts of where you begin, what to tell, and what to leave out. "Is he a criminal?"

Thea'daisis looked at him sadly for a moment. "...Yes, he is... Wanted, if I used that term right."

"But he's your friend." Her voice made him flick an ear, almost as if he was spooked. "Which is why you're so timid about talking about him." A deep sigh.

"Anything you say to us stays with us, Thea. We're not here to judge his or your actions." Another look of study.

"And you're content with risking your lives for the sake of others?" The dragon asked thickly. "To attempt to fight someone who might not even want to be found?" A rather quick nod from the grey one, and in the corner of his maroon eye, he could see Zeltra do the same.

"A little late to ask us anyway, considering you've already completed your side of the bargain." The canine shrugged.

A deep breath, and a moment of silence as the large one's gaze fell. "...Black." The two flicked an ear. "He had a black fur coat. He was like a stripeless tiger, about the size of it too. Had a few... Markings around his shoulder and hind leg."

"Markings? As in Tattoos?" A faint nod from him.

"Dyed red. He... Saved my life after I snuck out of that castle. Taught me how to survive a bit in the wild, hunted for us, but wasn't a great cook." A sad chuckle from Thea. "...He was my best friend, but he had to leave to find something. Check on something, and I have no idea where to start looking." A harsh pet on his neck of attempted comfort. "He could be literally anywhere in the world by now."

"That is if he's still alive." A faint shrug from those wings again, but the fox picked up a lack of worry about such a possibility. "Well, we got a description, that's better than some jobs I've had." Roe got off the ladder and picked up his rifle again. "Anything else we should know about?"

The blue one really gave it some thought, but shook his head. "That's fine." Zeltra tapped him again. "But consider telling us what he or you two did before we leave. It might help us find him."

"Alright, I'll check around here, gather some information from the locals. See if I can get a lead." The canine said directly to the badger. "We'll leave tomorrow at sunrise."

"I'll be ready-" She said, hearing the dragon groan.

"Can't we at least wait two?" Confused looks from the pair. "I'm going to." Thea's ears when back when those looks didn't lift.

"...You serious?" Zeltra barely questioned, getting a grumble in response from the blue one.

"No offense Thea, but you're not really fit to travel." The fox started, a snort that time from the draconic snout.

"For once, he has a point. You could barely make it down here from the mountain. Which I might add; is all downhill."

"I'll manage." The other two shared a look, irking the dragon. "You're not leaving me here, alone."

"Thea, I know you don't feel comfortable around them, but you did just demand a home-"

"He might have a good point." Roe stated, meeting the double take from the female. The thick stare studying him for a few moments. "One of the Consultants here were... Suggesting to deny Thea of his requests earlier this morning. Attempting to convince the General to go back on his word." The blue one's heart almost sank with fear.

"Why am I not that surprised that you know that." She grumbled, getting him to shrug. With a deep breath, she looked over the dragon again. "You think you'll be ready to travel in the morning?"

A slight groan, but he nodded. "I feel like I've been laying down all day."

"That's because you've been laying down all day." She chuckled at his snout toss. "Fair enough. We'll move out at sunrise. Get all the rest you can, eat every last bite of your supper. You'll need the energy traveling."

"In the meantime, try packing him a few things. I'm sure you'll be perfectly fine carrying for him."

"Is that a Challenge, Mercenary?" She smirked at him.

"Sure." He smiled back. "I'll see what info I can get."

"...Human?" Thea just stared at him, unable to really say much else.

"You know what a human is, right?" A nod. "Probably seen a few around, but they don't seem to be terribly common around here." A deep breath. "I grew up in a world run by them. A bit more advanced than what we got here."

"Like in your stories from before..."

"Yeah." The Tirix laid on his side. "Apparently I appeared in some kind of bush, on some rich couple's garden. No one knew how I got there, and apparently no one could find any evidence of me just crawling in." An odd look from the dragon. "As in, I was a baby then. And because of that, they took me in. Eventually adopted me when no one else claimed I was theirs. I mean, Jesus, free baby. Who *wouldn't* want it?" Krow snorted, getting a chuckle from the blue one.

"But I grew up to be an asshole. Getting a lot of things just given to me, but I earned most of it myself when I got older. Let alone, how to take care of it." A puzzling look. "Remember when I told you what a car was? Think of that."

"I still don't really..."

"Motorized Wagon with Style, not that hard to picture." Another chuckle. "Went to a public high school, and was an asshole there too. Wouldn't take BS from anyone, including the teachers. Principal knew my parents number by heart, I was that much of a bastard." The odd looks didn't lift. "See, this is why I didn't really want to tell you this. It's gonna go way over your head."

Thea's head and ears lowered. "Sorry."

"Whatever, I'll try to make it as understandable to you as possible. In this society, much like down there, you tend to attempt to find a mate growing up. Often enough going through several of them before finding one that really suits you. One specifically of mine only wanted me for protection and it wasn't until her father was beating on her at home that she realized I was serious."

"Because...?"

"I broke into his house and kicked his ass. To the point where he attempted to sue me. But that trial was not in his favor, especially when this girl threatened to testify against him." A very puzzled look from the dragon got the tiger to grumble. "Do not even get me started on the Dumbassery of Law." A chuckle.

"So, me and her old man were not getting along at all, and he really didn't want us together. She wanted to leave the city and start out elsewhere, and I was actually considering it. However, this bastard overheard her talking about it over the phone one night, and ended up sabotaging my car the next time I

was in." A deep grumble. "Sabotage means to rig up so it will fail, or dysfunction."

"Oh." There was a quiet moment between them. "Krow?"

"...On my way to my parents' home, there was this train track. Think of a very specific vehicle that is extremely heavy. It runs, literally, on two large bars to guide it across the land, but it doesn't have the freedom of something like a wagon." The dragon could feel something off from his voice. "It's made to carry large cargo at long distances, and usually goes pretty fast. When my car stalled from that bastard rigging it..."

Another long silence. "She didn't survive the collision. I barely did, breaking nearly every bone in my body. I was stuck in life support for several months, and my father did everything he could to keep me alive. No matter what the price, he paid it." A deep breath. "Even bought me a new skeleton, but they were afraid that plastics wouldn't cut it. Instead, they used metal."

Thea really didn't know what to say, just stared in the direction of the black creature. "Problem with metal is... Inside most creature's bones is where blood is... '*Made*' so to speak. This is called Bone Marrow, but metal can't do this. Even when they attempted to put marrow in those metal bones. So the only thing they could do was take it out of my body, recharge it, and put it back in. Kind of a long and painful process, but it was something."

"Eventually, I was able to leave the damn place. Visit her grave, even when I missed out of the funeral. Went through endless physical therapy, and when I was able to walk and move about almost normally, I was sent back to school. Which didn't go so well after an accident like that. People start looking at you differently, to the point where it's infuriating."

"I started lashing out at the city, the school, and eventually just quit going. I remember taking a trip out to some nearby town in the mountains, and ended up getting the car crashed by the fog. Some asshole cops that 'knew me well' ended up taking me to the station in this town, but..."

"But what?"

"...This is where it gets weird. The entire town was basically empty. Not a damn soul around, but evidence that people existed there less than an hour ago. It was like as soon as we arrived, they all disappeared. The cops desperately attempted to find the place while a thick fog while they kept me in cuffs, but..." A deep breath. "There were creatures in the fog. I'll give you the short version of this story, kid: they didn't survive."

"...But you did."

"This is where I found out I wasn't human. Here was where I found out that her father was the one who tampered with my car, causing her death. And where I found out what I should be doing with the gifts my body gave me." Another breath. "I even met my real father there, just didn't know it at the time. Even remember what he first said to me."

"Which was?"

"You Are Changing Into A More Powerful, Resilient Version Of Yourself. But Whatever Your Final Form, It Is An Expression Of Your True Nature." A bit of silence as the dragon stared into space, his gaze drifting around. "Take that how you like, but it's something that I've... Kept close." With another deep breath, Krow got up. Looking at Thea for a moment. "Satisfied?"

A slight shrug of his wings, and he sadly smiled. "I'm up for more if you want to talk-" His stomach growled loudly.

"Maybe after a snack." A chuckle from the blue one. "I swear, you can't keep a dragon full."

Chapter 4

The dragon collapsed heavily on the thick grass, panting desperately to regain his energy and almost wheezing trying to speak. "W... Why... Would...!?"

"It's only been 3 hours." The badger half chuckled, tapping the blue one and trying to get him to relax. "If we're going to take breaks like this so quickly, then it'll be an extra day of traveling to get there. That is, if this lead is correct." Roe just shrugged at her.

"I just told you what I heard. There's been sightings of some large black animal wandering around there. Sometimes going after the livestock and hunting bigger game. It's a better lead than to take a pair of sticks and head towards where they break."

"If you listen to the wild, it will direct you. If you're worthy enough that is. Besides, it lead to this direction anyway, so I don't know why you're complaining."

"All I'm saying is, we shouldn't trust wild superstitions."

"And all I'm saying is, we shouldn't trust rumors." She playfully glared at him, seeing the grey one shrug before the dragon coughed loudly. "How on earth are you so out of shape?"

"Go... Eat... Bag..."

"Yeah, yeah." Zeltra studied the sky for a few moments. "It'll probably rain here tomorrow, so it

wouldn't be wise to make camp." A loud whimper from the large one, and she swat him. "Quit being a wussy! You wanted to come with us, and now you're here. Deal with it, like you said you were going to." The fox chuckled at them.

"Maybe I'll go find him some water. You stay here with him." And the canine walked off into the woods. Finding a clear stream quite easily and taking a sample with a vial first. Studying it with the sunlight for a few moments before concluding it was safe to drink. Refilling the waterskins, his ear flickered. Catching a noise in the distance.

"You okay?" Zeltra chuckled, now that the large one had finally caught his breath. Glaring at her with flat ears. "How did you survive for thirty-"

"Don't." He grumbled, almost growling at her. "I didn't have to hunt or chase things down. Most things just ran away from my sheer size." Thea snorted. "I don't think I've ever had to fight anything, barely raise a claw to swat. Just stand tall and spread my wings, maybe hiss a little, and everything scampered."

"So, you were a scavenger." He didn't know how to feel about that word, just lightly exhaling and almost looking away. "The legend of dragons do tend to vary with location, but most them are-"

"Better hunters than me?" Zeltra went silent. "I've been taken care of my entire life. Given almost everything just by approaching others... You want to know why I don't like the idea of society?" A few strokes of his neck while she put down her pack. "I almost feel like I don't deserve it."

"What do you mean?"

"All I seem to do in this world is just Take. And all I have to Give is one thing." He studied her yellow eyes. "Where is the balance in that? Is nature literally telling me that I need to sacrifice myself in order to live a comfortable life?" The badger didn't know how to answer, not really believing in the idea of Balance.

"...Is there a specific reason why you want to find Muugyn-?" A gunshot nearby got both of their attentions, as she quickly got her hammer and shield before heading towards where Roe left. Hearing the dragon shortly behind her.

"I think he missed ya, boss." A rather scrawny rodent snickered, getting almost a glare from the warthog. As well as a slight shrug from the grey fox, still aiming his rifle at the three of them.

"You say Missed, I say Warning Shot." Roe said rather calmly.

"Ya, but you already used up your shot in that there rifle. Pointing it at us is just a bluff, boss-"

Another gunshot came really close to the more pale rodent, as those green eyes locked onto its bright red ones.

"Some rifles, yes. But not mine." His ear flickered when the badger and blue one came towards the clearing. The sighting of the larger creature finally got an intimidating reaction out of the bandits. "Here I thought you two forgot about me. Means I won't have to do this alone." The warthog cursed under his breath.

"Where did you find these guys?" Zeltra asked, but picking up a scream in the distance behind the fox.

"You mind taking care of that? I got these guys, don't worry."

"You really want me to back down from this fight?" She snarled at him.

"Only to engage into another one. I'd send Thea, but we *are* supposed to be protecting him." The badger growled a bit, and another loud yelp in that direction got her to curse a bit. Withdrawing quickly, and getting the blue one to shuffle his sights between them. "Go on, I'm fine here."

A few moments of staring at the grey one, and the dragon snorted. "You better damn well be."

About a minute of sprinting, Zeltra came to a wagon, slightly off a main road. Charging at the first creature in ragged clothing she could see, she started spinning her longhammer vertically for momentum. Just now realizing that he had a female pinned to the side, odds are someone traveling with the vehicle.

Instead of going with the planned upward swing of the hammer, she changed it to swing it overhead, then strike sideways. Catching the back-turned bandit by surprise and knocking him out with the single swing, as well as a few feet away. "You alright?" Zeltra asked the avian female. As she gave a shaky nod, the badger then unstrapped her tower shield and let it fall heavily on the unconscious rodent. "Head back there, the dragon will keep you safe."

Staring through the two opened doors of the wagon, another groundhog was taking a crow hostage as well. Yelling at the Northe to stay back, but was slightly distracted by the previous avian running away. With his sights diverted, Zeltra threw the longhammer within the opened doorways, too fast for the bandit to react. Getting a loud crack on the snout that knocked both of them down, yet releasing his grip on the black bird.

Quickly climbing through the wagon, another rodent within stabbed her in the side with a small blade. Getting her to growl loudly at him before smacking the brown rat with a backfist, then throwing him out the door easily. Pulling the dagger out with little effort and throwing it out the other side before exiting towards the crow.

Speaking of the black bird, he was attempting to escape, but was nearly slashed at by scrawny

cat. A black paw caught his arm, halting the attack almost instantly before getting yanked back and punched heavily in his maw. As the bird scampered up, he pointed behind the badger, just before feeling a sharp point rip into her shirt, making her growl loudly. Mostly out of the hole it made more than the wound.

But the creature behind her attempted to pry out the weapon, just now feeling it tangled in both her hide and clothing. Making her hiss at the sting and swing her fist backwards in a sharp *whoosh!* Only to have the small lizard evade by ducking and yelping a bit. Growling, Zeltra instead grabbed the wagon door with the other paw, and shifted her back towards it while slamming the wooden barricade shut. Hearing the thing snap loudly as it hit the bandit, as well as a loud rip from her clothing.

A crude dagger flew just by her head and barely stuck into the wagon behind her, getting the black one to grumble at the amount of bandits there was for this one wagon. Making her wish that she didn't ditch her shield so quickly, but she could always improvise. Grabbing the wagon's door by the hinge, she ripped most of it clean off the vehicle. Though it would be a little awkward to use, it stopped another dagger being thrown just in time. Giving her cover as she advanced quickly and bashed the bandit heavily with the makeshift shield. Making him fly back a few feet before hitting a wagon of their own.

A quick observation seemed like they were keeping this thing nearby, waiting to strike at anyone passing through carrying a heavy load. Nearly filled up with medical supplies, her investigation was cut short with the sound of someone being impaled.

He couldn't understand how someone could run so fast. Cursing his massive body and lack of endurance, even after that short rest. But the road ahead was rather opened. Seeing the badger's destination not too far from here. However, when he noticed more of the bandits about, the fear of conflict raced his heart.

Thea wasn't sure what to do. If he engaged in the fight, he would either hurt someone, or even be hurt himself. The dragon wasn't a hunter, let alone a fighter, but what if Zeltra needed him? A heavy sigh as he couldn't decide what to do. Perhaps wait behind until she said it was safe.

Judging by their stories, these Northe were tough. Let alone, Badgers were. His mind recalled the night they met, and she willingly cut her own arm just to prove the blue one's abilities. Though it irked him, it also showed that she was no stranger to pain. "She'll be fine." He whispered to himself, looking back and wondering how the fox was doing. "Just stand back, and come in when she's done-" A noise in question as he spotted something off the road.

What appeared to be a body made him a bit nervous at first, but the clothing was a bit too fancy compared to these woodland bandits. Perhaps it was the driver instead? The large one slowly approached another black avian, seeing a few stab wounds and a bit of a damaged beak. "Walter!?" Thea double taked at a female bird approaching him.

"I-is that her name?" He curled his neck.

"His name, yes." She kneeled down and carefully turned the wounded one over. Hearing the dragon mutter a curse under his breath. "He's still breathing, but..." Another groan from the larger beast got her a bit frightened, then a loud growl coming from the wagons in the distance. As well as the sighting of the first black bird. "All of our supplies are back there-" She started, only to get the dragon's face really close to hers, making her yelp for a moment.

"Do Not. Tell. Anyone. Understand?" She then gave him a puzzled look.

The warthog and two rats were staring down the grey one, as he eventually withdrew his aim at them and tended to an aching shoulder. "Been a while since I've had to shoot that one-handed." He muttered rather calmly, as the two rodents shared a look with their leader if they should attack or not.

A few loud snaps in the forests nearby got their attention, and the fox to flicker his ears. Taking a deep breath and prying out the cartridge of the rifle. "Don't worry about me, love. I'm fine here. But look after those two, just in case." A few more snaps, and a sudden suction of air towards that direction got the other three a little spooked. "Now..." Roe said, placing the bullets back into his bandolier. "I don't like shooting people. So I'll do what I can to avoid it." A pull on the trigger, and the long weapon omitted a faint click. "But you don't seem like the type to just walk away." He looked the hog in the eyes, almost challenging him. "But I'm giving you a choice."

A harsh glare for a few moments, and he gave the gesture to surround the canine. Slowly, both mice started shifting around. Twitching their small knives and trying to reflect the sun into those green eyes, all the while the warthog braced his club while taking a few steps forward. When Roe started to squint a bit, the pig quickly swung upwards, then down. Each time barely missing the grey snout.

Almost immediately after the second attack missed, the barrel of the rifle swatted the hog's tusk heavily, stunning him for a moment. While the pale rat to the canine's right went in for a slash at his right heel, the fox's left boot slammed into his face by surprise. Getting the brown rodent to halt his own attack and nearly get the same boot in the snout.

Furious, the boar swung the club sideways in order to reach the grey one, but the heavy swing was halted by the rifle's midsection. The two locked eyes during the deadlock, as the pig through all of his strength against the canine's stance. Eventually causing his own crude weapon to begin to crack. Roe then parried the club along its intended way, causing the stock of his gun to slam into the warthog's snout once, bash it in for a second strike, then make a full backwards rotation for one last slam against the boar's head. Causing him to fall unconscious.

For a moment, the fox took a deep breath. Slowly studying the expressions of the two frightened bandits. Taking out the same clip of bullets from before, he loaded his rifle and pulled the bolt. "I won't

say anything if you leave. Let alone hunt you down. But if you keep fighting-" The two immediately dropped their weapons and withdrew into the forests, giving him a sigh of relief before heading towards the wagon.

It was unlike anything she's ever seen before. A crystal golem in the appearance of an upright dragon. Nearly eight feet tall, every sharp edge seemed to glisten with the dense redness of fresh blood, a few still floating out of sync with the rest of its body. It was hard to tell the difference between the creature's body, and the red staff that was planted through a bandit's chest. But a supernatural tug seemed to remove it from the very earth.

The two locked eyes for a moment, getting Zeltra to silently curse in her mind. Not only was she currently disarmed, but without a proper shield. That wooden door was enough to improvise against much smaller weapons, but nothing like that.

Some movement behind the black one got her ear to flicker, and all at once, the gemmed creature vanished in a series of threaded lights. Feeling a bit of air suck towards where it was, but also some behind the badger as well. Getting her to dodge roll to the side and hear half a whimper before a horrible cleaving through bone and sinew, as another bandit failed to scamper away.

Finally able to retrieve her longhammer, Zeltra was at least armed by the time she locked eyes with the red one again. Noticing a mix of both madness and bloodlust within its black slit. "Zeltra!" They heard Thea from the other side of the wagon shout, as he picked up the tower shield that was all by its lonesome. Tossing it over the carriage for her to don.

However, another bandit attempted to use this opportunity to escape. Scampering away, but the red dragon charged towards it. Getting next to him almost instantly while performing a sideways slam. Hitting with an unreal impact and cutting him into ribbons before the badger caught the airborne shield. Hiding behind it, a small bit of fear cut through her. Getting that same feeling like when she fought the bear.

As the feline bandit whimpered a bit, cowering but not moving, the gemmed one took a few slow steps towards him. Resting a heavy paw on his lower back and positioning the spear to impale it, still staring down the badger in the eyes. Until it seen some movement on the other side of the wagon. Almost growling at the sight of the blue dragon, and hearing him whimper when they locked eyes. Staring at him with a pure, undiluted hate.

Chapter 5

The gemmed creature's red grip tightened against the gemmed weapon. Its muzzle slightly shifted as if it were snarling silently, still locked onto Thea's eyes. Then its ear flickered behind, catching the steps of Roe as he kept aim at it with his rifle. "**Freayha.**" He growled loudly, getting the attention of the crystal one.

"...Flyare." It seemed to respond, in a semi-female voice.

"Then Stand Down." The fox ordered, only getting those red eyes to study him for a few moments. "There's no more need for bloodshed."

"They witnessed *it*." It said rather calmly. "Do you really think it is wise to leave them-?"

"I don't care, that's not a reason to kill them." A bit of silence, and the feline whimpered again. Still attempting to endure the heavy weight of such a creature. "**Stand. Down.**" Another growl. It seemed like ages before the creature eased its grip on the spear and withdrew it. Releasing its hold on the fragile feline and taking a step aside the bandit's wagon. When it did, Roe released his own heavy sigh of relief. "Go." He motioned the cat to get up and withdraw, and it did so.

"You know this thing?" Zeltra half hissed, still keeping her guard against it. Though the crystal dragon did half grumble at the statement, it looked at Roe as well for an explanation. Seeing the fox rub the back of his neck trying to think of where to begin. After a few moments of awkward noises, the red one turned to the badger once again.

"We're old comrades." It bluntly stated, getting a look of disbelief from the answer. Stepping around the large wagon, the blue dragon attempted to get a better look. Only to get those red eyes locked onto him again, nearly with the same stare. Making him lower his head and ears, but barely catching the whimper in his throat.

"*Old Comrades.*" The black female repeated, glaring at the canine once again. At least now lowering her defense a bit and seeing the three avians overwatching the group. "What the hell are you?" Its eyes returned to Zeltra, almost hurt. However, the sudden moment caused the mask of its face to move slightly faster than the rest of its gemmed head. The odd display nearly told the badger that this... Golem, could fall apart and probably still function. Even if shard by shard.

"I'll explain that when we rest. For now, can you scout overhead and see if anyone else was attacked?" Roe asked the crystaled one, getting it to study him for a moment then nod. Though still half glaring at the other dragon, it quickly leapt to the air and flew off in seconds. And with it, the tension of the area. Feeling the curious, yet distrustful stares of the other two made him groan uncomfortably. "She's..."

"Your *girlfriend*?" Thea snorted, finally getting his courage back. Though the canine's expression didn't relief.

"Any other secrets you're keeping from us?" Zeltra grumbled, attaching her hammer to her belt again and walking towards the travelers.

"I'd be lying if I said no." Again with the distrustful glares. "Look, I know it seems... Dishonest. But trust me when I say that I'm on your side. I'm just trying to protect you-

"From what exactly?"

"And why?" The blue one grumbled. Not getting a response from the grey one. Not even a look. "Fine, be that way." Thea snorted. "Just don't get us killed, or worse."

"You're really going to keep trusting him-?"

"I don't have much of a choice, do I?" The dragon almost snapped at her. "The only ones I *Can* trust are you guys. Half because you two are the only ones reliable, especially after this and that bear a few nights ago." The two looked at Thea for a moment. "Yes. I heard that. I'm pretty sure the world heard that." He snorted at them.

When they kept quiet, the avians caught up to them. The female one giving the dragon a smile. "Thank you for saving Walter's life." To which the blue one tossed his snout sharply.

"What did I *just* tell you!?" He groaned loudly, placing a paw over his eyes and getting the birds to whimper a bit. "When I said 'Don't Tell Anyone' I meant **Anyone**. Not even me!"

"He showed you his talent, did he?" Zeltra asked them, trying to push the tension between her and the canine away.

"Are you two alright?" Roe asked the other two avians.

"Y-yes." The crow answered. "I'm Doctor Watson, and this is my mate Sandra and assistant Walter."

"We are traveling to Vestarro when we got word of the epidemic there. They've sent requests for help in nearly every city this side of the river." The white female explained.

"It was a rough trip down here without the bandits, then they suddenly ambushed us." Walter exhaled. "One of them climbed onto the bow where I was leading the horses and attacked me before shoving me off." The bird held the side of his head. "I blacked out, probably landing on a rock. Sincerely, thank you for saving my life." He said to Thea.

"As well as you two for coming to our aid."

"You're very welcome, Ma'am. But you mentioned Vestarro? We just came from there, Thea here cured the epidemic."

"Incredible." The black crow studied the dragon from afar. "I never heard of a dragon capable of such things-

"Something you will take to your grave, understand?" The large one grumbled.

"As grouchy as he is, Thea is right. You should really keep this story to yourselves." The badger said. "Though the illness over there is cured, they could really use some supplies."

"Yes, but our horses..." The group looked towards the front of the wagon towards the neck yoke, currently empty of any carrying source. Then looked at the dragon, who only double taked at everyone before hissing at them.

"No!"

"We're only about three hours away-

"No!" Another hiss, specifically at Roe. Getting the canine to chuckle.

"He would complain the whole way down, you realize this."

"Exactly!" He snorted at the badger.

"Let alone, he's probably not fit enough to-" A loud hiss at her broke Zeltra into chuckles as well. "I'll pull it. How about that?" The three birds double taked at her.

"A-are you... Serious?"

"Completely. I'm a Northe!" Thea and the fox groaned while tossing their muzzles. "Northes are capable of anything! Pulling a wagon is nothing for us, even if it's loaded with rocks and traveling across thick mud." She motioned the dragon for a moment. "Just help me reload it, alright?"

Another snout toss. "Fiiiine. But I'm still complaining about it."

"Don't worry, we'll get you three safely to the city."

"Thank you. That is incredibly kind of all of you."

"Why though?" The dragon curled his neck while the Tirix tossed his snout. "I mean, what's the point in shortening words to... Their starting letter-

"Initials. And it's more of a style thing."

"Style...?" Thea tilted his head, hearing the black one sigh.

"You know, style. Doing what you think is cool or impressive." Those frilled ears perked a bit.

"And saying BS instead of..." He shook his blue muzzle for a moment. "Is... Cold?"

"Not that kind of cool-" A sharp sigh from Krow as he rubbed the bridge of his snout. "Let me try explaining this differently. You know how I act how I rule the world, yes?"

"Yeeessss?" A very puzzling answer.

"That's my style."

"But you don't actually rule the world... Do you?" A shrug from the tiger.

"Kinda. Some could argue I do. Some could argue that you do too." A curl of his scaly neck.

"But... I don't own..."

"Not with that attitude, you don't. But what's stopping you from trying?" The large one didn't know how to answer that. "Acting how you feel, or want to feel, is a form of style. Even if it isn't true, or drastically far from the truth. The point is, it gives you identity." Thea's expression didn't change. "As in, it makes you different from all the other blips out there."

"...Blips?" A near frustrating growl. "But, you're already different. I've never even heard of a Tirix."

"And style will make you more different. Giving them a better picture of who you are, or what you want to be." Those red eyes drifted away, somewhat understanding what the black one was talking about. "It's usually a matter of a simple question: *What do you want to be?*"

"...You." The blue one said after a long silence. Getting the two to lock eyes for a few moments, then whimpering when those purple iris' read a very puzzled look. "S-should I have said...?"

"You want to be **Me**?" Krow asked, a bit harshly. Getting the dragon's head to sink almost into the tall grass and hide his purple ears. "I mean, I can understand every reason *why* you'd want to be me but... **Why**?" After a long awkward silence between the two, a traveler came through the bushes. "Oh, thank Thogth- Literally anything else. Let's pay attention to it."

The lizard in rather light clothing couldn't help but gock at the two. One; for them actually talking, and the other that such creatures even existed. But it's attention was more towards the blue dragon than the Tirix. "By the Gods... You do exist!" It said, full of almost hopeful disbelief. Dropping its traveling staff and backpack before kneeling in front of Thea.

"Ah, Shitballs." Krow grumbled under his breath.

"I've been looking all over for you! I've heard the tales, but I hardly believed they were true!" It claimed in front of the clearly uncomfortable dragon.

"Yet, you wandered through this entire forest without guidance to find him." The black one muttered.

"Y-yes, the Gods lead me to you! They must have!"

"Of Course." An eye roll from the Tiger, while the blue one slightly whimpered. Not knowing how to respond towards the green lizard.

"Please! You must help my dear Fargoh! He doesn't have much time left!"

"F-Fargoh-?"

"You must be mistaken. He's not the dragon of these tales you speak of. Just your unordinary, dense blue dragon. And the dense part isn't describing his color." The large one was too stunned to glare at the Tirix' insult.

"Is that true? Are you not the Healer of legends...?" The green one's eyes were nearly filled with tears, almost tearing Thea's heart to look at them.

"...I..." A faint breath. "...I am the one of Legend, yes-"

"No, my friend here is delusional, and wishes he was a superhero. Really, he's just nothing but a waste of space." That time he got a glare from those red eyes, yet they were half puzzled. As well as the lizard. "Now, continue your hunt for some magical being that probably doesn't exist. For all you know, this Fredrick isn't alive anymore-"

"Krow!" The dragon hissed at him, getting a harsh stare in response. Regardless, he turned back to the green one. "I-I'll heal your friend. Just show me-"

"Perhaps you don't understand how this works, Thea." The black one growled, getting up and almost shoving the traveler out of the way. "The more people you attempt to *Save*, the sooner you dig your own grave." His frilled ears went back. "You can't just save everyone who comes to you."

"I can't just say No to them either-!"

"Yes. Yes, you can. And you will have to if you want to live. You can't just throw your own life away everytime one of these people get a papercut." A sad look from those maroon discs. "Is this the identity that you *Really* want to have? The kind who will leap to their own demise just to save those who are stupid enough to get injured."

"B-but my husband is ill. This wasn't his fault-"

"Meaning he either didn't dress warm enough, or ate something he really shouldn't have. Considering you're well enough to make your way up here, I *doubt* it's the latter." Another grumble as he

ignored the look in her sad eyes. "Don't risk your own life to save the world. They won't remember you for it, let alone appreciate what you've done." The two stared at each other for a long time, and eventually the dragon sighed.

Looking away from the tiger, Thea got up. Taking a deep breath and looking at the traveler once again. "...Lead the way." He said, getting a barrage of thanks and a very irked expression. When the larger one attempted to walk around Krow, he got back in his way.

"Park your scaly ass down."

"I won't say no to him-"

"H-her." The green one corrected the dragon.

"And I really don't like repeating myself." The Tirix growled deeply. "Don't become another Atlas." A puzzled expression from him, though Thea was doing his best to remain stoic. Getting a snout toss. "I'll tell you later, but you're making a mistake!"

"What else am I going to do with my life-?"

"**Anything You Want!!!**" Krow barked at him, finally getting the blue one to take a step back. "That's what... Whatshisface would've wanted for you! If you go through with this everytime someone gets sacked, then you're no better out here than you were in that castle!" Those frilled ears dropped, and the black one let out a grumbling sigh. "Fine. **I'll** do it. How about that?" A double take from the traveler.

"W-what?"

"You said it was an illness, right? I can deal with it, let alone without sacrificing anything." The two males stared at each other for a few moments. "But under one condition: You deny the next person who begs for you to cure their damn hangnail or whatever is wrong with them. Deal?" The large one's head sank. Taking a deep breath and looking away, he nodded. Eventually getting a few taps on his chin until they locked eyes again. "You can't save anyone, enjoy life, or do anything productive if you're **Dead**. Eventually, you'll learn to realize that." The words were heavy enough for him to sit on his haunches once again. Letting the Tirix motion the traveler to lead the way.

It was late night by the time the two reached a very crude looking home. A small fire made by another lizard, looking much younger, barely provided enough light to see inside. Getting a both surprised and frightened look at the black tiger when it appeared out of the shadows, following the female. "How is he?" She asked the younger one.

"Still breathing, but hasn't woke up yet. Is that...?"

"It's our help. This is Krow, he's going to-"

"Never mention that name again, understand?" The black one almost growled, entering the hut without permission and overlooking the slightly taller lizard on a makeshift bed. "Some people will get the wrong idea if you say that name around them. Speaking of which, I'm going to lay down some ground rules before he... *Recovers*." Another frightening look as those purple eyes seemed to reflect the light of the fire.

"L-like...?"

"First. I was never here. I'll even go out of my way to erase my pawprints. Second: you never found *Anything* in the forests. **ANYTHING**. Understood?" A loud swallow from her. "Third: he recovered out of sheer willpower or miracle of the Gods, or whatever the hell else you make up. Get creative if you wish, but he was not saved by anyone other than himself." A faint nod from the two, and the Tirix tapped his right wrist. Causing four long blades to rip out over his knuckles, and making the two worried.

With the other paw, he searched for the male's hand. Cutting a gash on the lizard's palm and making their child whimper a bit. "W-what are-?"

"Are you questioning the methods of a doctor?" The black one asked rather calmly, but not distracted from his work. Cutting his own left palm, he let some of his blood run out before grasping the lizard's wound with it. Letting the two exchange red fluids for a few moments, and soon signs of the illness began to fade. His breathing was deeper and more healthy, though still slightly coughing the junk out of his lungs, and the gash was completely healed up.

The other two rushed inside to check on him, amazed at the miracle that they witnessed and seeing the father's eyes begin to open. With a strong grip on her arm, Krow pulled the Traveler slightly aside. "Remember. Our. Deal. If you break it, I'll hunt all three of you down and gut you if you even leak out **anything** you saw today. Got it?" A frightful nod, and he stared deep into her eyes for several moments before letting go. Leaving them behind as if he were never there.

The large one stumbled off the road into the same patch of thick grass as before, panting loudly. "N-no... More...!" Getting the other two to shake their heads.

"You okay?"

"I still can't believe how out of shape you are-" The dragon attempted to hiss at her, but coughed instead, getting her to chuckle a bit. "And you actually wanted to visit the Northelands? This is really easy travel compared."

"Bite... My Scaly... Blue Ass!" The two chuckled a bit.

"We're only back where we left off before-" A loud groan as the badger observed the sky. "And that storm is still coming over us. I'm not sure if we'll make it out at this rate."

"Maybe we can find a cave or something to hide from it."

"It'll last around 16 hours." A look of disbelief at Zeltra.

"You cannot possibly know that by looking at the sky-"

"A Northe can sense the weather much better than any other!" Another groan from the blue one.

"Regardless, we can't squeeze him into a tent. So, can you sense where a cave might be?" She lightly shrugged and shook her head.

"When we traveled down here, we did it in about two days." Roe stared at her for a few moments.

"...Isn't the Northelands a few hundred miles from here-?"

"Yes." She said rather calmly, leaning up against the exhausted dragon. "We were excited, what can I say?"

"Uh huh..." The fox then looked into the forestry for a moment. "Can you find some shelter nearby for us? One he could at least fit in?" Some rustles in the bushes got the other two's attention as the gemmed dragon flew out above it. Quickly taking off to scout the lands.

"Was it... Just following us all the way down here?" Thea whimpered, getting the canine to rub the back of his neck and shyly nod.

"So, it's been stalking us this entire way."

"I'd rather say she's 'Protecting' us."

"And by Us, you mean... You?" An awkward shrug and the black one half grumbled at him. "What the hell is that thing?" A quiet breath from him.

"She... Wasn't always like that, y'know? All crystal-like. I mean, she was a dragon. A different species of one that was becoming more upright through evolution." A puzzling look from the two. "Long story, but they were a civil race. They were strong, and powerful like all-" A moment of study on Thea. "...Most dragons."

"Thanks Roe, tell me what you *really* think." The blue one snorted at him.

"Anyway, they had potential. Enough to realize they could either conquer the world, or protect it."

"And they chose to protect it?" The badger asked, getting a nod from him as they sat down and got out a snack.

"Yeah. Eventually learning multiple different ways to as well. Be it technology, weaponry, magics, or just pure knowledge. They made a large school or academy to teach these things. At first, it was mostly for these dragons, but eventually accepted others as well."

"And that thing...?"

"Flyare was taught an art of defensive weaponry known as Lancing. They specialized in, well, lances, staves, spears and other polearms. As well as an offensive style of Dragooning; using the sky to their advantage, as well as jumping and falling for more power. Their flight speeds were extraordinary." The two looked towards where the crystal one took off before.

"Then...?" The dragon started, seeing Roe nod at him.

"Where she came from, there were a specific type of enemy that we came into contact with quite frequently, called the Unborn." A look in question from the two. "And they are a whole other mess of information to deal with. But one battle specifically, these creatures ambushed her while trying to shatter a Worldstone."

"A what?"

"Think... A planet's Heart or Pearl. Sometimes, planets get wounded from the inside, and to cure such a thing, they condense a tremendous amount of life-force around it. It's... Not quite solid, but not really a liquid. Something inbetween."

"And she was struck by this?" Zeltra questioned.

"No... She was thrown into it." The two studied the canine for a few moments. "At a state where she was in constant adrenaline, not to mention furious... And this stone preserved that emotion. As well as... Did that to her body."

"But it's only her outside... Isn't it?" The blue one asked, seeing Roe shake his head.

"The worldstone shattered, and her along with it. Every inch of her old body is now split into shards, including her insides. But it's all preserved in a strange state of existence. So she still lives, even if

she can open up her chest and hand you half her own heart."

"But you said that her state of mind was preserved as well. Meaning..."

"She's... Unstable at times. Especially during conflicts. Flyare knew her discipline quite well, and was rather composed. When I first saw her like this, I couldn't believe it was the same knight that I fought beside."

"Does this mean the planet is going to die?"

"What?" The grey one double taked. "Oh, no. This was a differennnt... Planet..." He said slowly, getting him to cover his eyes with a paw.

"One that you're from...?" The badger looked between the two males, not quite understanding what Thea was talking about.

"Wait, you're not just an outsider to this land, but all the lands? Am I understanding this?" The grey one whimpered a bit at her, and the dragon curled his neck. "Okay. I want a rematch." Zeltra said, somewhat excitedly. Getting the two to look at her oddly.

"W-what?"

"A rematch of what exactly?"

"As in a Duel." Another odd look from the red eyes, and discomfort from the green pair. "I was thinking I lost to a lowly southerner, but really, you're an..."

"Extraterrestrial?" The two looked at Thea again, a bit surprised at the word. Sending his ears back and hissing. "I know stuff!"

"Just not how to take care of yourself." The badger got another hiss. "But this changes everything. I could be the first Northe to battle an Outsider!"

"Please don't make this a thing." The fox whimpered.

"Why not? This is big! This is epic! I'll gloat about this for years!" Another whimper from him.

"Back to the matter at hand." The blue one grumbled. "Why is... *She* serving you?" A sad look into those red discs.

"She just trusts my judgement. I've never lead her wrong-"

"So, Love." An embarrassed whimper. "Predictable." Thea snorted. "But what's going to stop her from... Impaling us in our sleep?"

"I usually send her off to scout the lands and do recon." An odd look from the two, and he sighed. "She can't rest in this state. To do so is to give into the bloodlust. Giving her tasks like this..." He motioned upwards around them. "It gives her purpose, a goal to focus on. So her mind doesn't..."

"Give into the red." Zeltra finished, getting him to nod. "Even some Northe would often go berserk during large battles. Unable to tell the difference between friend or foe, beside another Northe."

"They share a specific stench, I'm sure." The blue one grumbled, getting a heavy tap from her that was meant to be playful.

"No. Just a Northe knows how to defend themselves." The males tossed their snouts.

"Here we go." The canine chuckled, then took a breath. "I hope this helps you trust me a bit more. And I'd appreciate it if you didn't tell anyone about us-"

"Just one thing:" The dragon interrupted him. "What are you doing here exactly? What's your main goal for all of this?" The fox pondered in slightly stressful thought for a few moments, getting the larger one to growl. "The truth wouldn't take this long."

"Okay, okay. We..." A sigh. "We woke up here." Two looks in question. "I don't know anymore than that. All we're trying to do is get back home."

"And where is 'Home'?" The grey one looked to the sky again, almost being able to trace where the gemmed dragon was flying to.

"...Where she can be herself again."

It seemed like the longest night to him. Even longer than the first night on his own, nearly watching the sun rise up and greet the day with its warming light. At least this time he wasn't completely afraid of every little noise. Over the past month or so, he's grown accustomed to the night critter's songs.

Of course, he spent all night listening to them. Mostly because the events of yesterday kept him awake, all the while waiting for his friend's return. Krow has never talked to him like that, let alone anyone they've seen through the forests. Occasionally, the Tirix would playfully insult the large one, but he grew to know it was all in good fun.

But that afternoon was different. The tiger was just flat-out denying the dragon to use his powers to save another person. Thea couldn't get it through his head why. Yes, he knew of the consequences of his powers and how it would take out his own years. But something told him that it was the right thing to do. And Krow has never lead the dragon wrong, so what was so different about this?

After a night's worth of listening for those pawsteps, he finally heard them. Nearly stopping the blue one's heart, and almost wishing they would never return. Only because he didn't know what to say to the black tiger. Letting on like the larger one was still asleep, he kept still. Hearing the Tirix flomp down beside his larger body and sigh loudly. "What an ordeal."

Again, there was awkward silence, but the question needed to be asked. "...Why?" Thea almost whimpered.

"Must you really ask? Maybe you're suicidal and just don't know it yet." There was that smartass remark, at least putting a smile on the blue muzzle.

"I just..."

"You want to help people by giving yourself to them. That's how a lot of people are." Another grumble. "...It's how I used to be." Those red eyes looked at him. "I left that part out on purpose, because I didn't think you would be so *willing* to give up your life."

"...Are you saying that I shouldn't-"

"Yes. I am." The two locked eyes. "Look, the more you do it, the more people will take advantage of you. I was, I guess, 'Lucky' enough not to have an expiration date, but you do. And I will damn well keep reminding you of that until you mutter it in your loud snores." Another sad smile from him, granted it was short lived when the tiger got back up. Nearly coming eye to eye, as if to challenge the dragon. "Their Lives. Are Not. Worth ***Yours***. You. Are Not. ***Expendable***." His ears dropped, and the black one laid down again. "Regardless of your *purpose* in that castle, there's no reason for you to think that. I just can't believe that they brainwashed you to assume otherwise."

"There's nothing wrong with helping people-"

"*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?" Another sad look. "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?" No response. "Because they *Want To Live*."

A heavy sigh from Thea as he just looked away. After a long silence, he spoke up. "...What happened to... Him?"

"He recovered. Got to see his mate and son again. Probably up right now tending to the garden or some jazz."

"...And her?"

"I threatened her, nothing more." An odd look from the larger one. "I told her to never speak about us. That she never found anything in these damn woods. That her mate recovered by himself, and if they ever did mention it; I would hunt them down." The stare didn't let up. "Now tell me, could you have done that? After saving his life, could you threaten to take hers if she spoke about you?" His ears fell again. "Didn't think so."

"...And you knew this-"

"That you're a giant blue marshmallow, yes." A sad smile. "Something I'm going to have to make a bastard of if you're going to fulfill your end of our little deal." Thea looked away from him, but got a heavy tap on the arm. "Hey! You'll thank me for it later."

"Just like everything else you taught me." A deep sigh. "But I'm not sure-"

"I don't give a damn if you're sure or not. Eventually I'll make you into a very bitter dragon to the point where it will be second nature to insult the damn grass you sleep on." A moment of silence. "But I'm doing this for you, so consider it me showing that I care." The black one muttered, resting his head on his paws. After a few moments, a large wing covered him, almost pushing the furry creature towards the mass of scales. "You don't even have the stones to hug me properly."

"...Is that my first task?"

"Could be, for all you know." A deep breath from the large one, and he repositioned himself to take the Tirix in his arms and squeeze him. "Yep, feels like regret." A chuckle from Thea, as he nuzzled him. "Don't get any ideas, you."

"You're really comfortable, I never noticed this before."

"*A-hem. Ideeeaaasss.* Seriously." Another chuckle as Krow pried himself out. "Alright, tomorrow I'll tell you another reason why I'm being so strict about this whole thing. But I want to at least take a nap." Thea nodded, circling around the tiger and providing shade against the harsh light. "Would you look at that, you're not completely useless after all." A playful shove from the blue one.

Chapter 7

"So..." The blue one started, trying to get his mind off of those sore muscles. "Are you and the crystal person... Y'know." The two looked at him while keeping their pace, getting the dragon's ears to turn a bit purple while looking away shyly. "...You know..."

"Mated?" Zeltra bluntly asked, getting the fox to rub the back of his neck a bit and slightly whimper with Thea. "I doubt it. He doesn't look like the type to take an arrow to the knee."

The two males double taked at her, asking in sync. "...What?"

"It's a Northe saying. Means exactly what it sounds like."

"You mean, crippling someone?" The dragon snorted.

"Well, slowing down with a Mate, yes."

"Geez, Northe propose funny." Roe chuckled at her odd glare. "Regardless... I'm not sure. I mean, Flyare trusts me with her life and morality, but..."

"But that doesn't stop him from femalizing anyone who flutters her tail, I'm sure." The black one said.

"We actually never talked about it." The grey one muttered a little sadly. "I mean, I can see where you're coming from, but I'm sure she understands."

"And what exactly makes you so sure?" The badger grumbled, getting the fox to stop for a moment and look away.

"...Because I've already lost my mate." The other two slowed to a stop as well. "Gave her up so she could be with someone else. Someone... Better." A long silence, and the blue one sighed through his muzzle. Continue walking the path regardless of his screaming muscles. All the while, Zeltra just stared at him for a little longer, until she heard the gemmed one flying overhead. Finally breaking them of the heavy mood.

In a moment, a slight breeze pushed in front of them as Flyare phased into existence. Though still holding onto her weapon, she was not in stance. Taking a moment to glare at the blue dragon before looking at Roe's green eyes. "There's a cave not too far from here." She pointed in a direction east of them.

"Unoccupied, I hope."

"Is now, yes." His ears went back at that answer, but didn't say anything past that. As Thea took another step, almost trying to walk around her, those crystal eyes locked onto him again instantaneously. Getting him to lower his head again and whimper at her stare, as well as the unsettling lag of her body after such a quick action.

"Easy. Did you find anything else?"

"A river close to here with fresh water. No sign of contamination. However, the bridge to cross it will be out of your route." Those black diamonds didn't release from the blue one's maroon eyes. "You might have to make another bridge."

Zeltra looked at Roe like catching a pup red-handed. "*Another* bridge?" As much as Thea wanted to join in on the accusation, he was too petrified of the red one's near murderous glare. "What ever could she mean?"

"W-well... You see, I've helped other people make bridges in the past. And this one-"

"Would probably take considerably longer than to just travel that road to one already built, I'm sure." A sly smirk from the badger got the grey one to grumble.

"Flyare... Can you just lead us to this cave? Before you give this Northe anymore ammunition to use against me." The red one nodded, walking off the road and directly through the forest. Getting the badger to quickly follow her.

"You must tell me more about your commander." Zeltra said to the red one, getting Roe to groan loudly and follow them after a deep sigh. Then the largest one behind him.

"Why do you want to know about Exile?" A louder groan from the grey one.

"He's an exile, is he?" She asked, looking at the fox slyly, who was currently holding a paw over his eyes. "What did he do?" A bit of a surprised look from the red one, as she sent a few inner shards out to cut through the plantlife. Never getting a close enough look at them individually to notice how sharp they could be.

"He isn't an exile, Exile is his name."

"You're killing me, Flyare." He grumbled at her through his paw, getting the other two to chuckle.

"No one on this planet knows of your existence, there is no need for you to use an alias."

"Well, it would stop people from mixing up things like this. I'm still trying to keep a low profile here." He muttered. "Can we please talk about anything besides-"

"He told us you two were outsiders. Where did you come from?" It got the red one to stop for a moment, halting the organic train behind the dragon. Then looked at Roe for a moment.

"*Low Profile*, huh?" An awkward rub on the back of his neck. "We came from Veritas."

"Where?"

"A universe that is not this one."

"What makes you so sure?" It made the red one look away for a moment, then resume walking without response. Getting a paw on Zeltra's shoulder, the fox whispered to her.

"In Veritas, she isn't... Like that." An odd look from those yellow eyes, but she decided to drop the subject regardless.

It wasn't long before they arrived towards a cavern, one big enough to house all of them for the time being. Though signs of something else living there existed, it was more animal than person. As the crystaled dragon gestured the entrance for them to go through, they carefully stepped inside. But as Thea approached, he received that same glare from her, making him whimper again. "...Did... I do or say

something to...?"

Those eyes rotated to a close as she forced herself to look away. "...No." A moment of silence, and he didn't move, getting Roe to look back and observe the two. A cautious grip on his rifle. "I apologize for my instincts."

"Then..." He started, not getting a response. "Why?"

"You smell like them." A whimpering noise in question. "The ones who did this to me."

He couldn't help but stare at her sadly for a few moments, almost wanting to put a paw on her shoulder, or even give her a nuzzle to show peace. But he was honestly too afraid to. "I'm... Not-"

"I know." Those crystals moved in a gesture of a breath. "...I know." Slowly lifting a paw to attempt the offer before, he slightly glanced at the fox who was shaking his head. Deciding it was for the best, Thea let it go. Making his way down the large cave. "Did you need any water refilled?" She asked the grey one.

"Yes actually, the big one here is quite the drinker." He took off a large waterskin from his pack and tossed it up to her. Hearing the crystal one quickly take off once again and relieve some tension. "Just... Be careful around her." He said to the other dragon, getting a sad look from those maroon eyes. "It doesn't take much for her to go berserk."

"...You called her something else before. Is that...?" Thea almost whispered, as if the red one was still standing behind him. Watching the fox nod slightly.

"Freayha." Another glance at where she was standing. "Call it an alter ego of hers. In our lore, Freayha was a brutal battle goddess known for her barbaric tactics." A moment of silence. "It was the only thing she would respond to." The blue one looked behind as well, while Roe turned around and headed inside. "Pray that you never see it."

"So, they're not Gods?" Thea asked the black one, tearing apart a bit more sinew from a bison.

"Nah. They tend to see Gods as below them. The Sixes too, if you can believe that."

"But if they can manipulate everything...?" The large one grunted, trying to make sense of this. "Okay, but who's controlling the Forces?"

"A Counterweight does." His blue head tilted at him. "And don't ask who keeps that thing in line, that's as far as I got."

"I still don't see what this has to do with me."

"If you start healing people, regardless of your own effects, someone upstairs is going to notice." Thea looked up at the sky, hearing Krow grumble a bit. "Not literally 'Upstairs', it's a metaphor."

"R-right."

"Point is, you're going to get caught if you keep doing that. Sometimes people need to get hurt for a reason, they even need to die for a reason."

"-Like what?" The dragon half hissed, getting a harsh glare from those purple eyes. Getting him to take a deep breath for a moment. "...Sorry, but I can't see why-"

"-Do you really think I'd be the same person if that car crash didn't happen?"

"Car crash...?" He whispered, finally making the connection to what he was talking about. "Oh..."

"Do you think you'd be here if you didn't have this *Grand* ability to save lives?" The large one didn't respond. "Do you really believe that several old guys wanted to keep a dragon around for an amusing pet? You're out here for a reason."

"...I'm out here, because you saved me-"

"You're out here because I fed you. And like a little lost puppy, you cling to me." A sad smile from the blue one as the Tirix sighed and laid his head in the grass. "For all I know, you were supposed to die of starvation out here." His ears fell, then eventually his snout. "So it's possible I'm also fucking this up too."

"...Does that mean they might come after you?"

"They've already been at me before, remember?" A look in question, and then it clicked.

"That person...?"

"Was the Force of Reality. So they know I'm here. And if they know that..."

"Then they know about me...?" A shrug from the tiger. "What should I do?"

"Whatever the hell you want. But if you're going to start attempting to mess things up on purpose, be prepared to be deleted." An odd look from Thea, one that Krow didn't detect until he double taked at the dragon. "Meaning, *Removed*. And most likely disposed of."

"So... Dead?"

"Alot worse than that, I imagine. Hell, might even lock you away in some pocket of space for a

bazillion years." His red eyes dropped back to their meal. "Regardless, as long as you don't become a pain in the ass for them, they'll likely just leave you alone."

"And that's why you don't want me to...?"

"Other than the fact that it's unethical to constantly sacrifice yourself for others-"

"You can't possibly mean that!" A harsh glare from those purple iris'.

"Do you *really* want to have this argument again?" Thea's ears went back but he didn't respond. "It's not worth it. Regardless of how much it's going to sting to deny helping others, they're not worth your life."

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

"And they damn well had *their* lives, and spent it how they wished!" The stare didn't lift. "What's going to stop them from constantly running to find you everytime they need a refreshment? Would it be worth it *then*?" He remained silent. "What about the time after that? What about their kids? What about their friends? Cities? Pets? The old tree they used to play around?" A long silence. "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." Krow broke his gaze and laid his head down once again.

As the dragon sighed, he resumed eating. The thoughts going through his head about the morality of his powers. Though Thea still wanted to help people, perhaps the Tirix was correct, like he always has been. As harsh as it is to accept such a thing, maybe it was just for the best to use Logic over Heart.

Chapter 8

The cave was rather damp, making it difficult for the two humanoids to start a fire. Even with

fresh logs and patience, they were both running dry. Granted, that was fine with the dragon for the time being. After walking so long, he was tired of heat, and the cool shadows of the cave were rather welcoming. "Almost got it." The badger grumbled, trying to be extra careful with the flint. But even the kindle was having a hard time to breathe it seemed. Barely getting anything out besides some faint smoke, until some small embers were shown. "There!"

A few moments of feeling proud were blown away by the same sudden breeze as the gemmed one landed outside. The sharp winds just strong enough to put the embers out and getting the black one to growl at the red dragon. Taking a moment to study why the sudden aggressiveness, until she seen the kindle.

Almost completely ignoring Zeltra, she looked at the fox and handed him the large waterskin. "Thanks. Don't suppose you found any campfires out there?"

"Not even smoke, besides the villages from afar. If you like..." He shook his head, and Flyare started back up the makeshift rocky stairway. "I'll keep guard until you get the fire going."

"If you get restless, feel free to explore the nearby villages for that black tiger." A solid nod, as if she knew what he was talking about.

"I don't suppose you can create fire?" The badger asked the crystal one, still slightly annoyed at her.

"Only plasma."

"Only what?"

"Think..." The fox rubbed the back of his neck again. "Lightning bolts." A puzzled look from Zeltra that almost turned into curiosity. "-Don't." Roe whispered at her harshly, knowing she wanted to challenge the gemmed one. "Do not provoke her. Ever."

"Why-?"

"Because you will die." She rolled her eyes at the answer, but noticed the grey one was completely serious. "I can't guarantee your safety with her-"

"As if I need rescuing-"

"You don't fully understand what you're thinking about doing." Her black ears went back. "I can't save you from her-He can't save you from her." He gestured the blue one. "And she can't either." A motion towards the cave exit, where the crystal dragon could no longer be seen. "Let alone the lives of everyone possibly on this continent." Half a grumble from Zeltra attempted the fire once again. "If you don't believe me, fine. I don't care. But don't gamble their lives just because you want another notch in that legend of yours."

As much as she wanted to argue against that, she seen Thea get up. Constantly scanning the

darkness of the cave. "What is it?"

He didn't answer her for a moment, watching his ears flick and scan the area behind them. "...I feel..." He took a step forward. "It's like it's pulling me."

"Pulling you?"

"That's never a good sign." Roe grumbled, getting up and helping investigate. Hearing the badger drop the flint as if frustrated with it, she armed herself.

"We might as well check it out together. Heaven *forbid* that I actually lose one of you." She took a defensive stance and lead the way inside. Seeing the dragon look between them and snort.

"I'm pretty sure she means that you're expendable."

"I wouldn't doubt that." He grumbled back, going in second and carefully studying the shadows. Though the cave started to get smaller, as if it were collapsed in, it eventually opened back up quite widely. Illuminating with several dozen glowing insects. Though quite the sight, it was slightly creepy to the taller one. Almost waiting for one of these worms to fall on his neck, getting his scales to click at the thought of it, and everyone to pause for a moment.

"That was... Me."

"Bugs getting under your scales?" The fox teased.

"Don't say *That*." Thea tossed his snout. "I'll be having nightmares for weeks."

"Well, the tunnel seems to end here." She studied the walls. "Odds are it was just part of the main cave, but just collapsed during some earthquake."

"And you have to mention cave-ins." The dragon looked towards where they came from, like the hole was getting smaller. But when a glowing worm was trying to reach down for his ears, he gave a small yelp. Scurrying towards the middle of the room, where the highest peak of the ceiling was. "I doubt I'll be able to sleep in here tonight with these-" When his blue paw touched the center, the floor started glowing brightly underneath them with a lime green. Making a large pattern on the smooth stone before getting much brighter. Making all three of them yelp loudly.

The crystal dragon's ear flickered sharply from outside, getting her to teleport below where they attempted to make a fire. With their gear still around, she knew they were nearby. Following the path taken quickly, she came up to the room with the glowing worms, but no one else remained. However, the pattern still remained illuminated, getting Flyare to remain cautious about stepping on such a thing.

The light finally dimmed down. Though bruising their eyes a bit, the odd batches of colors soon

began to fade. Looking around at a strange metal-like room with many light patterns on the side. Using that same green light as within the cave. "Everyone okay?" Roe asked, still overlooking the area and themselves.

"Yeah, but..." The dragon started, still feeling something tug in his mind. Granted, was slightly distracted by a hovering tetrahedron.

"Where are we?" Zeltra asked, overlooking the strange structures and seeing a set of glass-like doors. Approaching them caused the barricades to slide into the walls, revealing a long hallway.

A few taps on the teleporter gave no response to the grey one. "Damn. Maybe there's another way to activate it. But be careful, you never know what security measures a place like this might have."

"Security Measures?" Thea grumbled, glaring at the fox.

"Sounds like he's been here before."

"I haven't, but... Places like it." He said, studying the walls around it. "Others were always better at technology than I was."

"What exactly is that supposed to mean?" The blue one muttered, watching Roe as he walked up to a computer-like console and attempt to work it. Too curious about the area, Zeltra took another few steps into the hallway. Noticing many of the mirror-like panels that lined the walls. Ones that almost looked like they could pop out. Granted, unlike traditional mirrors, these tended to have a dark tint to them.

Her eyes spotted movement from afar through the reflection, getting her fur to stand up on end a bit. Barely being able to make out the back half of some small critter, something that reminded her of a ferret, hop away on the other side of the hallway. "Hey." She called to it, getting the fox's attention.

"Zeltra, don't go in there-!" The far doors of the hall suddenly closed shut. Dashing inside to grab the badger got the other doors to close as well, locking the two inside, and the dragon out with the console. "Damn!"

Several flashing lights started going off, as well as some voice overhead that was in a different language started out. "Is this what you meant by Security Measures!?" She hissed at him, trying to watch both directions at once to see what was going to happen. Feeling him rest himself against her back told the black one he would watch one direction; where they came from.

"What do I do!?" Thea whimpered, trying to shove the door opened, or even break it. Eventually seeing several panels on the other side of the hall start to shift, and getting the fox's attention. Four small cone-like barrels started shifting out vertically, aiming slightly towards the center of the hallway.

"Get down!" Roe shouted, pulling the female flat on the ground as four continuous red lasers shot out from the cones. Reflecting off a couple of mirrors in the center walls of the hall, and crossing paths to cover the entire hallway besides the very top and very bottom. Making the dragon yelp when

the beams hit the door, but didn't pass through it.

The cones retreated, but the sirens didn't stop. Getting the fox to raise back up and look at Thea. "Hey! Get over on that thing, see if you can get it to shutdown!"

"Shut...?" The blue one slightly panicked, whimpering when he seen more movement from afar. One large mirror panel on the floor tilted up to slightly face the intruders, while a second one opened up on the ceiling. Seeing the top one armed with three cones from the reflection of the bottom, Roe cursed again. Pulling the badger up on her feet.

"Against the wall!" He shouted, seeing her obey without question. As the cones fired the same red laser, it reflected off the bottom mirror and shot towards the door again. This time, the top panel started to tilt, causing the lasers to ricochet down the hall with a threatening heat. Eventually getting absorbed by the doors again. "Thea!"

"R-right!" The dragon scampered, trying to make sense out of the screen and three dozen buttons on it. "What do I do!?"

Scanning Lifeform.

"Scanning what?" A small light appeared above the screen, getting the large one to yelp and defend himself. When there was no pain, he slowly looked at it giving pleasant beep.

"Stay on your side!" The fox roared, hearing another set of red lasers go off, and making the dragon whimper loudly again.

Dragon Detected. Common Language Found.

"Dragon...?" Looking over the buttons again, he seen them begin to take a shape he understood. Many of them were for letters and numbers, but several were for different functions he couldn't understand. "What do I do!?"

"On The Ground Again!"

Request Function.

"Function...?" Another whimper. "Stop!"

Request Vague.

"You're Vague!" Thea hissed at it. "Stop The Hallway!"

Password Required For Request.

"What password!?"

Answer The Following: What happened to Subject #114739 When it took too much charge?

"Subject...? Charge?"

"Thea!!" The two shouted from within.

"What are you talking about!?"

Enter Password.

"Password-Password-Password..." He whispered, then blurted out the first thing that came to his mind.
"I-it went berserk!"

Scanning Password... Accepted.

The sirens went off, and soon the hallway doors opened. Slowly, the dragon peeped in to see the other two on the floor, gasping for air. Relieved that they were still alive, he stumbled to a sit and accidentally tapped his wing on the Tetrahedron. Getting it to spin a bit before hearing a voiceover, making the blue one yelp again.

Data Tetra #2

I wish I had better information to report. The drones have done well to find me specimens from the planet, but they have not accepted the energies of this strange rock well. The balance that they can acquire is very sensitive, and it seems that every creature tends to have its own limit. If the subject intakes too much of the meteor's charge, it becomes enraged. Suffering major muscle swelling and is pushed into a frenzy. One actually got out of its prison, but before it could do anymore damage, its own muscles grew so much that it crushed its own heart. Very interesting...

However, those who take very little tend to become very depressed and lonely. Even when locked up in site, or with other creatures. Its own species or not. Although these are setbacks, I will not give up yet. I do have a plan, one I'm sure the Force will be proud of.

"...What was that?" Zeltra asked, getting up and seeing the dragon stare at the floating device.
"That thing just described that bear we fought..." Her and Thea shared a look while Roe sat up.

"...Oh no..." He said a bit sadly, getting the other two's attention on him, then what he was looking at.

"Is that...?" The badger started, seeing several large green tubes with animals floating inside them. As the three cautiously walked down the hall, the next room was full of those tubes. Very few were unoccupied, and nearly all of them were attached to several devices, including the one Zeltra found the morning after the dire bear's attack. "Is this...?"

"Looks like a lab of some sort." The fox muttered, getting a look from the other two, but only

locking eyes with the black one. "And probably where it came from as well..." The three almost felt cold, as they overlooked the room. "Not complaining here, but how did you know the answer to that password, Thea?"

The dragon snorted. "Because everything has been going berserk lately! That bear, people in Whatshisface-Town, your Comrade." A grumble, looking back at the console. "It was just the first thing to come to mind."

"Saved by a shot in the dark. Lovely." Roe grumbled.

"So, what would've happened if you were wrong?" She gave him a playful glare.

"It would turn you into cupcakes, what do you think?" He half hissed, spotting another Tetra nearby. "What does this one say?"

"Thea, don't touch anything-"

Data Tetra #4

I performed a small surgery on one of the smaller creatures, with several security drones standing by just in case. Due to not knowing the effects of such energies, I decided it was best to perform the operation without any form of sleep on the subject. A bit cruel, perhaps, but this is for science. By drilling several holes into the brain, and attaching a specifically designed device to the creature's head, I was able to get data about its own thresholds when it comes to this... Terra Energy... It worked...!

I couldn't believe it. Energies and muscle mass increased over 14 times! Logical responses and ability to gather information increased greatly. Though they could never pass as one of their own in the wild any longer, with their... Features currently on display, it doesn't matter. For now, I finally get a companion.

"...Great. A triangle-thing that can't count." The blue one snorted.

"Who is this guy? And why is he doing this?" The badger asked.

"Why, I'm not sure. But odds are, he's the one who built all this."

"Thank you Captain Obvious."

"Seriously, what happened to #3?"

"Hey, you asked. I just wanted to make sure we were on the same page."

"Is this not making anyone else curious?" Thea grumbled.

"Look, I might not be all-knowing like someone around here, but I can put a mad science freak and whacko metal together."

"Guys?"

"You've never seen this stuff before, and I highly doubt that 'Mad Science Freaks' appear in your legends very often. All I'm doing is making sure we're coming to the same conclusions. What's wrong with that?"

"Guyyys?"

"What's wrong with it is that you seem to think you need to help me with everything. I'm a Northe, outsider! I don't need saving from you, or your crystal mate, and why are you tapping on my shoulder, Thea!?" The black one hissed, following his eyesight down the right wall where the small little ferret from before was just staring at them.

"...Nobody. Make. Any. Sudden. Movements." Roe whispered.

"...Why?"

"Because it's possible that thing is what triggered the alarm and nearly turned two of us into dust... And probably starved the other one to death." Zeltra hissed.

"I'm not that helpless." The two stood in silence for a moment. "...I'm not!"

"Yes. Yes you are." The dragon snorted at him, getting the little weasel to nearly make a break for it, putting everyone on edge.

"..... I have the worst itch right now."

"If you scratch yourself and get us killed, I am going to kick those blue balls so hard they'll come out of your ears." The large one looked over at Roe, who double taked at him.

"And you wanted to get into her pants?" Zeltra growled at them, scaring off the ferret into a small hole beside a large door.

"Terrible time to bring that up." The fox groaned, covering his eyes with a paw. "And I never said that."

"Please, you've been glancing looks and stealing feels ever since you two met." As angry as the female was at the grey one, she couldn't help but stare at the dragon.

"You know alot more about that day than you let on."

"Big surprise! The mountain I was living on was **Boring!** I spy on people entering my forests for entertainment, bite me."

"Oh, I'll bite you alright-!" A sudden grab on her shoulders from the fox actually surprised her before getting a growl. Seeing him clearly look behind her, almost terrified before spinning her around to see some sort of hovering machine. Several metal appendages extended out of it, all carrying different tools for surgery, as it slowly floated towards the large tubes.

"...Nobody. Make. **Any**. Sudden. Movements."

"...I forgot to scratch that itch."

Chapter 9

The three creatures stood completely still as the dark hovering machine seemed to make its rounds. Checking up on every specimen within the glass cylinders and recording their data. With its back turned on them, the dragon slowly reached up behind his ear to cure that itch that's been bothering him. Giving off a slight purr when it was relieved, and receiving a glare from the two.

"Just give me the word, and I'll smash it." Zeltra whispered.

"Only to possibly have others know that we're a threat. It's best if we sneak-" The machine started to turn around, making everyone freeze once again. As the Drone floated for a closer look, it gave off a slightly pitched sound.

Organism detected. Energywaves Recognized. Guests Not In Database. Would You Like To

Record Identifications?

"...Yeeesssss?" Roe half answered.

State Your Name.

"Roe?"

The Name 'Roe?' Has Been Recorded. Add Another Guest?

"Thea?"

The Name 'Thea?' Has Been Recorded. Add Another Guest?

"Zeltragrae!" The badger said proudly, hearing the drone make a strange noise.

Error Detected. Issue Resolved. Repeat Action.

"Zeltragrae." Another strange noise, and the machine didn't move. Still hovering in place, the three cautiously looked around it. Giving the thing a few taps with her hammer did nothing.

"...I think you broke it."

"Who knew it's one weakness would be Northern Names?" Zeltra gave the fox a glare. "But we should leave it alone for the most part. Let's see if we can follow that ferret." The three looked over the large door next to the weasel's escape route. Seeing several characters that no one recognized, but a blue shape specifically stood out. Looking down at another door, there was an orange shape instead. "Thea? What color was that console you used?"

"Green. Like everything else in this place." He grumbled.

"I wonder if we can find anymore of them around here?" The grey one muttered, studying the walls between the doors.

"Well, if they're not here, then maybe they're...?" The female looked over the large room with the dozens of containment centers. Getting a bit of a whimpering groan from the dragon.

"I'm going to have nightmares for months." He grumbled, as they cautiously started looking around. His scales clicking everytime something twitched inside of the green tubes, almost expecting one of them to burst out and savagely attack him. But with another deep breath, something caught his eye: Another Tetra.

Data Tetra #5

I've still been experimenting with the form of matter that this meteor is made of. It's nothing that I've ever encountered before. What seems to be almost stone is yet a form of Metal. One I haven't been

able to break, chip, or even dent with even Eight million pounds of force. The only thing I've been able to do is Drain it.

However, by storing the drained energy in a very specific way, I've been able to witness it change into a liquid. Capturing over several bottles worth and attempting to study it from there. As long as it's in motion, it seems to remain solid. But as soon as it's still, it morphs back into a liquid. Which leads me to my next experiment: Mixing the substance with another liquid... Results have been both successful and failures at the same time. Because of this energy's specific nature, it does not mix with a second substance, but consumes it.

"Meteor...?" Thea whispered, looking around for the other two in the distance. Turning around to backtrack caused his tail to hit one of the tubes, hoping he didn't actually break it. A quick study gave him relief, but the badger called for him shortly after. Making him turn to her direction and smack his muzzle against another occupied container. Getting the mountain lion inside to open its eyes and stare at him.

A faint whimper left his muzzle as he slowly backed away. Feeling his tail touch another set of tubes that were occupied. After a loud swallow, he carefully turned to leave the way he came, still not getting anything but a curious stare from the lion inside. Making the blue one's scales click loudly.

The dragon started being a bit more cautious about his surroundings. Not knowing what would possibly happen if one of these things broke. Finding where the other two left off, as well as another console. This one having the same blue symbol as the door. "Any luck?" The dragon asked, still a bit nervous about the area.

"Nothing yet. Another password, but we haven't come across the answer yet." The black one muttered. "Who would design such a silly game anyway?"

"Someone who wanted their research to be found, that's who. And by somebody probably willing to take in that information."

"What was the question?" Thea asked, looking over a smaller rabbit within the container.

"As long as the Energy stays in Motion, it remains _____." Roe said. "But I'm not sure what energy they're talking about-"

"Solid." A double take from the two at the large one's answer, then looking at the console when it accepted the answer. Another look from the two again, got his ears to go back. "I know stuff."

"You found another triangle thing, didn't you-"

"-No... Yes." The fox chuckled. "It was number 5. Still no sign of three either."

"Regardless, let's go see what's behind this blue door." The badger lead the way. Though seeing

the door remain close, it opened when they approached. Revealing a smaller room with another little hole. "That looks like it goes into the orange doored room." She said, looking for signs from the weasel, and seeing a worn path along the ground. Looking at the hole from a bit of a distance, the ferret suddenly peeped out, wearing one of those metal devices on its head.

The three nearly took a step back when the small critter stared at them, but it eventually hid back into the hole. "What was that doing...?"

"Leading us?" Roe half answered the large one. Looking at the console in the room, and matching the yellow symbol with the yellow door to their right. "No orange yet, but it's something."

Another Tetrahedron got the dragon curious. Tapping at it with his wing and hearing it load up.

Data Tetra #7

After the four failed surgeries in a row, it is clear I cannot trust myself to do them with precision any longer. Even with attempting to use Anesthetics, I am just not quick or dexterous enough with two arms. I've designed a specific type of drone that would attach the filtering device to the subjects so I would no longer, and am pleased to say it does remarkable work. In nearly Sixteen seconds, it can subdue a creature, perform the surgery, and let the subject go on its own: Now more powerful than ever. I've even thought of releasing a few more onto the crust of this planet to see how well they would perform, or perhaps Change, the world. I should get the Force's permission first, however.

The three looked behind them where the drone would be, nearly whimpering in sync. "Well, those things just got a bit more... Unsettling." Thea swallowed.

"So, they... Make the animals...?"

"Odds are, if they can do it on animals, then they can do it on..." The three almost shuttered from the fox's word. "Let's see if we can find a way back. Maybe another room with a teleporter." He started operating the console a bit, and the other two couldn't help but study the captive animals.

"It doesn't really seem right, does it?" Thea started. "To be contained after altered, let alone without consent."

"...No. Regardless of the abilities they were given. This one reason why I don't like Science."

"Not all science is bad, but this is definitely going outside the Right." The fox replied, getting the yellow door opened with ease. As the riflemale took lead, the other two followed him into a long hallway. The left side was filled with monitors, constantly collecting data with that eerie green glow. However, it was all in a different language that none could understand.

"Wonder what this is supposed to mean?" The dragon studied them a bit.

"No idea, but there's the orange console in here." Roe said, entering another small room with Tetra #11. Giving it a faint tap before operating the console.

Data Tetra #11

It seems everything is up and running again. Due to a solar storm that passed nearby, the main power source that runs nearly everything within my lab was disrupted. Nothing was able to function for very long with backup power, and my distress calls went unanswered. But then Sarcvankatsis purposed an idea...

We worked well through the nights to find a way to use that rock as a power source for the lab. And though it took a long time, to the point of near exhaustion, we managed to get it safely. Whatever this Terra Energy is, it functions very well. Nearly perfect... Though I can't help but feel like there's something wrong with it. Even through the safety of my hazard suit, there was something dark about this Gem. It almost feels... Alive. And Angry.

"...Sarcvankatsis?" The three looked at each other, then the dragon looked where the ferret was last seen. "His companion from before...?"

"Is it possible that it's still alive?"

"Very well might be. We don't know how long it's been." The grey one muttered. "But what rock was he speaking of?"

"The meteor." The two double taked at the dragon, and his red eyes glanced back at the third Tetra. "It crashed here eons ago, I've... Heard stories about it."

"So, it's otherworldly." The badger grumbled. "No wonder all of this feels unnatural."

"The meteor should've only affected the grid though. He's the one using this energy to affect the wildlife." Thea snorted.

"What grid?" The large one curled his neck at her for a moment, and then sighed while looking away.

"It's... A long story."

"I'm sure it is. Regardless, this... Terra Energy that he's speaking of, it's keeping the lights running here." The fox looked over the Tetrahedron for a moment. "Data Tetra, can you tell me what date that log was recorded?"

Date Recorded: 24459.6817-41C

"Errm... Can you calculate that into days?"

Days Since Recording: 14,785,569,874,231,745-

"Okay, It's old. Got it." The grey one grumbled. "Regardless, that should open the orange door. And I might have found another way out. We're just going to have to find a way to cross a large catwalk."

"Sounds easy enough." The black one said, leading the way out.

"Yeah, well... That catwalk crosses over that... Rock." The other two looked at him. "If it's actually contagious or radiated..."

"We might catch ill from it?"

"And the guy said the suit didn't really protect him. It's pretty much our only shot if we can't get the other teleporter to work." The three all took a breath, nodding at each other before moving on to the orange door.

"You're joking." The blue one said in disbelief. "He just gave up his entire kingdom to someone who just wanted his fortune? Why?" He almost hissed, getting the black one to sharply raise a silencing paw.

"Let me finish the story, you. Damocles took up the king's offer and lived in his luxury for the rest of the morning. After the evening feast, the real king asked if he was enjoying himself. Of course, he said yes, until he leaved back in his chair. Above his head was a longsword, held on by a single thread of a horse's tail." The dragon curled his neck, but remained quiet. "After that, Damocles gladly declined such luxury, probably for the rest of his life."

"But... I don't get it." The black one looked at him in question. "Why put a sword above his head?"

"It's a symbol. Defining the constant fear people with great power tend to have. If you think about it, your life fits with the metaphor."

"So fear of what? Being threatened by others?"

"Or to be targeted for having such a carefree life from the outside looking in. Unless you live through it yourself, you cannot possibly imagine the burdens that others must live with. Even then, they're never the same as yours." A sad look from the large one, and the Tirix shrugged. "Just a story that I thought you might find interesting."

"Yes... Are there any others-?" His ear flickered, catching something bipedal walking nearby. Racing his heart for a moment and looking at the black one with a bit of fear.

"Finally showtime, perhaps?" Krow whispered, not nearly condemned with the stage fright as Thea was. "Better put on your angry face." Hearing the blue one whimper, and he tossed his muzzle. "You gotta do it on your own sometime. I'll be your wingman, don't worry."

"Wingman?" The large one questioned as a canine stepped through the bushes. Looking at the two with a bit of amazement, and making the dragon uncomfortable. Unable to do anything but stare at decently dressed creature.

"A deep blue dragon? By the Gods, it does exist." He said rather smugly. Getting the blue one to look at the tiger again, only getting a paw gesture to go on.

"E-excuse me?" Thea asked.

"You're the one, aren't you? The blue dragon with the ability to turn people immortal?" The large one's head tilted. "They told me you roam these forests and live out in the quarry to the northeast."

"Ohhh, *that* dragon." Thea snorted. "You've mistaken me for someone else. In fact, you just missed him. Keep going that way, I'm sure you'll catch up." Though he was trying to adapt the attitude of the Tirix, it still came out a little shyly.

"Cute mouth on you, isn't there? But you're the only blue dragon I've seen around-"

"Racist." Krow muttered.

"What was that?" The canine growled at the black one, only to hear him faintly chuckle.

"Did you even do your homework?" An odd look from both the noble and the dragon, getting another snout toss from the Tirix. "Means Research. He's not the only blue dragon in existence, you know."

"He's the only blue dragon around here-"

"And that *magically* makes me the one you're looking for? Sounds pretty racist to me." A growl from the dog.

"I mean, seriously. If you even tried to look into some of the lore of other lands, you'd know that the deserts across the ocean are literally covered with blue dragons. You really think that they're all Gifted with some life giving BS?"

"That still doesn't prove my point-"

"Do you have any idea how hot the deserts are over there?" The blue one grumbled, finally getting some more courage thanks to his 'wingman'. "This place is paradise compared."

"Granted, he wouldn't know that. Judging by his clothing, he probably has people follow him day and night with fans. I wonder what punishment he gave them for not being stupid enough to come out here in search of some immortality fix."

"Are you mocking me!?" The canine barked at him.

"I'd say he is, yes."

"Nah, you came alone..." Krow started getting up. "What sort of noble carries his own things? Let alone, goes solo in attempt to find something that they're not even sure exists?" He half asked his dragon companion.

"Good point. That is rather suspicious."

"I was hoping to reason with something other than rude beasts-"

"Oh please. Don't flatter yourself. What were you planning to do? Find *Immortality*? Plan an assassination attempt that you somehow survive? Show off that you are some sort of descendant of the Gods by being revived? Or were you planning to make yourself into a martyr?" The dog growled loudly, causing the Tirix to smirk. "That growl means yes. Called it." He looked over at Thea for a moment. "You owe me some Sadifruit."

"You can't guess multiple times like that." The dragon snorted.

"Why not?"

"Because-"

"Enough!" The canine pulled out a pistol off his belt and pointed it at the blue one. Getting him to curl his scaly neck at first, but then hold his breath when he recalled what it was. "I don't know who you work for, or how you spied on my plans, but I won't let you ruin them! Now, make me immortal!" His heart pounded against his plated chest, not knowing what to do against such a device. According to the tales, such things were completely fatal if hit in the right area.

As the fear took over his body, it started to fade when Krow started chuckling. Getting the other two to look at him while he whistled loudly. "Wow, look at the brass balls on you. Too bad all that courage is wasted on someone so *idiotic*. Wouldn't you agree?" Another glance at the dragon as the noble stuttered.

"What-!?"

"What exactly is your plan here? You have a pistol that holds one shot, and there's two of us. Let's forget the fact that it takes more than a single bullet to kill a dragon, who's going to save you after you fire that shot?" The canine took a step back, shifting his eyes between the two. "If you shoot me, he'll turn you into dust with his lightning breath. You shoot him..." Krow tapped his own right wrist, getting those long claws to eject over his knuckles. "Then I get to rip you apart."

Though it was near paralyzing for the blue one, he could really sense the dog's fear. Almost making him want to chase after the noble, regardless if he was armed or not. Slowly, he began to raise up. Though receiving the threatening attention of the hostile one, Thea still tried to remain composed. "How long has it been since we ate, Krow?"

"K-Krow?" The noble whimpered, instantly aiming at the black tiger. "I-imposs..."

"Is it?" The Tirix questioned him, though getting a puzzled look from the dragon about such a reaction. "Last time I checked, I existed. But I can't say the same for you if you don't leave. Right now. And I wouldn't speak about us again, if you'd like to continue living. Savvy?" Without even nodding, the dog retreated. When his footsteps were no longer heard, the black one sighed, withdrawing his claws. Only to still feel the questionable gaze of the blue one. "We should *probably* call me something else in front of others from now on."

"...What was...?" Thea just looked at him for a few moments.

"Need me to spell it out for you?" His gaze didn't lift, and the Tirix shrugged. "Alright, alright."

Chapter 10

The air in the lab felt very uneasy, as the three made their way back to the orange door. Almost as if the very creatures were going to burst out of their containers and assault them. Looking at them uncomfortably before arming themselves in front of the orange door. One last look at each other, and they opened it.

Inside were several more containment tubes, but most were empty. One that remained in the back center was occupied by something dark, and at its base: the ferret. Constantly pawing at it like it was trying to get in, but looking back at the three between pauses.

Slowly, they began to walk inside, being very cautious about the dark room, until the lights turned on. The small weasel whimpered while still pawing at the hard glass, eventually waking up the being inside. Seeing some sort of humanoid with a reflective exoskeleton begin to move its appendages a bit. Looking down at Sarcvankatsis, and placing an armored hand on the glass, while the little one did the same.

"You've gotta be kidding me..." Roe whispered harshly, still taking aim at the creature inside. Before he could explain, a sharp whimper from the smaller mammal was heard. Then a second one as it grabbed its own chest. Stiffening it's body before collapsing on the ground. "A heart attack?"

"Just like the bear?" Zeltra asked, only to hear the container start making rapid beeps. Like it was warning of some sort of energy influx before the creature inside started slamming against the glass. Cracking it with its first strike, and breaking out with a third. Though it did have a hard time to stand, it did so quite easily. "What the hell...?"

"That's an Unborn." The fox almost growled, as they met eye to eye with it. "A Synthetic one at that. I knew that damn rock sounded familiar...!" The humanoid hissed at them with otherworldly vocals, as if to blame them for the loss of its companion. As the beeping went on, it slammed it's armored fist against the machinery, causing the noises to fade to a stop.

"W-what do we do?" The dragon whispered, taking a step back and away from the creature.

"We can't leave it loose." The grey one said sternly, rather composed at that. "But watch out for its blades."

"What blades?" The creature stressed in a bit of pain before a medium length blade ripped out of its Ulna (Outer bone in the arm. Opposite side where it's thumb would line up), then one on the other arm. As well as one on the back of each shin, just above the ankle. "...Oh. Those blades."

Another hiss that was closer to a roar, and the Fox shot at it. Getting it in the eye, but hearing the bullet ricochet like hitting steel. Causing the armored creature to stare at him with pure hatred, and Roe to curse a bit. Folding out his bayonet just as the Unborn attacked, and parrying the blade to the side away from Zeltra, but not without shaving off some of the barrel.

With the creature slightly off-footed, the badger cracked at it with her longhammer. Hitting it heavily on the shoulder, though not without feeling a lot of resistance. But before she could go in for another hit, the Unborn swung wildly at her face. Misjudging the distance of the blade that seemed to fold forward beyond its hand. Getting her shield just barely up in time, the blade still seemed to cut through the portable wall's defense with extreme ease, even slicing into her muzzle a bit.

With the top 10% of the shield cut off and a deep cut right under her nose, it hurt to snarl at the pain. As the creature went in for another swing at the badger, the long rifle caught it in the inner elbow area. Pushing in the weapon a bit further, Roe got the end of the barrel to reach behind its neck, slamming on that area to lock the arm back, and to force the creature leaning forward.

Furious, Zeltra swung upwardly, right at its chin. Hearing the harsh impact and also something give a little, as well as disable the lock the Fox had on it. Making the creature take a few steps backwards and rub its dented chin a little. "At least it's imperfect." The grey one muttered, slightly glancing at the female. "You okay-?"

"Shut up!" She growled angrily, charging the metal creature with a shield bash. Before she could heed the fox's call not to, the Unborn crossed its arms to defend itself, letting the armbldes swing out. The lower one cutting the shield in half, while the other managed to stab her in the breast. Feeling the cold organic metal in her very lung and cause her to freeze due to the pain.

As the creature twisted the blade a bit, it started to cut across her lower half with the lower arm. But only getting about 20% of the way before Roe forced the arm to a stop, making the creature hiss at him trying to save the Northe. When they remained in a deadlock, one the other two were slightly losing, the Unborn pulled away from the black one too attempt the same attack on the canine. Only to get the rifle in the medium between the two arms, like blocking a pair of scissors opened wide.

As Zeltra stumbled back against the wall, she held her wounds. Now feeling them much deeper than they felt. Adrenaline muffled her hearing, unable to recognize the dragon calling to her until his own paw touched the tender wound. Getting her to hiss as he dragged her back. Her vision was getting blurry, beginning to see these strange lights like fireworks over the blue muzzle, and then a blue fog.

Within a moment, everything started to return to her. Hearing the canine still struggle with the metal creature. Seeing the blue muzzle and those red eyes sigh in relief. "You okay?" A faint nod from her as she started to get up, placing a paw on his snout and keep him at a safe distance.

Roe was doing what he could to keep the creature at bay, only to eventually get dangerously close to one of the blades and retreat. But in result, his weapon was cut in to three pieces. Leaving the canine unarmed and take a stance as if he was holding something behind him with his main paw.

As the Unborn readied his blades, it sensed the badger behind him once again. But not reacting fast enough to the hammer swing, hitting it square in the back. A heavy crack got it to stagger forward, and then kicked in the chest by the fox. Another forceful strike to its ribs, and it slashed out wildly, not hitting anyone but prevent the chain of attacks.

The three breathed heavily, constantly watching their opponents. But it was the metal one that was breathing the loudest, almost hissing in rage. It was then Zeltra noticed the canine's green eyes fixed on its chest. It took a moment, but with each breath of the metal creature, it was like the plates were trying to expand to open up.

All at once, they tightened against the Unborn's heart, getting it to stagger. Loud crunches could be heard, as the metal plates started denting inward and outward with every breath. It eventually fell to its knees, reaching for the ferret's body before collapsing. "...Heart Attack Ex Machina?" The badger asked, still not letting up her guard.

"Actually..." The grey one studied the creature a bit longer. Finally taking a step closer and

nudging it with his foot. Not getting a response. "This makes a little more sense now." A noise in question from her. "When Unborn get desperate, a burst of energy tends to build in their chest. These plates can fold out, expelling the build-up and enter a rage. All while exposing a weakspot."

"Their heart." She muttered.

"Though it's not a physical heart. I've never been able to actually understand how they work. It was always too dangerous to keep them alive because of..." He gestured her bloody clothing, getting her to look at it as if she just noticed it. Then looking at Thea, finally realizing what he did. "It's probably the same thing that happened to that bear. But whereas it's body wasn't... Let's call it: completely solid, it was able to keep together as that energy built up. But the question is, why didn't it happen to this little guy?" He looked down at the ferret, finally getting a close-up at the device on its head.

It looked like a plate with many circuits, but three specific tubes extended out of it. Completely drained of any liquids inside. "The last one I found, those containers were broken. Odds are it was from that bear."

"But what exactly does that conclude? The liquid keeps them alive, but puts them into a frenzy?"

"Only if there's too much of it." Thea explained. "If they keep it regulated, the creature can live. That's probably what that device is for. But if they get too much..." The two looked at the large one for a few moments. "It was on the first Tetra." The three looked over at another floating one in the room. "Might as well see what's on it."

Data Tetra # 47

*I don't understand it... I was so close to being able to fully harness and control this power, and you suddenly get Frightened of it? Or are you Frightened of me instead...? It makes me furious, after all my hard work, all my sacrifices, and you want to keep such a power buried!? We could power massive armies with just a small cube of this material! We could conquer other dimensions-other Universes with this rock! And you **Back Down!?***

Clearly you are not liable to be the Force that you are. I should've known you would have used me, being so far below you... But with this Gem, I could be stronger... I could be the Force...

The group remained quiet for a few moments. Though Zeltra eventually spoke up. "What is the Force?" The males looked at her, but didn't respond. Getting a mixed message of if they actually knew or not. As the fox turned around and operated a console, she looked at Thea again, who was only looking at the ferret sadly.

"...He only wanted his companion freed. He wasn't trying to warn him of us, but leading us to free him." Though cautious about the other creature, the dragon took a step closer to look at the weasel.

"It's a wonder he was able to exist all this time..."

"It would've been a lonely life." The large one nodded sadly, a look of understanding in his eyes. "Find anything yet?"

"Yeah, in the container room, there's a door that leads down to the catwalk." The grey one looked down at his rifle, now cut to the point of unable to be fired safely. Along with the metal sheets that made up the tower shield. "Let's just hope we don't find anything aggressive down there." A nod from the other two and the badger lead the way out.

Looking over the rows of containment cells, the blue one slowed to a stop. Eventually, the lack of heavy pawsteps got the attention of the other two. Observing what the maroon eyes were scanning, and Roe sighed. "I know what you're thinking, but there's nothing we can do."

"...We could free them." The two remained silent. "There's no reason for them to remain in here forever."

"And if they attack? Not just us but others if they go berserk?" The fox said, a bit sternly. Getting the dragon's ears to go back. "Not to mention, we don't really have the means to defend ourselves at the moment. Let alone know if this teleporter is going to work." A heavy sigh, and Thea nodded. He couldn't argue with reason, but something about these animals reflected to the large one. Another deep breath, and they resumed down the halls.

Finding the stairway down the caverns. Much of the technology that lined the walls grew scarce, but many green lights seemed to illuminate the heavy aired space. Eventually leading the group to stare at the massive black rock in the middle of the cave. Completely outlined with machinery, as if to warn others to stay away from it.

Gazing at it brought a bit of fear in their hearts, as if watching a slumbering behemoth in attempts not to wake it. Carefully, they started to cross the large catwalk, seeing another room up ahead. But the dragon couldn't help but keep staring at the meteor, feeling something so familiar about it. Like it was singing to him, a song that was stuck in his head since his hatchlinghood. A familiarity that he could not put into words, but it called for him.

It itched at him, and Thea made the decision to investigate. After seeing another set of stairs connected to the current catwalk, he started taking them. "Whoa, wait! What are you doing?" Roe called at him.

"I-I need to see it. I can't explain it." The large one half explained, not even bothering to stop and reason with them. "An Outsider wouldn't understand."

"Are you kidding me?" The fox grumbled, as the two chased after him. The badger in the lead.

"Dumbass! You're going to get yourself killed!"

"But it's not threatening me. It's just... Calling." The blue one shouted back, slowly approaching a

large bare spot, lacking of machines and barricades. Slowing to a stop as he whispered to it. "What is it that you know...?" The rock shimmered in response.

"Get away from that!" Zeltra got in front of the dragon, shoving him in the chest. "This thing is dangerous, haven't you realized that yet!?"

"Then why is it calling to me!?" He roared at her. "Why do I feel like I know it!? That I belong with it!?"

"Much like how it entralls people who come close to it!? What do you think those Data things were doing? Warning everyone to stay the hell away from-" A loud spark of energy from the meteor got the two to step back.

"Get back-!" Roe roared at them, but a heavy jolt of energy shot towards the dragon. Shocking him, and chaining to the badger at the same time, knocking them both out. Cursing loudly, the fox tended to Zeltra first. Having to do CPR to wake her up and get her breathing again.

As for the dragon, he was still breathing by the time the canine got to him, just slightly dazed. Unable to really hear the fox calling for him until his head stopped ringing. "Hey!"

"*I'm right here.*" He grumbled, getting a sigh of relief from the grey one.

"Can you stand?" His large muscles felt a little weak, but was able to with some time. "Good, I'll help carry her. I think she took most of the charge." He lifted Zeltra up and threw an arm over his neck. "Come on, you. You're tougher than this."

"Told you... **Feels.**" Thea shot a joke, one that took a few moments for Roe to get. But after a very uncoordinated gesture of the female's chest, he understood.

"You sure you're okay?"

"I'm *fiiiine*, just no more walking." Regardless of the statement, the dragon kept walking.

"You look and sound like you're walking on cloud nine."

"I *saiiiid*..." A very long awkward pause from the blue one as they climbed the stairs. "No more walking."

"Just a quick test." The grey held up two fingers. "How many fingers am I holding up?"

A very long stare at the paw as the dragon's eyes shifted pupil several times. "You have, like, the **Best** nails."

"And now I'm concerned." A light slap on Zeltra's cheek. "What about you-?" Her reflexes punched him in the ribs, getting the fox to stop for a moment in pain. "She's alive." He grunted.

"I'm proud to not watch football." An odd look from the canine got the dragon to double take at

him.

"Just... Get on the teleporter, and let's hope we're back where we started." The three stood on the area, and the blue one stepped on the center again. Getting the device to emit a bright light and vanish the three.