

Wrong Side Of Heaven Act 2 - Jailbreak

By Bartan Tirix

Chapter 0

It was the waiting around that stressed her. Knowing how badly they would be hurt. Once again, she tried to calm herself by taking deep breaths and staring out the window. Staring out to that path and expected the lights of lanterns or torches of the townsfolk carrying back their injured.

The first time she did this, it almost ruined her. Tending to people for nearly a week, and even then, with all her 'powers' people expected her to have, she still lost three quarters of them. People knew her kind as a Healer of sorts, but what she did... It never Magically healed or removed pain. She was more of a therapist really, just able to do a few things outside of nursing. But she wasn't a miracle worker, like many often believed.

Her eyes trailed down to the brass rings that were resting on her wrists. The sleeves of her white gown attached to it, to keep from getting in the way while she was working. But young woman found herself often playing with it when she was anxious. "Are you okay?" The older woman startled her.

"Oh-I'm sorry..."

"It's alright, dear." The elder red head could tell the younger one was a bit nervous, trying to hide it with her blonde straight hair. "Is this your first battle?"

"...No. I was rather young for my first one. But I still don't feel comfortable with this."

"No one does. But we really can't just leave them. Those ettins are getting a bit closer it seems every day."

"...Is anyone you know...?" The younger one asked, though she knew that it was a rather harsh place to go. The older one did give her a soft smile.

"My husband and my son are out there. But they know how to take care of themselves, I'm sure..." A faint nod and the two just comforted each other. A few moments later, a some lights could be seen in the distance, coming down the road. "They're back?"

"There's very few lights, I wonder..."

"I'll go check it out." The red haired woman said. As quite a few of the towns people went to the

returning men, the younger one was trying to make out any words that seemed to echo in the air. But no luck.

A small creature seemed to fly overhead of the house she was staying in. Landing on a nearby tree. "Excuse me?" She got it's attention. "Could I ask you something?"

The small owl flew down to the window sill and landed beside her. "Yes?"

"A lot of these people went to fight a large group of ettins, in that direction. Have you been over there by any chance?"

"I have. But I've not seen any group of people."

"So, they didn't fight then? Perhaps the ettins backed down."

"They did not. They were attacked by a large animal."

"Large animal?" She repeated to the small owl, it attempted to nod, but it looked more like bobbing its head up and down. "What kind?"

"None I've never seen before. It seemed to change color quite frequently. Did you not hear it from over here?"

"No, I haven't been able to hear anything. My ears are not as good as yours." She smiled at it. Then the men got her attention, heading for a new barn that was recently raised just before the path exiting the town. "I wonder what they are doing..."

"I'm not sure, but no human was in the conflict with Ettins this night. I assure you."

"Thank you." She smiled at the bird, petting it a bit until the door opening seemed to surprise it and cause it to take off into the night.

"Was that an owl?" The red head asked her.

"Yes, I wanted to ask if it had witnessed anything tonight." The woman gave the younger one a bit of a strange look in disbelief. "He said that there was a fight with ettins, but no human was involved."

"Really?" The woman took a breath. "The men said the same thing..."

"The owl said that there was some other creature fighting them. One that could change color?" The two women shrugged a bit, not getting any ideas. "So what are the men doing? Is everyone alright?"

"Yes. No one actually had to fight." Through the window, the two seen people get a large flatbed ready and head up the path. "I think they're getting something."

"A prisoner?" The woman whispered. Getting a back rub from the elder one.

"...Try to get some rest for now, Tia. It should be easier for you knowing everyone is safe."

Chapter 1

It was the constant grasp and a few quivering breaths that slowly got him awake. Awaking to a half daze, unable to remember who it was that was holding him. Every few moments it began to feel tighter and tighter, almost like a vice. Until it seemed to pinch one area in his back, getting him to grunt a bit loudly. And that caused it to let go. "...I'm..." A whisper behind him, followed by a few breaths. "Are you awake?" She asked.

Slowly opening his amethyst eyes to the dull grey cave and the sound of cold rain, it began to come back to him. "M'a bit of pain in my back and ribs, but I'll be fine." He muttered. He tried to look behind him and see who it was, but the turn caused him to flinch a bit in pain. After a grunt, he spoke up. "What are you doing back there?"

"N-nothing." He felt her paws let go and stand up. "It's just..." Slowly he turned to lay on his right side, seeing the dark purple dragon acting a bit shy. "I thought the rain would make your back cold, and..."

"...Nitaka?" He asked, shaking his head. Her attention told him that the name was correct. "What's wrong? And what is that smell?" He grumbled. Getting him to feel a bit woozy.

"I came to say... Goodbye." He double taked at her. "Just for a few weeks." A tilt of the black one's head, and another flinch at the far back of his neck. Rubbing it, he still tried to keep his ears perked. "It's my... Season."

"Season?" He asked, a bit too early before it clicked. "...Oh. Well, why didn't you say so? Why the embarrassment?" He snorted. Getting up and limping towards her. He couldn't help but take a deep breath at her scent. As much as he didn't want hatchlings, his body was beginning to want her.

"Shroud... You're in no shape to take care of yourself."

"Nonesense. I'm fine."

"You can't even walk two steps before flinching."

"That doesn't mean anything. I can still walk and fly, I'll be fine on my own for a few weeks." He nudged her, seeing a guilty look in her eyes. "...What did you do." The black one grumbled, getting her to smile a bit and giggle. "Hey, what did you do?"

"You remember... Vanitos?" A shake of his head. "The human that pestered you yesterday."

Shroud tossed his head. "Oh, no. You didn't..."

"I've asked him to come up here once a day to check on you. He might even end up camping here for a while, while I'm gone."

"Why?" He grumbled loudly. "I don't need his help, Nitaka." He snorted loudly and getting the female to laugh. Although, the insulting gesture did stop his body from it's cravings.

"I'm just a bit worried about you. And I almost lost you yesteday. I thought I did..."

"You can't lose me unless you keep sending humans to pester me. Or if you get an egg inside of you. I might end up running if that happens." He teased her.

"Which is why I'm leaving for the few weeks. But at the same time, this would be a good opprotunity to get to know your rider."

"I thought you were my rider." He snorted, getting another laugh and shove from her. "Besides, I'm better off fighting by myself, and he's better off finding another mount."

"I heard he beat your challenge yesterday."

"It was his challenge and he didn't win. If anything it was a stalemate."

"Means you got something to work out in the meantime." Another toss of his snout leading to him shaking it side to side. Getting a few licks from her, he returned them.

"You're lucky you are in heat, I can't think of an argument over your aroma." He purred a bit, unwillingly.

"I know. Before I go, want me to take care of that thorn for you?" He didn't even have to look down to know what she was pointing at.

"Might as well. Just remember, I'm mounting the daylights out of you when you return-" He grumbled, getting interrupted by her kiss.

A crash of thunder startled her out of her slumber. It was very dark where she was, only the faint glow of embers to partially light up the dark room. She could hear something large taking slow breaths around her. Feeling for the leafy bedding she was resting on lead her to something hard, but warm.

Almost scaly, and last night began coming back to her.

Though the woman was afraid of loud storms, she remembered who she fell asleep next to. It comforted her, even though he wasn't conscious to protect her from it. Then again, she was protected with his creations. The reason why she couldn't see the rain or the storm was the rocky shelter that he had made. Her master made.

Another loud strike of thunder seemed to shake the structure and cause her to instinctively grab his neck. As her heart raced a bit she whimpered, getting the dragon to grunt a little bit awake. As he shifted his black body, another echo of thunder rumbled in the far distance. Making the young woman tighten her grip. A cross between a grumble and a chuckle came from the dragon's throat. "M'she Had A Need To Feel The Thunder, And Chase The Lightning From The Sky."

"W-what?"

Atlas yawned, stretching a bit. "M'was an old song I used to listen to. Part of it anyway." He snapped his jaws a few times. After moving a bit, he felt a bit sticky on his chestplates. Feeling a round for it, and smelling his paw, he identified it. Releasing a chuckle, he couldn't help but smile. "M'yes... I recall last night now." Trying his best to hold the woman between his neck and the bottom of his jaw, purring a bit. "Thank you."

She smiled at him, stroking the outside of the chin. "You are welcome, Atlas." Another strike of thunder caused her to yelp loudly and hide within him.

"It won't hurt you." He tried to say, yawning once again. Getting a few kinks out of his body, he got up and headed towards a wall. Morphing a large section of the rock into an exit with an awing.

"What are you doing?" The woman whimpered a bit. Hearing the loud sound of the pouring rain.

"Just getting washed off. The lazy way." Exiting the shelter a little ways, and enjoying the sudden change of atmosphere. The cool rain made his scales click, though they could not be heard over it. Shaking his body a bit and spreading his wings as the weather bathed him. After his top side was done, he lowered his head and rolled forward onto his back.

Elexus couldn't hold back her smile. Though, still nearly petrified by the fear of the storm, to see the dragon lay down in the grass put her a bit at ease. She laughed when he started to shift and squirm a bit on his back, while the rain washed him. Rubbing his head and snout in the wet grass.

After a few minutes, the black one got up and turned an aqua blue. Reentering the shelter as a thick mist and reformed a moment later. "What...?"

"Just to get the extra rain off me. Don't want to get you wet." He said. Though the statement puzzled her for a moment as the beast made a couple of small bowls and filled them with rainwater. Sealing the shelter once again. "We're not walking out in that. So might as well relax until it passes." He handed her the smaller one, and she graciously accepted it. Drinking and feeling the dragon curl up next

to her, taking a few laps of his own. Wrapping his head and neck around her after he was done.

She pet him a bit, ducking at the thunder in the far distance. "You're... Awfully... Friendly this morning." He didn't seem to reply to it. "Atlas?" A noise in question came from his throat. "Could you start the fire again? I'm feeling a little cold." He nodded, changing colors again. Soon after the embers started to snap loudly and grow. "Thank you."

For a long while, the two just stayed silent. Listening to the fire and the pouring rain. Eventually, the dragon began to doze off. His breaths turning into that of a slumber. Though the woman was still a bit uneasy about the storm, she tried to get some sleep regardless. Another strike of nearby lightning got her to gasp and move tighter against the black creature. Hearing something move above her, and getting her vision to darken a bit more, she tried to make out what it is.

His wing. His sore left wing was trying to cover her, almost protect her from the storm. Though he was still sleeping, it didn't seem to be hurting him anymore. Perhaps the oils last night actually worked, like the man said it would? Still, the thought of it made her smile. Both at it's recovery, and it's protection. With another strike of thunder, Elexus found herself much less frightened by it. Enough to once again sleep herself.

The black one could hear his footsteps from afar. Though still have dazed by his mate's goodbye-for-now gift, he was conscious enough to know what it was. Grumbling, he got off his sore back and onto his belly. Whereas to hide some of the mess. "Go away." He snorted loudly. "I know what you're doing and I don't want you here."

A few chuckles came from far outside his cave. Grumbling a bit, he tried his best to face away from it and go back to sleep. Maybe if he just ignored the man, he would give up and go away.

Trying to get comfortable on the smooth stone floor was more difficult after getting crushed by that rock. Quite a few places in his body seemed to ache it, to the point where he was looking into replacing it with soil and dirt. Perhaps even grass. Though there were many issues with it that were brought with the comfort. "So you are awake then." The man asked. Getting a loud growl from the dragon as he tried to sleep. "Nitaka told me to look into you."

"And by that she would assume that I needed some type of care. The only benefit to being immortal: you don't need a babysitter." The dragon's ear flickered as the human dropped a large backpack. Walking over to a wall near the dragon and sitting down. "Meaning, the request that you got from her is pointless, and you should go back to planning how to prepare your city for war. Your efforts are not needed here-"

"It's a nice day really."

"...Yes. Excellent for walking and walking back."

"Want to go outside for a bit?" The dragon finally opened his eyes and glared at the man. Trying to stare him down with his ears back and his spines raised. "You'll probably feel better."

"No doubt this is some plot you've set up, so no. I'll pass. Now get out before I throw you into the waters below. Providing whether or not you survive the fall doesn't bother me in the least."

"Here I thought your threat was to eat me."

"Either or. It hardly matters to me. As long as I get rid of you." Shroud snorted, laying his head back down once again, then hearing his stomach growl loudly.

"Sounds like someone is hungry." Vanitos teased.

"Are you seriously promoting me to eat you?"

"Not really." The man got up and walked over to his pack. Unzipping several things in it, then walked back to his spot. "Here."

"If you're going to give me something, give me your leave of absence." The black one grumbled with his eyes still closed.

"Come on. Just try it." Another grumble and the dragon stared at the man holding what looked to be a large sandwich. "I made it myself."

"You made..." Slightly curious, the dragon sniffed it. "Breaded lettuce with a small slice of meat in the middle?" He grumbled. "And what is that?"

"A special sauce I made. Mixing some tomato juice, soy, and some sap from trees northeast of here." The creature studied him for a few moments. "It won't kill you. We've established that."

"So you want me to bite off your hand then?" The dragon snorted, snapping his jaws at the sandwich, but the man pulled back his hand to a safe distance.

"Perhaps not like that. Just open your mouth."

"So you can feed me like a tamed animal?"

"Would you rather have it on the ground?" Vanitos smiled at him. Getting Shroud to grumble a bit before opening his muzzle and looking away. Once he felt something placed on his tongue, he slowly let down his jaws. Getting some of that sauce he was talking about to dance in his mouth. Sweet, yet tangy, it was a very pleasant taste. "See? You like it."

"It's... Reasonable." The black one tried not to show he was enjoying it so much. Laying his head back down, but not swallowing it yet. He played around with the taste in his muzzle for just a bit longer.

"I made several more if you want some. Your size too."

"Is this some sort of bribe?" The dragon tried to growl.

"Not really. I just remember trying to eat some things raw before, and well..." The beast glared at him again. "Things are just better if they're prepared."

"Define that: Prepared."

"You know, served. Cooked and cared for properly."

"Why waste so much effort on something you're just planning to eat?" He snorted.

"Well, you can just eat it. But will you even remember it after you've done so? I mean, if it wasn't horribly bad, that is." The human took a bite out of his own sandwich. "My point is." He talked with his mouth half full. "We eat everyday, right? Shouldn't we at least make it memorable? We have a sense of taste for a reason."

"Indeed. To warn us not to put horrendously tasting stuff in our bodies."

"But that didn't taste bad, did it?" The creature just laid his head back down. "I heard you purr a bit."

"Dragons don't purr."

"Yes they do." Shroud growled at him. "I've heard it before."

"What you heard was a growl of pleasure perhaps--"

"A purr." The man teased.

"It's not a purr. Purring is for kittens and felines. We're nothing like them."

"Actually--"

"Nothing. Like. Them."

Vanitos was trying to hold back his laughter so he could take in another bite. A few moments of silence and he spoke up again. "You walk the same. You tend to have the same type of eyes." Another growl. "You definitely have the egos of cats. And you purr--"

"How much longer are you planning to pester me?"

"Just until sunrise." A low growl. "Three days from now." A louder growl.

"I'm seriously considering throwing you out and making a door."

"But how would you make a door for a rocky home?"

"Simple: Remove the wall when I want to leave or enter. Then remake it when I'm done. That way only I can enter it." The dragon snorted.

"Sounds like you've been thinking this for a while."

"I've been considering it, yes." He grumbled.

"So, what's stopping you?" The man received a very odd look from the beast.

"...It's like you want me to throw you out." Vanitos laughed at that. As Shroud laid his head back down and exhaled loudly. "Some... Things have been getting in the way."

"Things?" He pried. "Like Nitaka?" A low growl. "That means yes."

"Forget this." The black one snorted. Getting up, careless of the pain it brought to him and left the rocky cave.

"So you do want to go outside?" The man immediately got hissed at.

"I wouldn't be so cocky."

"Why?" The man teased, taking another bite out of his sandwich. Only to hear a loud rumble and be completely left in the dark. "What the-!?"

"Works better than I thought. Though you can definitely tell there was a cave here." The dragon said rather loudly on the other side of the rocky door.

"Shroud? Shroud! Open this... Wall!" Vanitos shouted, his mouth still half full.

"I'll open it once I get some peace and quiet! And you will stay in there so you cannot annoy me any longer." He grumbled, as he took off to the skies over the bay.

Chapter 2

It was that strong smell again that invaded his senses. Dark, as usual, and a bit hazy. With the slightly bitter comfort of resting on a bed of hay. It was that barn, once again. Dim and barely lit up with a single small lantern. Because of it, the window outside remained black and reflective.

Looking towards the small table was the blonde woman in white, looking like she was just about to burst into giggles. "Don't you start." The dragon snapped at her, causing her to break her will and laugh at him. "I expected to be back here sooner, to be honest."

"Is that right?" She asked through her giggles. "So, how...?" She attempted to say, but couldn't finish without nearly falling out of her seat.

"Stop laughing." He snorted at her. "It's not that funny... What exactly so funny anyway?" Again she tried to speak but couldn't. "That's alright. Take your time." Atlas replied sarcastically. Facing away from her with his ears back. After a few moments, she caught her breath and composed herself. Enough to talk sensibly once again. "Done?"

She nodded, still trying to hold back her laughter. "So... How was it?" Another giggle fit when he tossed his snout in the air.

"Is that what you wanted to ask me?" He hissed at her. "I never knew you were interested in such acts." Another snort. As the woman once again recovered, she met with the black one's glare.

"If you keep looking at me like that, I'm not going to be able to talk." She giggled.

"Meaning the longer I can incapacitate you, the less likely we will talk about it." He grumbled. "I'm not sure what there is to talk about anyway." The dragon laid his head down and closed his eyes.

"Why do you say that?" No response. "Atlas, why didn't you say something to her? When she asked about how friendly you've been?"

"I don't need an answer for that."

"Alright, then why are you being so friendly to her all of a sudden?" Another glare to witness Tia having a rather sly smile on her.

He snorted. "Because you told me to be."

"Did I?"

"Yes. You wanted me to be more respectful to other creatures in that circle, so that's what I'm doing."

"Is it?" She teased him.

"Yes." The black one's spines began to raise a bit.

"Then why did you go back for her? In the city?" A very low growl was in his throat. "You could've found many ways besides interacting with people to find me, but you didn't. Instead, you went back for Elexus."

"Do you seriously want me to repeat myself?"

"I think there's another reason why you want her around. There's just something about someone taking so much interest in your own life that you enjoy. Not only does it seem to feed that ego of yours," He snorted. "But you also get the satisfaction of teaching. You always have." She stepped forward, placing her soft hands on his muzzle. "That's why you were comfortable with teaching her about your body."

He rolled his eyes. "Says you. It's a wonder why my ears didn't remain purple." Another smile from her.

"But you enjoyed it. So did she. And now you sleep easier, knowing that she was taught about these things."

"So, you're saying that she's like a child of mine?" Atlas grumbled.

"Nope." The woman smiled.

"A student?" He tried to curl his neck a bit, only to get her to giggle and shake her head. "Then what?"

"Atlas. Why didn't you say something to her? When she asked about how friendly you've been?"

"Tia..." He tried to look away.

"Atlas. Why didn't you say something to her?"

"Tia?"

"Atlas..."

A loud snap from the fire woke him up, getting the black beast to stretch a bit while shifting. Feeling the young woman near his neck to do the same. With a silent yawn and a snap of his jaw, he mumbled. "M'y Elexus..." Trying his best to nuzzle her.

"Someone had a good sleep." She managed to say, just before yawning herself. "Any chance you could make us some food?"

"M'sure. Just a bit longer."

"Okay." Elexus laid back down into him. And for a few minutes they rested a bit longer, until the fire once again broke the silence. A few grumbles while getting awake and the dragon stretched again. This time getting up and yawning loudly while heading to a wall. Removing most of the shelter but a few pillars brought it much of the light the day held. Though still a bit cloudy, the sun was out and a bit hard on their eyes.

"What do you feel like?"

"A little drowsy." She replied, getting used to the light by shielding her eyes for a bit.

"I meant for food." He chuckled.

"Oh... I'm not sure. I'm just hungry." The woman walked outside beside the black beast. "In my last master's house, we had porridge every morning." She laughed at him making a face of disgust.

"I never liked that. But it's a good way to feed someone who's unable to chew." He grumbled from experience. "Hmm. I'm feeling oiled potatoes with ground pepper and some apple juice." Atlas looked at the woman smiling at him, and he gave a light one back. "Sound good?"

"Sounds perfect." She stroked his arm a bit.

"Granted, I'll see if I can catch something for meat later. You never know what you'll run into." He said, changing to a Green color and growing several plants quickly. "Pick a few of these for now, the potatoes we'll have to dig for, but it won't be hard. I've made the grounds soft and easy to move." The dragon went back to the fire and prepared a workspace. A few moments later, she arrived with an armful of items. He washed them off with some water, made a pan to fry them with, and began to use several herbs to make an oil. Cutting the large potatoes into thick slices, he felt her watching him. Looking at her, Elexus gave a shy smile. "Come over here." He pointed at the other side while he made another bowl and a long block.

"What...?" She half asked, but doing as the creature asked regardless.

"Take the black peppers for now, place them in the bowl and start grinding them." She looked at the peppers and then looked at the long tool she was given. Almost giggling as he tossed his snout. "Push and twist with this. It will grind them into a flakey powder. It's what we want."

"Oh, okay." And she did so, while the dragon tended to several other things. Frying the potatoes in the pan and oils, then worked on the apples and draining them of their fluids. "Is this good enough?"

"Perfect. Now, lightly sprinkle them over the slices." And she did so. He then turned them over so she could do the other side. "Just need a bit longer, then they will be ready." He handed her the small bowl from that morning with some fresh juice in it. A sip of it got her to make a bit of a face. "Too strong?"

"A little. Almost..."

"Sour?" She nodded, trying it for himself got him to make nearly the same face and make her giggle once again. "Oh, wow. Yes, too sour. Let's water that down a bit."

"It does taste a bit strange, too."

"That's just from the rapid growth. Like any other living thing; it tastes better once it matures." She gave him an odd look. "You know what I mean. Only eat them when they're old enough to be eaten."

Otherwise they don't have the same appeal."

"It almost sounded like you were talking about children." She giggled again, until he didn't seem to respond. "Have you actually...?"

"You don't want to know the answer to that." He said, with a bit of a smirk. Making it unsure to her if the dragon was lying. Giving her a plate of breakfast, and an altered bowl of juice.

"Thank you." She smiled, accepting them. He just nodded, and tended to his own. A bite into the slice of potato gave a loud crack to the skin, but it was soft on the inside. The pepper was a nice touch, and masked that strange taste of the growth he was talking about.

"What do you think?"

"Better than porridge."

"Of course it's better. Anything is better than porridge." Atlas snorted. Getting a snicker from the woman. "And this juice is much easier to take in."

"It was almost as strong as a cider before."

"You've had cider, have you?" He asked.

"We've sneaked a taste during some of the celebrations. It was a bit hard to swallow."

"They probably didn't make it correctly then." He said, looking off into the distance of where they came. "You haven't tried real cider until you've had mine. But it takes a long time to make." Taking a few more bites, his attention didn't stray from that distance. "...Why were you on that wagon?"

"What?" She asked, a bit surprised. Getting the black creature to look at her once again. Usually there was some type of awkward or annoyed look into his purple eyes. But this time, there was something different. Curiosity? Perhaps Concern? "Oh... Our last master passed away, and we were..." His ears perked a bit. "We were being sold to his son. Traveling around with some possessions that were being..."

"Inherited?"

"I think so. But during the road through the woods, something on the wagon broke. A few minutes later, they... Came."

"And you managed to escape. Or at least tried to." She nodded. "And this son?"

"He wasn't a terrible person whenever he came to visit. But... I've heard that he does... Things to young women. Something in his bedroom." A low growl came from the dragon's throat.

"He probably rapes them." He caught that look in her face again. "It means... To force oneself onto another. Taking that gift without consent, and..."

"Take... advantage?" He nodded. "The same thing you were warning me about last morning."

"...Yeah." The black one looked back into the distance once again. "...But I won't let that happen to you, Elexus."

"Atlas...?"

"I promise. Even if I have to eliminate every threat this world has to offer." The statement actually frightened her a little bit, even if his tone was rather light and at ease.

"Atlas..." The concern in her voice got his attention. "Are you... Feeling alright?"

"I'm fine. Why?"

"It's just..." She lowered her head. "You've been strangely kind lately."

"Would you rather me not be?" The black one curled his neck.

"N-no, it's just..." The dragon resumed eating. Perhaps it was a better idea to just change the subject. "...Where did you learn how to cook?" Atlas looked at her for a moment, and then smirked.

Though he didn't enjoy it in his eyes, the sun felt amazing on his black body. The massive warmth it brought relaxed his sore muscles and warmed his aching bones. Pleasently waking up to a few birds singing in the distance, and a light breeze going through the trees, the dragon began to move a bit.

The extra nap away from any annoyances was just what he needed. Perhaps that man was correct to go outside. Though that thought irked him. As if a human could possibly know what was good for a dragon. Let alone an immortal one that was still recovering.

Before he got away from himself with his thoughts of aggression and spite, Shroud stretched a bit and snapped his jaws a few times. Getting more aware, he found himself rather famished and thirsty. Walking towards a nearby spring his scent lead him to, his body felt much better with that warmth and the comfort of the grass. "M'perhaps I will end up making the floor of my cave covered in grass. Even if I have to regrow it every few nights." After all, most dragons in nests do tend to sleep on the grass. It just felt more natural.

After refreshing himself with water, he decided to hunt something before he went back to his cave, then perhaps make that floor. He stopped in place for a moment, just now remembering he trapped that man in there. Looking towards the sun, Shroud discovered that he was only asleep for

about four hours. Odds are the human was still okay. Shrugging his wings, he continued on to hunt something.

Catching a outskirts ram offguard was an easy meal for him. Killing it quickly and eating it while it was still warm. But there was something off this time. For some reason, the black one noticed how bland it was. Though he's eaten creatures like this hundreds of times, it never bothered him before. Regardless, he still finished it. Even if it didn't seem enjoyable to him.

After the meal and a quick swim, the dragon thought he should probably return to his cave and let the man out. Hoping that maybe the human had learned a lesson about pestering him. Heading out towards the northeast bay, the scent of the ocean could be picked up from miles away. Landing a bit early and walking towards the cliffsides where his home resided. In a large pillar away from the lands themselves.

After leaving the nearby nest to get some peace and quiet, Shroud ended up shifting that pillar into a large cave. Sculpting the rock to an opening, and creating a long bridge from the cave entrance to the grassy cliffs. Just in case he had to walk, much like last night. Though he did fly most of the way to the cave, Nitaka didn't quite trust his judgement on something rather narrow and hard. Though he detested being treated like a wyrmling, he just agreed with her.

Snorting at the memory, the black one crossed the stone bridge. Lacking of any guard rail or safety symbolized that it was not a place of comfort, nor a place of welcoming. It was a sign of danger, from the high winds that often seemed to whip in this area, to the waves crashing against the sharp rocks below. Compared to the rest of the land, this place was rather dark and unsettling. And that was perfectly fine for this dragon.

Walking up to the door, he could hear something high pitched coming from the inside. The closer he got, the more it hurt the black one's ears. Getting him into a more rotten mood. "Stop making that noise!" Shroud hissed at the makeshift door, instantly getting the noise to cease.

"Shroud? Is that you?"

"Who else would come to this dreadful area?" He snorted. Placing his paws on the rocky wall and lowering it. Doing so, the dragon could smell smoke, and see that Vanitos had set up what almost looked like a tent and a campfire. "Did you light a fire in the middle of my home?" He growled loudly at him.

"You left me in the dark, what did you expect me to do?" The man shrugged, not intimidated. He was holding something long and wooden in his hands. "It's about time you came back anyway. You were gone for half a day it seems."

"A few hours. But back to this 'Fire-in-my-home' Thing." The dragon stepped inside. Taking observations on how much room the man had taken out of his cave. "What is all this?"

"I told you, I was planning to stay out here for like three days." The man recieved a snarl from

the beast. "Besides, it's not like you have any possessions or anything of value in here." It made the dragon look around again. "It's rather sad and empty to be called a home."

"And so you thought you would bring your own possessions? Make yourself at home here?" Shroud snorted again, studying the odd structure of the tent. "Why would someone need such things?"

"I don't plan on sleeping on the cold ground, for one."

"Dragons do."

"Well, I'm not a dragon." Vanitos smiled at him.

"Of course you're not. And you wouldn't be here if you were."

"Yeah, odds are I'd probably be out flying somewhere."

"I meant more of me beating you senseless and so close to death that you would never even cross sights with me again. Now get out." The dragon gave the tent a swat, knocking it down.

"Hey, wait a minute!" The man stood up.

"Get out of my cave!" Shroud roared at him.

"Just be a bit reasonable, okay?"

"Reasonable?" He curled his neck. "You want me to be reasonable? Fine!" The black one bit the man, but not hard. Just enough to pick him up and carry him outside. Regardless of how much the man struggled against the muzzle, he wasn't able to do much. Sitting down on the bridge, Shroud grabbed one of the man's pantlegs between his claws and held the human over the waters far below. "Here is my *Reasonable* offer: Either you get out of my cave and never return, or you can go for a swim. As well as have your possessions follow you to your watery grave."

"Wait-wait-wait!"

"Waiting wasn't an option. Now which will it be?"

"Okay, what if I... What if I gave you something in return?"

"Like what?" He curled his neck. "What could you possibly offer me?"

"A friend?" A growl came from his throat. "Maybe some peace and quiet?"

"I'll be getting that after you fall. Try again." A loud rip from the man's cloth pants omitted. "And I would be quick about it. I just sharpened these."

"What about if I taught you how to make those sandwiches?"

An odd silence fell over the area while time seemed to stop. "...Sandwiches?"

"Yes. Sandwiches."

"...You're offering me sandwiches for your life."

"Not offering sandwiches, but how to make them." Vanitos tried to make it sound more appealing. Another loud rip almost drove the man to a panic.

"OkayWhatIMeanIsThatIfIJustMadeYouSandwichesThenThatWouldImplyMeHavingToVisitYou A lotMoreFrequentlyAndSoFarYouReallyDon'tSeemToBeTheTypeToEnjoyFrequentCompany SoIfITaughtYouHowToMakeThemYouWouldBeMuchMoreIndependantAndWouldGetLess VisitsFromPeopleLikeMeOrJustMeInGeneral... So, Sandwiches?" For a few moments, the black one just stared at him. Eventually, his claw lost grip and the man began to fall. But the dragon caught him with the other paw. Placing him on the stone bridge and pinning him with the one paw, Shroud just looked away with his ears back. Exhaling loudly. Then a second time.

"...Sandwiches." He grumbled.

"They're tasty, and maybe if you like them so much, you could learn how to make other things as well." The human weezed. "Shroud? Paw... Weighs a lot." The dragon glared at him for a moment, then did a third loud exhale before releasing the pin. Walking past the breathing man and searching into his backpack. Coming out of the cave with one of the sandwiches in a bag, he threw it at Vanitos and stared at him.

"...Amuse me." Shroud demanded.

The woman stared at the dragon in silence. Catching her, he double taked and curled his neck. "What?"

"You locked him in a room and then almost dropped him off a cliff?" She laughed at him tossing his snout.

"You make it sound like he's the victim. He was the one pestering me. Regardless, yes. I did." Atlas snorted. "Even though I detested the thought of being taught by a human, it was that decision that actually made me into a chef." The black one looked into the distance. "From there, it felt like I took one step away from being an animal. Being able to enjoy something that I blindly seen as just a need to fulfill. It became a hobby of mine, attempting to perfect the way of cuisine."

"...So, you locked him in a room, and then almost dropped him off a cliff?" He instantly tossed his snout and she laughed out loud.

"Is that the only thing you took from that story?" He snorted. "Besides, you wanted to know how

I learned to cook. And now you do." He got up and stretched a bit. "Alright, ready to hit the roads?"

"Yes." She got up herself, finishing her drink before noticing that he was laying down once again. "Are you okay?"

"Do I seriously need to explain this everytime I lay down? Get over here." He grumbled. As she approached him, Elexus stroked his arm a bit. Being a bit surprised still when he rapidly changed to a bronze color. Raising a platform under her feet just enough for her to get on his back easily. "I suppose it wouldn't be a bad thing to teach you how to mount me properly, but."

"I thought you didn't like being ridden." She said, almost quietly.

"I don't. But you're too slow on foot, so I might as well carry you." He snorted. But how the dragon said it made her giggle. Standing up and beginning to walk made the woman a bit cautious at first, but she eventually got used to it.

"How's your wing?" She asked, stroking his neck a bit.

"It feels alright. Much better than yesterday."

"So the warming oil worked?"

"Is that what that was?" He tried to look back at her.

"Yes, I bought it in the town." He snorted loudly. "What's wrong?" She giggled.

"I can probably make the stuff myself. I suppose it didn't matter too much because I made the coins that you used to pay for them, but next time try to check with me first. Gold doesn't grow on trees."

Chapter 3

Out in that grassy field once again, the Black dragon was experimenting with some cooking. Completely immersed into his work, he didn't hear the man's footsteps in the grass until he was almost behind him. Giving a little bit of a low growl on how it nearly surprised the beast, and how the man seemed to chuckle. "Glad to see I've inspired a hobby of yours." Vanitos said, dropping his bags and

equipment in the grass.

"Good, you're here. I need a test subject." Shroud grumbled. Getting a bit of a concerned look from the man caused his spines to raise and his ears to point backwards. "What?" he hissed.

"I still haven't recovered from your last attempt of making... What is this exactly?"

"It's suppose to be that sauce you were going on about." The dragon grumbled. Grabbing a small cup and giving the human a sample.

"Sauce? Did you actually find the tree for it around here?"

"I didn't find it. I grew it." The man looked at him before trying the sample. "You said it grew in the northeast. So I went northeast and asked people where I could find that tree."

"Wait, you actually asked for a human's help?"

The dragon hissed at him. "More like demanded that they show me. Now test it before I attempt to cook you."

"That sounds more like a form of torture." A loud growl and the man surrendered. Carefully taking a sip out of it gave him a strange face, and the dragon exhaled loudly. "It's getting better, at least you were thoughtful enough to not serve it boiling hot again. But..."

"It's rather plain, isn't it?" Shroud grumbled. "I'm starting to think that it might be the plants I make. Perhaps the rapid growth of them lacks flavor."

"Maybe. But overall... It's not bad. Still has the sweetness of mine." The man placed his hand on the beast's forearm, and the black one glanced at him. "You'll get it, don't worry. Just keep at it. You might want to try to grow your own crops though. And I mean naturally."

"That takes years." The dragon grumbled. "But perhaps you're correct." The man nodded at him and smiled. As Shroud's purple eyes trailed behind them to Vanito's equipment, his spines raised once again. "What the hell is that!?" He hissed. Looking at what looked like a large saddle.

"What? My basic stuff. Backpack, tent, saddle-"

"Saddle for what exactly?" The dragon growled loudly.

"For riding a dragon. I mean, yes I can do without, but it's better if you get used to having it on-"

"What do you mean by that!?" Shroud roared at him.

"You said you were going to fight with us." Vanitos said, rather calmly.

"Yes, but I stated nothing about being ridden by anyone." He snorted.

"Are we really going to argue this again? You lost the challenge-"

"It was a stalemate. Meaning I'm going to help you in the war, but you also lost. Meaning you need to find another dragon to ride!"

"You're just joining the fight so you can settle your personal vendetta against whoever threw that rock at you, and you know it. And I won that bet. Like it or not, we're better off working as a team. That's what this is all about-"

"I thought this was about your species being unable to defend yourselves-"

"You know what I mean. The plan to partner up with a human. But you don't want that because you've been a loner all your life." The dragon curled his neck at him. "Don't give me that. Look around at your life! You live far away from the nearest dragon nest. They call you a stray, and I'm assuming you left your first one to get away from others. You reject nearly every form of social activity, regardless of species. Even when your mate is gone for a week, you don't even seem to miss her any! And you've been pushing me away, non-stop. Tell me, how many friends do you have, Shroud? How much family do you have left?"

The black one stayed silent, staring at the man while he took a breath. "Look, I can half understand. You feel that you're stronger alone, because you can do more. But the truth is, you're not. Because I seen you fight those giants a week ago. Your style... Those weapons that you make from the Atonements, it's reckless. That might not be an issue for you, but it is for us. Because if you fall, we are weakened. A lot. And this 'Coming back to life' thing doesn't seem to be instant. Is it?"

"...No. It takes a few hours."

"And you are no good to us dead for those precious hours." Vanitos exhaled, breaking eye contact and looking towards the saddle. "I know it doesn't appeal to you. Especially when you look at it on the viewpoint of being treated as an animal. And you're not the first dragon to be insulted by it. But trust me when I say that it's for the better. And if you want to win this war, if you want payback, I know how to do it."

"But it involves that." The dragon grumbled. Looking in the opposite direction.

"Yeah. And it takes a lot of practice. Not only for me to get used to your speeds and maneuvers, but for you to get used to having it on." The man looked at him again. "But it won't restrict you. It's designed not to. However, I can't say you won't feel it." Again, the beast was silent. "So, do you want to fight in this war? Or do you want to win it?"

"And that's how diamonds are made." The black one explained. "Even some random things like peanut butter can be turned into them if they get compressed enough."

"I'm sorry, that is just..." Elexus held her forehead for a bit. Thankful for the shade of the forest

they were walking through.

"Over your head? Complicated?"

"Yes. Where did you learn such things?"

"I've been on lot of different planets, but they all seem to have the same physics. People spend their lives learning and discovering these things, and well... That knowledge can be useful."

"For one like you? With all your powers?"

"Atonements. Yes. The better understanding you have of the world around you, the better you can survive in it. Control it. And protect those you care about." His head lowered a bit. The woman pet his neck, feeling bad for him. Hearing his stomach growl, the dragon stopped for a moment. "I think it's time for lunch."

"I'm getting hungry again to." She said, looking into the forest. Though nothing really seemed to be moving much, in her position she seen something strange in the distance. "Is that a hole in the ground?"

"Where?" She pointed, and the dragon studied it for a moment. "Probably a trap for an animal. Hunters would often cover them with branches and leaves to hide them, and something would fall in."

"So if it's uncovered...?"

"Then something is probably inside. Good work noticing it." She smiled at Atlas' comment as he turned green. Moving some of the plantlife around him while he approached the trap. "I wonder what was caught. With that big of a hole, and so much of the branches missing, it's bound to be big. Maybe a deer or a stag?"

"Are those any good cooked?"

"Sometimes. But they tend to have a very strong smell to them. It likes to mess with my head. However, I won't apose to it now." Looking down the hole, he tiled his head.

"What's wrong?" She asked, bracing herself to look down as well. But she couldn't quite see. Leaning a little more caused her foot to slip and almost fall. Grabbing onto the dragon's ear and getting him to yelp really loudly. Snatching her and placing the woman on the ground, Atlas whimpered loudly. "I'm sorry! I slipped, and-"

"Never grab a dragon by the ear!" He hissed, holding it and trying to warm the sting away. "They're extremely sensitive." A few whimpers and he let go, seeing if it still functioned. "Is it even still there?"

She couldn't help but giggle at the question. "Yes, and it looks fine. I'm sorry."

"Just don't do it again." He grunted. Once again looking down the hole. Getting Elexus curious as

well.

"...What... Is that?" She looked at him.

"I have no idea. I've never seen it before." He almost whispered. "...I'm going to lift it up."

"What if it attacks us?"

"I'll kill it if it does. You might want to stay back for now." She nodded and took a few steps back. As the dragon changed to a bronze, she felt the earth begin to shift a bit. Slowly filling the hole and lifting up the creature inside.

It was mostly white. Black stripes seemed to cover it from it's lower back to it's hind hooves. But it's front body seemed to be that of a dire winter wolf. It's forepaws were a bit large, carrying four claws that almost seemed retractable, as well as almost a hidden appendage on the inside.

It's head was that of a dire wolf as well. Long, almost canine, yet almost that of a bear as well. It was shaped a little strangely, but closer look, there were two heads, one covering the other while the creature laid on it's side. What almost seemed to be long whiskers and a thin beard coming down from it's jaw gave the impression that this creature was old. And perhaps more adapted to a colder climate. "It's still breathing. Means it's still alive." Atlas said, studying it.

"...Do you know what it is?" He shook his head.

"I wonder how it tastes." The woman looked at him with a bit of shock. "What?" He curled his neck. "I'm hungry!"

"But you shouldn't eat it if you don't know what it is. It could be poisonous."

"Unlikely. Looking at it's jaws and claws, it wouldn't need something like a venom to defend itself. And... Are those hooves?" He asked, tilting his head again while looking at the creature's lower half. "Two heads, two hooves, two paws, and two tails. Hmm..."

"What are we going to do?"

"I'm going to eat it. But I don't want to make a camp here in the woods. Too many things could go wrong." Changing into a green again, the dragon summoned a series of plants to pick up the dual creature and place it on his back. "You'll have to walk for a bit."

"Are you sure about this, Atlas?"

"I'll be fine. Even if it does wake up, I'll be prepared."

"How-?" She asked a bit too early. Once again turning into a bronze, the dragon's scales seemed to harden very quickly. Turning into a clear rocky white. "Are those...?"

"Diamond Scales. Though not the greatest of defenses, they work rather well. Just not very

comfortable." He grunted.

"They are gorgeous..." The woman said, getting lost gazing into his side as she walked beside him. "I had no idea you could do this."

"Didn't I just get done explaining this to you?" He snorted, getting her to giggle a bit. "There should be a clearing up ahead. We'll rest up there."

"Okay."

The black one carefully landed in a courtyard of the human city. Though a few people rushed to get out of the winds caused by his large wings, they didn't seem to be too frightened. However, they were a little cautious. Getting a few stares from them, Shroud hated the feeling of being gawked at. "Hurry up and get off me." He grumbled at Vanitos, as he laid down so the man could dismount. "The faster I can leave this place, the better."

"Don't expect to leave anytime soon. I might just have to make a new saddle to fit you correctly." He said, stroking the dragon's neck a bit while getting his equipment. Getting a growl from the dragon, he just ignored it. Waving to the people around to show that everything was alright. He looked back at the black one with a smile. "They've just never seen a Black one before. You're basically a myth."

"You tell me this now. I would've changed color if I knew that." He snorted. Trying to shake off the feeling of an audience. "Get moving." He grumbled. The man just chuckled at him, entering a nearby building with the saddle in his hand. Folding his paws in front of him, Shroud rested his head on them. Hearing the people whisper, but eventually carrying on with their errands. Feeling people almost enter the dragon's personal space, he instinctively let out a low growl. Which only grew louder when a few of them started to touch and pet him. "Go away." He growled again.

"I've never seen a color like this-"

"Does nobody understand the meaning of Go Away anymore?" Shroud rolled his eyes.

"You're very pretty-"

"And you're about to be eaten if you don't stop pestering me." Feeling someone on the other side of him tickle his wing. "You and everyone here." The young woman just giggled at him, and that was enough for the dragon glare at her. The black hair on her head looked rather familiar. Another tickle under his wing caused him to hiss in that direction. And a touch of his tail was the last straw. "Forget it!" The dragon got up, flapping his wings to make the people step back.

"Shroud!" Vanitos came back out just before the dragon took off.

"Deal's off! Find someone else." He hissed at him.

"Everybody, just stay away from him, alright? He doesn't like to be touched." The man shouted to the others. Getting everyone to stay out of the courtyard except for the young woman. "Hey, sweetie."

"Hey dad."

"Dad!?" The dragon double took. It came out louder than he wanted to.

"Yes, this is my daughter, Lindrea."

"And this is your dragon?" She asked, getting a loud growl from the black one.

"Not anymore." He sat down hard and looked away.

"Shroud, it's alright. People here are just used to dragons being friendly. They usually like the attention that humans give them." The man sighed. "I suppose I should've told others before I went to Nathan, but it was only going to take a minute."

The dragon didn't say anything. "He does look like the ones from the legends." The woman said a bit quietly. "Sorry if I disturbed you. When dad told me that a black one actually exists..."

"None of us believed him." A rather tall and thin man came out of the building. A bit brushy gray hair covered his head and looked like it wasn't groomed. "But behold, he was telling the truth. For once." The man said sarcastically.

"Come on now, Nathan. Have I ever lied to you?"

"Didn't you tell us that this black one was crushed by a rock?"

"Well, yes... But."

"Yet he's still here. Unless you found yet another rare colored dragon for a partner."

"Ex-Partner. We've recently decided to split." The dragon said.

"Wait, what? We-?"

"Yes. We decided it was in your best interest to, after presenting my new leverage." Shroud lifted his head.

"And that would be?" The dragon's tail sneaked over and curled around Lindrea's body. Though he didn't squeeze her much, she still yelped when she was lifted off and pulled away from the man. "That's just low, Shroud."

"Regardless, you will now have to find another partner." Although the dragon was serious, the woman was giggling uncontrollably. Getting him to stare at her, unimpressed. "You're making this very difficult for me to come off as serious."

"I'm sorry, my lord." She said, petting his tail a bit. "But I'll gladly be your captive for a while."

"Captive?" His neck curled. "I was planning to eat you." He groaned.

"You know, I could take her off your hands for you, in exchange for something." Vanitos offered, playing along. "A gift, perhaps." It got the dragon's attention almost immediately, getting the two to chuckle a bit.

Looking back and forth between the two family members, the dragon growled. "I feel like I'm being manipulated."

"It's a worthy gift." The black haired man said. "Suited for a partner." Another growl from him. "Or you can just keep her. But I'm warning you, she's loud, abnoxious, and tends to eat like a horse."

"Dad!"

"You're both pests. Must run in the family." The dragon grumbled, setting the girl down. "This gift better be worth it."

"It will be. Matching jackets for us." The man teased, getting the dragon to hiss at him. "I'm joking! But seriously, I'll go get it. However..."

"However...?" Another loud growl.

"He's going to need some measurements for the new saddle." Another growl. "Giiiiift."

"Witch." He grumbled. Laying down once again and letting Nathan approach him.

"Yes, he is much bigger than your previous one. No wonder the saddle didn't fit." The older man said. Throwing a long tape over the dragon's neck.

"Not even loosening the straps was enough. Anyway, I'll be right back." And the two went off.

"...Previous one?" Shroud mumbled.

"Yes. The dragon he had when Vanitos was younger. Stupid reckless boy, he was. And an equally crazy dragon to accommodate. It eventually underestimated a cliff and shattered a wing. Though the fall was brutal on both of them, they did survive. The dragon healed up, but found a mate. And Vanitos found a wife. You're the only other dragon he's had since."

"So he had another dragon. Why pester me then?" He snorted.

"Though the other one can fly, it's acrobatics are still limited. Vanitos wanted one a bit bigger, and one without a family."

"Why?" He asked, rather coldly.

"Once you become a father, your outlook on life tends to change you." The man said, rather lackadasically. The dragon just sighed through his nostrils.

The two finally came to a clearing. The currently diamond dragon overlooked the wide grassy field ahead of them, but other than the hay patches, there was no other large animals. Somewhat disappointed, he searched for a flat area. "It's quite nice out." The woman said, enjoying the somewhat warm weather.

"Yes. A good day to be traveling. After that storm, that is." Burning another large circle of grass and preping another fire, Atlas looked at the sun himself. Concluding it was still early afternoon. "Nothing seems wet around here. Odds are the storm didn't reach this far."

"Good for us then." She smiled at him. As he looked behind him and took a few steps back, she questioned him silently. Only to have him sit, and let the large white beast on his back slide off onto the ground.

"It's heavier than it looks." He grumbled at it. "I wonder if there's any herbs around. I'm getting a bit tired of my meals tasting flat."

Elexus giggled at him. "I didn't notice anything bad about it."

"You just don't know better. But if I can find some, you will." Looking back at the beast once again, he changed to a silver. Raising several thick iron bars around it. "Are you going to be okay alone for a few minutes?"

"Y-yes. As long as it doesn't wake up. Can you start the fire first? I still feel somewhat cold going through that shady forest." He nodded, and did so. Stretching his wings out widely and fluttering them without flinching, he gave a grunt of relief.

"Time to test them out a bit. Maybe if they're okay, I'll take you for a flight later." The dragon smirked deviously at her before jumping into the air and taking off. The sheer power of the wind created by the wings almost put the fire out and startled her. Even though she seen it coming.

Searching for him out in a distance, he disappeared behind some trees. After a while, she couldn't hear his wingbeats in the air. (He probably landed. Finding something.) For a moment, she almost wondered if he crashed again. But she remembered the sound it made. The way it seemed to shake the earth.

Her sights returned to the white beast in the makeshift cage. Looking more closely at it's heads this time. It's mane was thick and rough looking. Rather large ears that seemed scarred a bit. Slits on them as if they were cut. And it's more canine muzzle was quite large. By the look of it, the jaw could possibly bite her entire head.

A few more wing beats in the air got her attention. Still not being able to see the dragon much, she almost followed it in the distance. Until it stayed silent once again. A few moments later, a faint

whimper could be heard nearby, as well as some of the grass shifting. "...Feyon...?" A voice whispered, coming from the direction of the creature.

"...Yes. I am alive, still." A sigh of relief.

"We had a good run... But..." A faint scratch of a claw against metal. As the woman tried to look around the fire in silence to see the creature, the slightest press in the grass got both heads to look at her. The two pairs of golden eyes stared in silence for a while.

"You... Can speak?" Elexus asked. Wondering if she could understand her. The two heads seemed to look at each other for a moment, then back at her. "We found you, in a hole."

"...Yes. We fell into that trap while hunting." The right head said.

"We were in it for two moons after that. Unable to climb out." The other added. Taking a closer look at the bars.

"Sorry about the cage... We were not sure if you would be... Wild or not." She said a bit shyly. Knowing how it would've offended Atlas if she said that to him.

"Wild, as in...?"

"Aggressive, perhaps." They said to each other. Then looked back at her. "Is that the only reason for this?" The left asked a bit sternly.

"Well... There is another. But if you're friendly, it won't be an issue." The two seemed to tilt their heads a bit at the odd statement. "My master was... Actually planning to eat you. If you were... Wild."

They looked at each other once again. "Then you have no reason to fear. We will not harm you."

"You saved us, after all. But we must ask you for something. We've been parched for a while, do you have any water to spare?"

"Oh, Atlas can make water. He should be back soon."

"Atlas!?" They both asked at the same time.

"Y-yes... Do you know him? He didn't seem to know what you are..."

Again, the two looked at each other, almost whispering. "Odds are it's just another named that." A faint nod.

"Forgive us. We... Encountered an Atlas before. And was nearly taken by him."

"Taken?" She asked, surprised. "As in... He tried to...?"

"Hunt us. Yes."

"Atlas... Was a Tyrant that lived a long time ago. He possessed great strength, which he stole. But was eventually crushed by the weight of the world he made."

"We were nearly victim to him at one point. But barely escaped."

"Oh..." She felt bad for them, getting a bit closer. "My Atlas isn't like that. He just went to find some herbs." The creature's ears perked up to something in the distance, and soon she heard wings flapping. "That's probably him."

"Your master?"

"Yes. He might be a little disappointed when he sees you though." As the wings got closer, the green dragon could be seen over the forest. Returning and landing softly a bit farther way. She gave him a wave.

"Your master...?" They looked at each other and took a step back.

"I see you're talking to your food, Elexus." Atlas grumbled, getting closer. "Don't tell me it can speak to you."

"It's rather smart and polite." She smiled at the dragon. "Sorry to sadden you." He snorted.

"It's fine. I found some yaks out in the fields anyway. I'll just grab one of those." The green one grumbled. Dropping a pawful of plants in front of her. "Shame, I'm curious to see how it tastes still."

"Atlas." She playfully scolded him, getting a snout toss as a reaction and her to giggle at him. "They are thirsty, I think. Could you..." The dragon nodded. Changing to a silver and morphing one of the bars into a large bowl. Then to blue to fill it with water. Setting it inside the cage.

"I don't suppose you could spare a leg?" Atlas grumbled. Still getting a very cautious look from the creature. "You're welcome, by the way." Another snort.

They looked at each other once again, the left one nudging the right to drink first. "Our apologies. We're just... Timid of others." A nudge from the right one, and the left one drank.

"We are thankful for your hospitality and your rescue. We've been down there for a while."

"I'm sure you were." The dragon studied the creature for a bit. "If you don't mind, I would rather keep you inside this until I return with our meal."

"We understand." The right one said quietly, laying down.

"I'll be right back, Elexus." He said before he took to the skies once again.

"I'm sorry about him. He's been awfully... Protective of me lately." Another look at each other. "Is something wrong?"

"...He called you... Elexus?" She nodded.

"It was a name he gave me a few days ago." She looked into the dragon's direction. "It's hard to believe that I didn't even have one until I met him."

"Do... You know what that means?" She gave them a puzzled look. "It's... Ancient Draconic for Nirvana."

"Nirvana?"

"Meaning: Freedom from pain, suffering, and the external world." The woman held her breath for a moment. Remembering what he kept saying when the black one woke up. "How long have you known him?"

"Only for two days. This is our third traveling together." Another look at each other. "He's changed my life so much since. And saved it about three times. I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for him. So please don't think bad of him for the way he acts..."

"Believe us, we remember how dragons are. His precautions are not what we are concerned about."

"Then what?" Another set of wingbeats got all of their attentions.

"...Ma'am, we've never learned to speak your-" The heavy nearby landing of a yak startled the woman. Then the dragon landed softly.

"That should do it." Atlas said. Once again changing into a silver and morphing several of the bars into a large pot. "How do you feel about a stew?"

"Sounds wonderful. Want me to do the..." She motioned the grinding she did earlier that morning, and he nodded. Making the small bowl and the tool for it and handing it to her.

"Be sure to pick off the stems first." She gave a smile as she tended to the herbs he had picked. Looking back at the white creature, just studying the two, he exhaled. "Can I trust you enough to set you free?"

The two nodded. "We're no threat to you."

"Of course you're not a threat to me." He snorted. "But you can be a threat to her. That's where my cautions lie."

"We will not harm your..." They looked at each other, not really sure how to answer. "Mate?"

It shot the dragon's head up for a moment. "Wrong word." He covered his face with his paw.

"Companion?" They tried again. Only to get a loud groan from him.

"Nevermind. You're staying in the cage."

"Atlas." She giggled.

"The closest word I can think of is servant." He snorted. Lowering a large section of the bars.
"Companion... The nerve."

"We just assumed so. You two come off as more than just friends." The beast walked around, getting in sight of the two so not to distrust them. Laying down near the fire.

"Says you. She's a witch and a pest."

"And you're stubborn old beast with no patience." She giggled, getting a low growl from him.

"I'm not old!" The large one hissed.

"It's strange to see such a relationship." The left head said, mostly to the right one but loud enough for the other two to hear.

"Indeed. It's rare to see a dragon nowadays. I thought they were extinct."

"They probably are." Atlas bluntly said. "But I'm not from this planet."

Another look at each other. "That would explain alot. We've never met an outsider before."

"Let alone one with such sorcery." The left one studied the pot.

"You really like to talk to yourself." The woman giggled at the creature. Getting a strange look from them. "What are you anyway?"

Another look from each other as they began to whisper. "It's possible they don't know."

"It wouldn't hurt to tell them, I suppose. Having the protection of an outsider wouldn't be a bad thing..."

"Sure, speak in your own language like we're not here." The dragon muttered. Getting a very confused look from the woman being able to still understand the creature.

"Not a bad thing until they learn. Then it's possible..."

"But unlikely. Even so, we can still possibly escape. We already have enough enemies..." The heads looked down and exhaled.

"What's wrong? What enemies?" The two beasts looked at the woman and the dragon's ear flicked to her.

"...We've been hunted for a very long time. Tracked by hunters and mercenaries alike." The right one admitted. "You probably don't know what we are because we are probably the last one."

"We were once called Kveldulves, by people in the north."

"I've heard that term before." Atlas said. "It means... Wolf. Twilight Wolf?"

"Yes. We were once a symbol of power, because many great hunters would come to us seeking it. Creating a pact with the Kveldulf was a sacred honor, but..."

"The hunters learned that they could kill the Kveldulf and steal its power instead of bonding with it. Ages later, our kind were harvested. Forced into isolation and to breed, only to have our young killed and taken for power."

"Do you know of some of the historical figures in legends that were told to have magics of some sorts?" The left one asked the woman. "Atlas was one of them. And there were many others: Larvast, Trekler, Bobastus. They all gained power by this mean."

"But the more they did it, the less power they started to receive. They discovered that the older the Kveldulf was, the more power they could obtain from it..."

"Which is why you're being hunted down." The dragon nodded. Getting almost a frightened look from the white creature. "I'm not looking for power." He bluntly said, not being distracted from his art.

Then a look at the woman, almost with the same fear. "I'm not..." She shook her head. "I don't think I could ever kill anything for..." She didn't finish.

"We are... Trusting you with this information."

"But we don't want to come off as deceiving you. We're tired of running. Hiding."

"Spending nearly every night unable to know if it will be our last."

"Is that why you keep looking at each other?" Elexus asked. A faint nod from the two. "Don't worry then, Atlas will protect you." The dragon snorted loudly. "We can't just leave them. Even if it's for a few days..."

"I'm not arguing. But be warned, you try anything and run, you'll have a dragon hunting you down. They're much better at it than any human." He growled a bit.

Changing the subject a bit, the woman asked. "Do you have a name?"

The left one nodded. "Feyon."

"Feyris." The right one added.

"Feyon Feyris?"

"A name for each head." The dragon stated. "I knew a hydra that did the same. It got out of hand when it came to keeping track of seven heads." The three shared a chuckle.

"You're welcome to stay with us then, Feyon and Feyris."

"Thank you." They both said. Bowing their heads and giving off a sigh of relief.

For a few minutes, they worked on preping the stew in silence. Filling up the large pot with water got the Kveldulf's attention. "How are you...?"

"I'm changing the water in the air back into a liquid form." Atlas explained. "It gives the illusion of me creating water, but in reality, I'm just reversing the concept of steam: Applying a large amount of heat to the water won't destroy it. But it makes it almost invisible as it flies off through the air."

"And you've learned these things?" Feyris, the right head asked.

"From other planets. I could do it since I learned the Atonement, but was never able to explain how." They tilted their heads. "Atonement, it's a form of manipulation of an element, substance, or energy."

"It's when he changes color." Elexus added in. Giving the large one a smile.

"So you're... Addapting to a form of power." The dragon nodded.

"And with it, you're able to change and shape it."

"He really is something else." The woman teased.

"Dragons themselves are 'Something else.' That should be truism." He snorted, playfully.

"Where did you come from, Elexus?" Feyon asked, as the two tried to secretly share a look. The question actually got the dragon's attention as well.

"Me? Oh... It's not nearly as facinating."

"That matters little. We're just... Curious."

"Well, I was raised in an orphanage. Never knew who my real parents were. I lived there until I was around eight, and then it was burnt down. We drifted together, but were sold off as slaves one by one. Until a large family bought the rest of us to help out on his ranch."

"So you took care of the animals?" The right head asked.

"No, I was too young to do much with them. They just kept me around to do housework and clean up messes. Laundry as well." She looked off to the side. "I didn't really have any friends. No one that I really confided in." The two heads looked at each other again. "But eventually our master passed away from an illness. While we were being taken to his son's lot, our wagon was attacked by bandits. I managed to get away, but..."

"One of them caught up to her. And I accidently landed on him." The dragon grumbled.

"And this is how you two met?" The left one asked.

"We've been together ever since, for the most part. He tried to drop me off in another town to start a new life, but no one here could understand him."

"Because no one else speaks Draconic. It's a dead language now." Feyris added. "Yet you can understand him?"

The young woman shrugged. "I don't hear any difference between you two. You sound like everyone else to me." The dragon snorted at her. "I meant, word wise. Of course no one sounds as bold as you do, Atlas." It got him to smirk a bit, and then checked on her task.

"That's fine enough, throw it in." And she did so while he started adding chunks of meat.

"And now your new master is him." The left one stated.

"Where are you heading to?"

"We're trying to find someone named... Tia?" Elexus looked to Atlas for a confirmation, and he nodded. Staying a bit silent on the subject. "I don't suppose you've heard of her." The two shook their heads.

"If she was in a town, then we haven't been in any for a long time."

"That makes sense." The dragon mumbled.

"Why are you searching for this one?" He knew this question was going to come out eventually. And for a while, Atlas stayed silent. He could even feel Elexus' gaze on him, wondering the same thing. With an exhale, the dragon laid down and faced away from them, remaining silent.

"Atlas...?" She got no response. Giving her the feeling that something was wrong. Knowing he probably didn't want to talk about it, the woman sadly shrugged at the Kveldulf, and they nodded in understanding. For a while, they sat in awkward silence. "I feel like I'm roasting." She said, taking the heavy jacket off for a bit.

Chapter 4

"This is humiliating." The black one growled. Just thankful no one else was around to see it.

"It's just as humiliating as the last few times you've had it on. Now hold still. The tighter it is, the safer." Vanitos said. Struggling to lock the saddle in place. "You know, the dragon often helps strap this in."

"You'd like that wouldn't you. You want to know what I would like?"

The man sighed, grumbling under his breath. "You'd like this damn thing off of you-"

"I'd like this damn thing off of me!" The dragon hissed. Getting both of them to grunt a bit.

"I just want to make sure it's on tight."

"It was on tight the last six times you put it on me! It's hardly worth the gift." He snorted loudly. The thought of it made him gaze at the man's equipment in the grass to sniff it out.

"Don't you start! You'll get them after we're done. Now help me, or else this is going to take hours. And by that time I might end up being too tired to train."

"I still don't see how that's suppose to convince me. The faster you get tired out, the less I have to do."

"Shroud! Please!" The man grunted with frustration. "Just hold this for me." He lifted up a strap, and though the dragon tossed his snout, he held it in place. "Now pull it."

"That's suppose to be your job-"

"Just pull the damn thing!" And the black one did. Feeling the plates at the base of his collar tighten, but not enough to block airflow. A loud click told him that it was ready to let go, and the dragon did without permission. Exhausted, the man sat in the grass. "Seriously, why fight this much? Why are you so stubborn?"

"You know the answer to that." He grumbled in reply. "I don't want to do this. I don't need a partner."

"And I want the fastest dragon, but the second fastest would probably be more cooperative."

"Well, the fastest dragon is also the most stubborn. He's also the one that doesn't want a partner. Let alone one that's a complete idiot."

"Hey, I'm smarter than you think!" Vanitos said sternly.

"Your intelligence isn't what I'm judging here. You're the one so eager to fight something eighteen times your size and get yourself killed by riding something six times your size! All when he has a wife and daughter at home waiting for him! Tell me, what exactly are you going to say to them when you come back after slaying several families of gaints? What am I going to say to them when I come back alive, and you're not!?" The two males stared at each other for a few moments in anger. "I know you had another dragon. I know you didn't ask that one to accompany you in this deathwish because he already had a family. What's so different with you and yours?"

"...Who told you." The black haired man didn't remove his gaze. "Lindrea? Nathan?"

"The idiot that made this horrendous thing. And that one was a shot at intelligence." Again a few moments of staring until the man started to laugh. Getting the dragon to curl his neck.

"Sometimes he is a little off. I personally think he's getting senile." The man said, rather calmly. Breaking the gaze and looking off to the direction of the nest. "...You want to know why?" He took a breath. "I told Nathan that it was due to the fact his wing was broken, and it would never hold up to the limits I wanted. Not without further injury, even if it's over time. But..." A sigh. "...His wyrmling is only 16 years old. That's like... Maybe one and a half or two years in human's years. My daughter is almost grown up. She has her mate, and even though I would love to see her in a wedding dress... She no longer needs a father in her life. But that wyrmling does."

"...What are you saying?"

"That if I don't come back from this, I'll be okay with it. Knowing that my best friend will still be living with his family. I guess you could say that I value his life more than mine."

"You value a dragon's life...?" Shroud trailed off. Looking into the direction of the nest himself. "...Why did you choose me." It was more of a demand than a question.

"Shroud?"

"Was it because Nitaka said I was the fastest? Was it because she said I was black? Or did you really believe those legends about me being immortal?" Vanitos was quiet. "Tell me human, what's the real reason you are doing this?"

That smell again woke him up. Looking around at the dim dirty room. "Why do I keep coming back to this barn?" He grumbled loudly. Trying to shake off the ichyness of hay. Only to have the blonde woman giggle at him.

"It's because this place reminds you of me, I'm sure. This is where we met, and everytime you think of me..." Tia gestured towards the building.

"Which only adds to the unpleasentry." He snorted. "Why can't we be somewhere more... Comfortable? This isn't the only place I've taken you."

"Yes, that's correct. But isn't it because you're not feeling comfortable?" It got the dragon to tilt his head at her. "Let me give you another hint; You let her ride you."

"I let you ride me too, but that doesn't mean anything." Atlas rested his head on his paws.

"I mean this morning. Why did you?"

"I'm beginning to think that you're jealous." He grumbled, not opening his eyes. Her only reply

was another giggle. "First you want me to get to know her better, now you want me to be suspicious about her-"

"**Atlas!**" An echoing screech of Tia's shot his head up. Looking at the her still sitting there a little startled. "What's wrong?"

"...What did you say?"

"I asked why you let her ride you this morning." She giggled at him again, tilting his head.

"I... Answered that." He muttered.

"Atlas? Why did you let her ride you this morning?"

"Tia?"

"Atlas? Why did you-**Atlas!**- let her ride you this morning?"

"Tia, what's going on?" He pressed against the pain in his head.

"A-A-A-A-Atlllllassssss? W-W-Why diiiiii-**Stop!**-iid you?"

"Atlas?" The dragon snapped out of his thoughts, looking at the woman. "Is it suppose to be doing that?"

"Hmm?" He looked at the water boiling and bubbling up a bit. "Yes, that's normal." He mumbled. But there was something in his voice that she spotted, and it concerned her.

"Is everything alright?" She asked. He nodded, but he didn't seem to stop staring into space. Even after Elexus got up and started stroking his neck, he sighed through his nostrils. Leaning his head into her body a bit, almost nuzzling.

"...I can't tell you." He whispered loudly. "...I just..."

"Do you like her?" The question got him to pause a bit, not knowing how to answer. "It's alright if you do, Atlas. I won't be mad or jealous." But still he remained quiet. Her sneaking hands slowly stroking up his neck and under his jaw got the dragon purring a bit. No longer trying to hide it anymore.

As she looked him over, seeing the smile creep up his muzzle, it made her smile as well. The

woman's eyes slowly made it to the Kveldulf, almost expecting to see the white beast's smiles. But instead, she read concern. "Is something wrong?"

Once again, the heads seemed to share a small look. "No." Feyris said.

"We've just never seen the softer side of a dragon before."

"...She...s... Turning me... Into... A Kresskre." Atlas said through his purrs.

"A what?"

"It means Big Softie." Feyon informed her with a smile.

"You don't... Need... To Tell... Her..." It just made the woman giggle, and she stopped. Getting a bit of a growl from the black one.

"You need to watch the stew. I'll do more later tonight for you." A series of grumbles, and the dragon got up. Tending to the pot and making three bowls. Then looking at the White one for a moment.

"Do you eat out of two bowls or one?" The Kveldulf looked at him a bit strangely.

"Either or."

"We prefer two, if you don't mind. It's going to the same area regardless."

"Fair enough." He said, a bit grumpily. Making a ladle and giving the woman two bowls. Tossing his head towards the white one's direction. As she made her way around the fire and towards them, they raised up and took a cautious step back. Almost like they were trying to avoid touching her.

"Thank you." The both said, bowing and lowering their heads.

"It's still a little hot. Be careful." She smiled at them, trying to reach out to pet them, but they took another step back.

"...Forgive us, but..." Feyris began to say.

"It's alright, I understand." She still smiled, returning to the dragon for her own bowl. As the beast stood in front of the two bowls, they observed the other two beings and seemed to wait until they took a taste of thier own before trying it. "Mmm, it's very good!"

"Yes, much better if you can find natural herbs." As each of the Kveldulf took a small lick of the stew, the amazing flavor danced in their mouth. Almost immedietly going for more. Instinctively, their tails began to flutter and almost flap a bit. The look of it made the dragon chuckle. "I know that feeling. First time with cooked food?"

"We've been in the pressence of it before."

"But never had it." Feyon finished the sentence. "It is delicious."

"It's something I missed out on for a lot of years myself. But now I've gone so accustomed to it, I can barely go back to hunting normally. I usually resort into stealing before I eat anything raw." Atlas chuckled again, getting a bit of an odd look from the three. "Nevermind. Long story. Just enjoy it for now."

And they did. Getting their fill and relaxing in the warm sun for a bit. "Atlas?" The woman asked him, barely getting a noise of question from the dragon laying out. "Did you happen to see a nearby lake while you were in the sky?"

"What for?"

"I just wanted... It's been a while since I bathed."

"You realize that water is probably cold at this time of year." She just lowered her head, ashamed she didn't think of that. As the black one grunted and got up. "I got a better idea." Changing into a Bronze, he made a large tub made of rock, with a few walls surrounding it. Filling it with water, and adding a small fire to the bottom of it, she looked at it amazed.

"You're always the creative one, aren't you?"

"Dragons are taught to be creative." He snorted playfully. "We'll wait here until you're done. Tell me when you are, and I'll dry you off myself." Although he half concerned her when Atlas said that, the woman went in regardless. Letting out a bit of a yelp when he sealed the walls to the room, but left it roofless.

After hearing the water break a bit, and the woman gasp, the two males stared at the rocky barricade. After her sigh of relief, the two remained at ease. Relaxing in the sun after a hot meal was very comfortable for the Kveldulf. Feeling unable to relax for a long time.

The dragon on the other hand still felt a little stressed. The answer to why he wanted to find Tia ached him to tell Elexus. But he wondered just how long he could avoid it. Thinking about the woman, he could still catch her scent rather strongly from the other side of the wall. Too strongly, to the point where he followed it. Leading to her jacket that she took off before cooking.

A small sparkle in the pocket caught his eye, carefully pulling it out with a claw. Revealing the amulet that she had boughten for him as a gift. The one with the Amethyst in the golden frame. Though he was trying not to get lost inside the gem once again, the frame brought back some memories...

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He was stuck staring at the mountains of gold coins in his hoard. The occasional gem and treasure carelessly thrown into piles as the lights danced on them. The black one was lost in them, but no longer getting the feeling of happiness he once did from admiring such objects.

As the white bear placed a paw on the dragon's shoulder, the furried one leaned into him. "...I know it hurts. You're not the first one to lose someone, but don't make it your last. As... Odd as that sounds." The black one got a lick from him. "It's worth it in the end. But... These will hold no good memories for you. Only lonely ones." It made the dragon sigh, finally breaking his gaze from them. "I need to keep going now. Take care of yourself, Haytre." As the counterweight hugged him, the dragon grumbled at him. Getting a chuckle out of Bartan before he flew straight up into the only entrance to the cave.

*Five Finger Death Punch - M.I.N.E.*

For about an hour later, Haytre sighed heavily. Turning to a bronze for a moment and slammed the ground. Thinning out the full wall to the south. After changing back, he picked up a few more coins and took one last look at them. Dropping them in place, he flew straight up, exiting his home for the past thirty years.

Landing outside a town south of his lair, he started walking towards it. It was a very close one that fell victim to his own greed. It was no surprise when he started walking near it, people were almost running to hide. Those who were unable to afford a home were left guarding their dirty possessions on the streets and alleyways. Regardless of the danger that was walking towards the town.

Patently, the dragon walked through the town, looking down at the poverty that he himself caused. Something he rarely seen, that any dragon rarely seen: the after effects of their own desires. And the impact of what that brought among those around them. The weaker ones, lower down the food chain. No wonder people often feared or hated dragons. It's no wonder they were hunted for a decent profit.

Haytre came to a stop at the town's center. In front of a large dragon statue that almost looked like it was made of either clay or copper. Roughed up and old from age and poor care. "Y-your Majesty." A man came forth. Dressed better than the rest of the crowd that was gazing at a distance. From the look of him, he was probably the town's leader. "W-we never thought you would come." He hesitated when he seen the dragon stare at him. "The statue that you ordered has been finished for a long time."

(Statue?) Then it came back. He did demand such a thing when he first confronted this area. It made sense the way it looked now, very crude and cheaply made. Cheaply, because he harassed this town for it's valuables for years.

Sighing through his nostrils, the black one approached it. Grabbing the statue on the head and forcing his black paw through it's chest. The violent action sent people in a bit of a panic, as Haytre forced out a large throwing knife from the statue. Destroying it's craftsmanship.

As the weapon seemed to hum with energy, the dragon took a slow look at the town and the people still staring at him. Turning around, he threw the knife at the closest mountain near the town; his lair. The impact hit the rocky wall and exploded loudly in a smoke of dust and debris. But after it cleared up, all the treasure the dragon hoarded over the years sparkled brightly with the reflection of the sun.

Being able to be seen from the town itself.

Another look at the people within it, and the Black one sighed through his nostrils once again. "...It's yours now." He said loudly. "...All of yours." And he began walking back outside of town. As the people still outside stared at him, all sharing the same surprised, yet afraid look, it once again made those memories come back. After reaching the exit, he took one last look at his old home, then flew west. Leaving behind the remorse he once caused.

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"You're better off not staring at that..." Feyris' words snapped the dragon out of his dream.

"We've seen what such things do to dragons."

"I... Know. I've already..." He trailed off. Pushing the amulet back in the pocket. As the dragon once again just rested his head, he heard the Kveldulf get up and walk closer to the dragon.

"Can... We ask you something?" Feyon whispered. The dragon flickered his ear, but didn't respond.

"We know that you are in pain. Struggling with something behind this."

"And we know that it has something to do with Elexus." Atlas slowly opened his eyes halfway.

"It is hard to struggle on your own. But if you trust her, she can support that struggle of yours."

"...A woman said the same thing to me." They tilted their heads at him.

"A woman?"

"Is this the woman you are looking for?" Feyris asked. Still whispering.

"...Yes. She said that I should share my pain, instead of holding it over my shoulders." A sigh though his nostrils.

"She sounds like a smart woman." The Kveldulf smiled.

"Much like another that we've recently met."

"You mean Elexus?" The dragon said rather loudly, curling his neck then snorting. "She's hardly one I would suggest going to for wisdom."

"I can hear you, Atlas." She shouted, giggling. Getting the dragon to whimper in surprise, laying his head back down.

"You can see now why we were whispering-"

"Shut up." Atlas grumbled in a whisper. Getting the heads to chuckle lightly.

"But you don't necessarily need to be intelligent in order to provide support. She doesn't need to completely understand to help you carry that weight." Feyon explain a bit.

"The answer will come if you confide in those you trust." The dragon sighed once again.

A few minutes later, alot of water activity could be heard. "Okay, I'm out. Did you want me to get dressed?"

"Wet?" Atlas double taked. "No, just stand near the wall." He got up and stood sideways to the stone wall. Placing a wing over the top of the walls and looking away, he began to lower them. Until her body was covered by his and his wing. Turning purple, he gathered alot of the hot air from the fire and blew it in circles around her for a few minutes. "You should be dried now. Right?"

"Yes, thank you." She said, stroking his side.

"Meaning: get dressed." He grumbled. Getting her to giggle and do the task. Coming out to his head, she stroked his chin. "Don't start this aga..." But it was too late.

"Thank you. It's been a long time since I had a pleasent bath like that." She laughed at his ears pointing back, flat against his head, but purring loudly with his eyes closed. Following her every movement when she started to move towards her jacket. When she let go, he growled. "You'll get more tonight, don't worry. And a stroking probably."

"A what?" Feyon asked, curiously.

"It's when his lower horn-"

"Elexus..." The dragon moaned. Glad his scales were purple, but it didn't stop him from covering his eyes with a paw. "You're not suppose to tell that to others!"

"What if he wants one too though?" A loud whimper from the purple one.

"We're afraid we don't quite understand. What is this lower horn?"

"It's the thing that males have between your legs." She giggled at Atlas' groan.

As the two heads looked at each other, now clicking in what she was talking about, they immedietly stared at the dragon for a few moments. Eventually relieving his paw of duty and realizing the gaze. "Of course, you look at *Me*." He hissed loudly. "Blame her. She was the one curious about it!"

And the heads turned to her. "He's the one who wanted me to pleasure him."

"Only because you wouldn't stop talking about it. It was stuck in my head to the point where it was in my dreams." He snorted, the froze, realizing what he said out loud.

"I was in your dreams?"

"The concept was in my dreams." He grumbled. "Can we just leave and never talk about this again? Ever."

"Is that why you were so embarrassed that first morning? Because you were dreaming about me?" She laughed. Enjoying his reactions.

"I wasn't dreaming about you, I was dreaming I was having a conversation about you wanting to... You know. Present yourself."

"Present myself?"

"To be mounted. Bending over and lifting your tail, like a dragon would."

"They are not very subtle about this." The left head said.

"Not subtle at all."

"Be quiet you two." Atlas muttered in his paw.

"Are you trying to concieve a hybrid?" The dragon whimpered loudly at that.

"What does that mean-?"

"We Are Not Having Sex!" The purple one roared, but could not control the embarrassment in his voice.

"We're afraid we don't understand then. Why are you involved in such acts?"

"It gives him pleasure. You should see him squirm-"

"Elexus!" Another roaring whimper. Changing into a bronze, the dragon covered himself with a rocky dome.

"Atlas?" She called, still laughing at him.

"I'll catch up. Just... GO!" Getting the other three to chuckle and carry on.

The black one landed in the grassy meadow. Walking to were the man left his equipment. "That was much better today. Though I think the saddle still needs some adjustments."

"It's tight enough." Shroud growled. "Make it any tighter and I won't have any blood running to my head."

"Oh, it's definitely tight enough. There was nothing wrong with the straps. Just the track and maybe the petals need some work. Your side is amazing, I just need to work on the mechanics of it." Vanitos fiddled with the paddles a bit. "Do you feel this?"

"Feel what?" The dragon tried to look at him.

"That explains that. What about this one?" Something poked into the right side of the dragon's neck, and he grumbled a bit. "I'll take that as a yes. But this petal here when I push back should give you that same feeling on the left side."

"So I know when you want me to roll that way, yes-yes." He tossed his snout. "I'm still not sure what moving around my collarbone will do for your cause. Hanging upside down just above my chest." He snorted.

"You mean like this?" The weight of the saddle was pushed a bit and went from the back of the dragon's neck, to the right side, and to the very front. Loudly clicking and hearing the chains lock in place. "The positioning is a lot easier for me to fire arrows without harming you. I can also take cover, be safer when you do stunts with a low ceiling, and last but not most important: This." He reached up and started stroking the dragon's jaw roughly. As the black one tried to hiss and keep his head away, he eventually started to cave in a little more. Trying to growl loudly through his purrs.

"Okay, okay! Stop!" he hissed, getting the man to laugh a bit and unstrap himself from the saddle. Flipping onto the ground, and then started to unstrap the saddle. "Pest." Shroud snorted.

"Now, now. But you've gotten a lot better these few weeks. Pretty soon we'll start trying stunts, and adding some targets. Maybe I'll get someone out here to launch them." Taking off the heavy saddle was a relief for the dragon. Growling at the grey and beige object. "Oh, come on. If it makes you feel better, I'm planning to paint the thing black. Once I've gotten all the kinks out of it." It actually did make him feel better.

He nudged Vanitos heavily with his snout. "Your turn."

"Fine fine. I'm glad you like them so well. My wife is too." He pulled out a large container out of his backpack and handed it to the dragon, after taking the lid off. Giving one of the cakes a quick stab of a claw and throwing it into his muzzle. Purring loudly at the peanut buttery taste.

"You've yet to tell me how to make these things." He muttered getting another one.

Vanitos chuckled. "Even if I told you, you wouldn't be able to." It made the dragon's ears go back. "Nitaka told me you don't like children, and well... If you don't like them, you can't bake a cake."

"I fail to see how children have anything to do with food. Unless they are part of it."

"It's just an old baker's suspicion. But if you can bake a cake that's half decent, I'll teach you how to make those little dragon treats. After your training is done, of course." A glare from the black one. "Or else I'll have to find something else to bribe you with." He shrugged. Getting his own lunch out.

"Manipulative witch." Shroud muttered with his mouth occupied. It only got the man to chuckle, and stare behind him. A creature's land got the black one's attention to turn around and see a dark purple dragon.

For a moment, the two just stared at each other. Her, giving a bit of a sad smile, but him; his purple eyes were full of guilt and sorrow. The look of her blue eyes reminded him of what Vanitos said to Shroud weeks ago ("Even when your mate is gone for a week, you don't even seem to miss her any!"). He dropped the container in the grass and started walking rather quickly to her.

"Shroud?" She asked, only to have him grab her head and force his tongue inside her. A few surprised yelps soon turned into moans of pleasure and acceptance, as she sharply grabbed the back of his neck as well. "What... Is that taste!?" She tried to ask, only to get pushed on her back with the black male on top of her.

"You... Guys realize I'm still here, right?" Vanitos said, uncomfortably. "Y'know what, I'll be back in an hour... Maybe two." He picked up his lunch and walked off. Giving the two mates some time alone.

Chapter 5

Shroud woke up sore. The smooth grass in his cave did wonders to help though. Getting a moan from his mate after stretching and almost clawing at her back a bit. "That was some night..." She let out, yawning and stretching herself.

"M'I told you I was going to mount the daylight's out of you when you returned." He stroked her neck a bit to get her purring, poking his muzzle between her neck and the grass. She got the signal and lifted her head up, using his as a pillow. "I'm... Glad you're back."

"Miss me that much?" He didn't answer. "I've never known you to be so... Affectionate." For a while more, he remained quiet. Just stroking her arm for a bit.

"...Can I tell you a secret?"

"You can tell me anything, Shroud."

"...I've gotten so used... To being alone. That for a while, I didn't remember how to be with... Another."

"Shroud?"

"Do you... Like this, Nitaka?" She wasn't sure what he was talking about. "This... Affection?"

"I do. I just don't want you going too soft on me." Another few moments of silence. "While I was away..." She started. "I was thinking... Alot."

"About what?"

"You, mostly. And... Your stories." She sighed. "Shroud? What would happen to you if your body was... Gone?"

"My body?"

"Yes. If there was nothing left to it, would you die?" Nitaka asked a bit quietly.

"I... Am not sure. I've never tried it." He muttered.

"Perhaps then, you could meet with my love as well..." The purple one spoke softly. With her ear on his neck, she could hear his heartbeat racing. "Is something wrong?"

"...Can I tell you another secret?" She nodded. "...I love you."

"I love you too, Shroud." She grabbed his paw and squeezed it tightly. "I love you too..." Together, they slept the day away.

"We're not sure if we understand the question." Feyon stated. Looking very puzzled at Elexus.

"What if Feyris wanted to move, say, your left paw forward, but Feyon wanted to move it backward. What would happen?" She giggled at them tilting their heads at her, and then looking at each other. "Who's control would win?"

They stoped for a moment, and moved the left paw forward, then backward. Then looked at the woman again. "Like that?"

"But do it at the same time. If you did, what would happen?"

"The paw wouldn't move. You cannot move forward and backward at the same time." Feyris said. Still confusing the Kveldulf.

"What I'm trying to figure out is, who has more control over what area."

"Control?" They looked at each other. "We both do."

"But who has more?" She laughed at the confusion she brought them.

"Neither. We both have the same?"

"Equal?" The left one more or less stated. "We don't try to conflict one another, if that's what you're wondering."

"We are one body. We must work together to survive and function."

"Though our minds might be seperate, we are still considered one."

"Then how come you have different names?"

Another puzzled look at each other. "We have one name."

"Feyon Feyris."

"But why isn't it Feyris Feyon?"

"Because he's Feyris." Feyon said. Motioning to the right head.

"The name starts on your Right, then to your Left."

"Or our Left and our Right. That's how we are named."

"But who picks your names? All... Errm..."

"Kveldulves?"

"Yes. They all have two heads, right?" They nodded. "How are the names of your young picked?"

"Well, It's not written in stone, but usually if the pup is male, the fathers will pick the name. If the pup is female, the mothers will."

"Sometimes that role is switched. Much like us. Our mothers named us."

"Why didn't your father?" She noticed a sharp of pain in their eyes.

"...Our father was held captive at that time."

"I'm sorry..."

"He escaped eventually. And was able to raise us." Feyris sighed. "We are thankful for that. But the world we were born into..."

"I... Half know what you mean. Though my sisters did help me survive, I feel the only person that

truly showed me kindness was Atlas." The two heads looked at her. "He gave me more than any other person has. And he's not even from this..."

"Planet?" She nodded, unable to remember the word.

"It's rare to find kindness like his in the world then." Feyon said. "Kindness like yours as well." She smiled at that.

"Thank you. I never understood why though. It seems like some people receive kindness and respect for nothing, while others..."

"Are treated without, or hunted down for their own desires." The Kveldulf muttered sadly.

"...What if we created our own planet? A place where people could live without all this?" Elexus asked, looking at the sky. "Maybe even Atlas knows of one?"

"I don't think exiting the planet is an easy task. I've never heard of such a thing being done."

"Perhaps we should ask Atlas how he travels then?" The left head asked. Then the two head's ears flicked upwards, both looking opposite directions to look behind them.

"Something wrong?" The woman asked, looking behind herself and seeing the dragon walk up to them at a distance. They took a sigh of relief and she waved at him.

"Perhaps we are just used to being paranoid." Feyris joked. As they waited for the black one to catch up, the two studied their surroundings. "How do you fair?" He asked the large one.

"I'm fine. Just..."

"It's good to see you didn't stay purple." Elexus giggled at him, and he just tossed his snout.

"This time. Next time you might not be able to tell which Atonement I'm using." He snorted. "Seriously, when I tell you to stop: Stop."

"I did not know that dragons were so impressionable." Feyon stated to Feyris.

"Oh yes, he tends to do anything I ask him to." She giggled, not noticing the glance that the heads gave to each other.

"Hush you two." Another snort. "Dragons are often impressionable to an extent. Get an idea or a concept in our heads, and it will constantly bounce around in there until we submit to it." He gumbled, lowering his head and shaking it. "So, no more talking about children, sex, or 'Hybrid species'." He growled at the Kveldulf.

"It was just an observation." The three chuckled.

"An observation that can get me into a very longterm commitment." Atlas grumbled. "I don't want another wyrmling."

"Wyrmling?" The woman asked.

"It's a stage of dragon kin." Feyris informed her.

"The worst at that. And what seems like the longest." Another grumble. "And what did I just say about no more talking?"

"I was just curious." She giggled.

"Just... Change the subject."

"You mean before you wall yourself in again?" The dragon hissed at the left head.

"Okay you two. Atlas, how did you get here?"

"I walked. Something you should be getting more used to." He snorted.

"I meant, on this Planet." She laughed. "How do you get to other planets?"

The dragon curled his neck. "I can't really control that."

"What do you mean?" The two heads tilted.

"There are these... Portals, I guess. Bartan called them Time Storms. They often take you to another planet if you go through them."

"And that's how you got here?"

"The first time, yes. The second, I'm not sure exactly." They all looked at him.

"...First time?" The woman asked.

"...Yes, when I was with Tia..." The black one said, a bit guilty.

Elexus stroked his arm a bit. "You said earlier that you were... Hurt?"

"What happened?"

Atlas studied the two bodys, then sighed quietly. "If you must know... There was a large group of Ettins that were planning to attack a village. I brought most of them down before the humans engaged."

"That was you?" Feyon questioned. Getting the dragon to double take.

"We half witnessed that fight at a distance. But couldn't make out what was fighting."

"How long ago was this?" He almost demanded out of the Kveldulf.

"At least a few seasons. I think three." The black one sighed at that.

"It's very possible that she's not even at this village anymore..." The dragon lowered his head.

"What happened next Atlas?" She asked, stroking his neck.

"...I was pretty messed up after taking a heavy blow to the back. I was planning to-" He stopped himself, getting them to look at him. "...Nevermind. Anyway, the humans got me when I was unconscious. They brought me to a barn and tried to get me to recover. I say tried, because no one there had seen a dragon before." He grumbled.

"And Tia was...?"

"My caretaker. She could understand me, unlike everyone else there. But for the life of me I cannot remember why." The two heads shared a bit of a sad look. "After I... Got better. I was called away by Bartan."

"Who is this Bartan?" Feyris asked.

"It's a secret lover of Atlas'." The woman snickered, getting a growl from the dragon.

"He's nothing more than a pest that likes to annoy me." Atlas grumbled. "And we're not talking about him. But after I was done with his... Request. I was sent here."

"Landing in front of me, on a bandit that was chasing me."

"And now you are returning to Tia. She does not know of your return."

"Correct. But with only this one able to understand me, it's difficult." He gave the woman a nudge.

"You don't happen to know why I can, do you Feyon Feyris?" The Kveldulf didn't know how to answer that.

"We are... Unsure."

"We have always spoken a different language. But we do recall a few able to translate."

"Understandable that you don't know. Considering your background." The dragon said. "What exactly are you planning to do with us anyway?" The two heads looked at each other a bit sadly, once again unknowing how to reply.

"It's always nice to have another set of eyes and ears. Or two sets." The woman giggled.

"Let alone someone with more intelligence." The dragon snorted.

"Hey!"

"Oh please. You're ignorant and you know it. Just like they are weird, and I'm perfect in every way. It sticks out, and can't be helped."

"Oh, wow. That ego."

"What have we gotten ourselves into?"

"Atlas." Elexus put her hands on her hips.

"I don't know why you're getting mad. I'm just stating the painfully obvious." The dragon curled his neck while the others just shook their heads.

The black one landed in the courtyard of the human city. A bit grumpy, seeing quite a few other dragons within the city from above. Many of them towards the eastern harbor. "Shroud!" Vanitos called from the crowd. The dragon did his best to ignore him for now, seeing if he could find his mate. "You're late."

"I was busy with something important." Shroud grumbled at him.

"...You were sleeping in the sun again, weren't you?"

"I was sleeping in the sun again, yes." The man sighed. "What? My sleep is important."

"You sleep like fourteen hours a day!"

"Only when you're not pestering me with meetings, training, and events." He snorted. "What is this one all about? And if you say anything to do with politics, I'm leaving. I've got more important things to do today."

"Like sleeping?"

"Like attempting to make that dreadful cake. I still don't know what was wrong with the last one."

"Simply put, I've attempted to eat rocks that were softer than that cake." Vanitos muttered. "Now come on. We need your saddle on."

"What for?"

"We're having a friendly race today. And I want you to finally show these guys how fast you really are."

"And if I do try to go my, say, top speed. What exactly is in it for you? Besides risking becoming a stain?"

The man shrugged. "Bragging rights."

"...Bragging rights." The black one repeated, unimpressed.

"Yes, now lie down. The others are already waiting for us." He tossed his snout and did so.

"Be warned, if anyone attempts to touch me, they will be burned. Badly." The dragon growled loudly.

When the saddle was finally on, and Vanitos strapped in, Shroud made his way towards the harbor. Landing softly among the crowd of dragons. Mostly due to the lack of space. "Look who finally showed up." One of them whispered.

"I don't know why someone would bother with a stray like him."

"One without an Atonement is near useless." Another snorted. Getting the black one to growl.

"Don't let them get to you." The man on his neck whispered. "Speak with actions, not words."

"Can I bite them then?"

"I meant flight." Another low growl.

"Fine." He snorted. Looking out to the waters with several Buoys with flags rested in the waters, as well with many landmarked rocks that stuck out had them as well. "How far is this?"

"I think fifty miles? It's just a small one, but it has a lot of turns. So just sprinting won't cut it. Meaning, we've got a much better chance of winning if you use all your Atonements."

"That is if several other dragons don't get in the way." The black one muttered. "I don't like this."

"I know you don't like them. But overall, we're on the same team. Well, after today anyway."

"That's not what I meant."

"If it's the collar, that's just truism by now-"

"That's not what I meant either!" He hissed. Placing a paw over his eyes. Seeing Nitaka come out from the crowd and greet Shroud with a smile.

"I was hoping you would make it. Rather surprised, but I'm glad you did." She nuzzled him, and he did in return.

"Can't say I wouldn't miss it for the world. To be honest, the world can go to hell." It made her chuckle.

"I don't believe we've met." The man said to Nitaka's rider, a strawberry blonde female. "Vanitos."

"Phanto." She said. "From Larriendale."

"The kingdom far west from here? No wonder I've never see you before." He attempted to look in that direction. "I thought they sent people over to assist, but I also expected them to use their own dragons."

"We actually got to know each other while I was away." The dark purple one explained. "We did alot of training there, and we felt compatible."

"Well then, thank you very much for your assistance, Phanto-"

"Stop flirting!" Shroud grumbled.

"Shroud! I'm married."

"Like that ever stopped you." He snorted. Getting the man's face to turn red.

"Nervous about showing them?" The female dragon whispered. Turning around and standing shoulder to shoulder with him.

"Perhaps a little."

"Well don't be. I want you to rub it in their faces when you come in first place."

"...You mean when you come in first place." He gave her a wink. "I've got another plan."

"You're not planning to hurt them, are you?"

"Not at all." He tried to curl his neck. "I don't know where you would come up with such an idea-"

"What are you two talking about?" Vanitos asked, unable to make out what they were saying.

"What else would we be talking about? Same thing you're thinking about doing to Phanto here."

"Nitaka, please..." The female human covered her face, laughing. "Try to keep it professional."

"Fine, fine. I'll tell you later then, Vanitos. Perhaps even let you watch again-"

"Wait-what!?" The man double taked. Instantly looking at the woman and waving his arms back and forth. "No-no-no! It's not what it sounds like. I never-"

"Ceased to enjoy such a thing." Shroud finished him. "I've actually discovered the thrill of having an audience."

"This has got to be the worst moment in my life." The man mumbled in his hands. Soon after, a loud whistle came from the waters. "That's our que. Good luck Phantos." Still not removing his hands from his face.

"It was nice to meet you, Vanitos."

"Good luck." The black one gave his mate a lick. She returned it and nodded.

Lining up, the black one got several dirty looks from the others in the nest. Mostly instructors that he had rejected, insulted, or offended over the few months. "Ready to be embarrassed, stray?" Shroud just snorted at them loudly. Taking his place in line.

"Don't let them get under your scales now." Vanitos warned him.

"Too late."

"Well, then... Don't do anything reckless during the race." The dragon tossed his snout. "Don't give me that. I know you were scheming with Nitaka."

"About the race, change of plans."

"Change of plans?" The man double took.

"On your marks!"

"Shroud? What plans?"

"Just hold on. Move only if I tell you to."

"Get Set!"

"Shroud! Don't do-"

"GO!" The ref blew another whistle and all the dragons took off, instantly following the track to the right (south). All but the black one, who was concentrating in the distance.

"Shroud! Go!"

"Fine." He grumbled. Taking off and going straight forward.

"Wait, the other direction! We're suppose to follow the flags-"

"I'm making my own course!" He hissed. Climbing into the air, and making several air doughnuts to accelerate him. Soon he was reaching mach speeds.

"Shroud!" The man shouted, holding on. Trying to look forward with his goggles, he could see several large sparks into the clouds. "What is...?"

"Just hold on! And I'd advise against touching anything metal!"

"50% of this saddle is metal!" He shouted.

"Well, touch the other 50%!" He hissed back. Flying into the sparks seemed to absorb into the

dragon's body, causing it to almost become one with it and slightly lose its physical form. As well as the man's body. After getting the fifth one, it was like riding a beam of lightning across the sky, almost splitting it in two.

The noise the traveling made was deafening. A loud rumbling thunder that fluttered the two's hearts with raw power. Somehow being able to see through the massive amount of light, Vanitos was almost able to get the sight as if he was the dragon himself. Seeing the ocean down below rapidly be torn away and thrown into the distance. Any forms of islands or icebergs that were left around, nothing but still frames that were there in one instance and gone within a fraction of a blink. Within a few moments, there was land. Thousands of acres being left behind in seconds. Cities he somehow recognized by landmarks and tales passed by as the world itself grew darker and darker. But able to see many of the lights and torches from them below. Along with a long trail of light behind them.

Behind them, the tail of the electrical comet they became, was the only source of light besides the moon. It was the one large stroke of light painted by his partner, for everyone still awake at night to see. One white streak in the black sky of darkness, for the entire world to witness. For the entire world to share, once again, the legend of this dragon.

With a loud roar, Shroud began to speed up. Faster and faster, racing the very light of day and bolting towards the sun in the distance. Soon, the land below them were flooded with an ocean. Reflecting the dusk, but almost reversing the time. The world itself spinning below them, gradually slowing down. And the man could feel himself almost reshape once again on the dragon. "We're... slowing down? Is everything okay, Shroud?"

"Yeah, just want to get something!" The black one pointed off into the distance, a large castle.

"This is not the time for a tourist stop!" The man yelled. Only to get a sharp toss off the dragon's snout as a reply. Slowing down a bit more and more, until the black one came to a near stop on top of the roof of the castle; snatching and ripping off the large flag that was being held over it. Then immediately taking off once again. "The hell-!?"

The dragon didn't bother explaining. Instead threw himself forward again and again, breaking the sound barrier with every doughnut he flew through. Below, the lands were once again passing by at incredible speeds, until Vanitos could see his city in the distance. "Shroud? Shroud? Shroud!!" The man shouted, as the dragon began to dive to the city. Seeing the starting point of the race, as well as a sea of dragons flying towards it as well. The dark purple one in the lead. Just before she reached it, the black blur whipped right in front of her and off into the distance of the ocean. The female reaching the finish line next.

As he used the massive space above the ocean to slow down, the black one landed a bit hard in the courtyard. Both males, catching their breaths and resting their bodies. "...My scales... Are not used to that." The black one said, rubbing his eyes. Feeling the man tap him on the side to lie down. As Vanitos unstrapped himself off and fell to his hands and knees, the man almost threw up.

After a few breaths, he composed himself. "... Would be so pissed... If that didn't look so awesome..." It made the black one smirk a bit, and lightly chuckle through his breaths as well.

"You two realized that you went off course, correct?" A ref said sarcastically, followed by a few others. Only to have the dragon growl at them and throw the flag at their feet. "What is...?"

"That's the..." Phantos took it from the man's hands. Folding it out to see the battered old flag. "Larriendale's flag! I look at this thing every morning. How did you...?"

"I don't give a damn about your race. Even if you disqualify me, I made my point." He growled at them. Laying down and giving Vanitos a sharp look. "Now get this thing off me."

Chapter 6

They were working overtime. Getting used to flying together in the darkness. Vanitos remembered how hard it was to see in the darkness during that race a week ago. And in result, wanted to have some practice flying around in the darkness of night. Often enough, battles tend to happen during the night.

As the dragon flew around quickly between large rocks and cliffs, he felt the slight press into his neck on his right side. Doing an Aileron towards it, the saddle clicked and locked in loudly, stopping and resting at the very back of his neck. Then releasing to the left side.

Coming up to a large wall, the black one soared upwards with it. Almost climbing it without touching it and feeling the saddle once again move around his collar. As they reached the top of it, another press into his right, and the dragon rotated with it again. Parking at the back of his neck as usual. "Okay, I think that's enough for now. Lets rest a bit." Vanitos said.

Searching the grounds for a place to land, Shroud spotted a few lights in the far distance. "...You see that?"

"See what?" The dragon pointed, lightly gliding towards it. "What is that?"

"A village maybe? Bonfire?"

"Feels too cold to be a bonfire. And there's no villages up this far." That statement worried the

dragon, and he started to fly towards it. "Shroud?"

"This doesn't feel right. I'm going in for a closer look."

"Be careful. And try not to make too much noise." As the two glided in closer, they made out several torches of a large group of giants, along with what almost seemed to be a makeshift building. Quietly landing on the other side of a mountain, the dragon crawled around the side of it to spy on them from afar. "What are they doing?"

"No idea." A few moments later, their leader came out of the building. The one with the totems around his neck. Instantly, the dragon almost growled too loudly. Wanting to bolt over there and engage the giant in combat.

"Shroud!" The man whispered loudly. "Calm down. We'll get him later-"

"I could get him now. All of them, right now." He grunted. "Why should I wait-?" Another creature came out of the building. A very dark teal skinned one. Though not as tall as the giants, it still came up to their elbows.

"...What is that?"

"An Ogre Mage?"

"They have Ogres now-?"

"It's an Ogre Mage. Not the same thing, but somewhat similar. They're more unpredictable with sorcery."

"What could they be planning?" His reply was a large grunt from the dragon. "We should go back and tell them." The dragon was quiet for a bit. "Shroud. Lets go back. We don't know what we're getting into right now, and I don't have the proper arrows with me to fight Giants."

"...Fine." He hissed at him. Withdrawing and heading into the night.

The three bodies laid on the grassy floor of a stone shelter. Relaxing after a nice meal of steaks and vegetables, with the fire in the center giving off a nice warmth. "That was a good meal." The dragon muttered. Rolling on his back and stretching a bit. "One nice to sleep off."

"Indeed it was." The right head stated, drinking some fresh water.

"Thank you once again for it." Feyon said graciously, coming up from a drink.

"Yes, thank you Atlas." She pet his neck. "Would you like to be rewarded for your efforts?" She teased him, playing with his ear as it tried to flick her away.

"You're obsessed." He grumbled, trying to nudge her away. "I'm content tonight with nearly anything. But you owe me something first." Another nudge as he tried to motion the woman's hand under his chin. She giggled and started stroking him, getting the black one to purr loudly.

"I suppose I do." She said. Though her back was to them, the Kveldulf started to watch her a bit concerned.

"Perhaps we will give you some privacy." Feyris said. Getting up and heading towards a hole in the shelter's wall.

"Are you sure you don't want to get one as well? I don't mind, really."

"N-no Ma'am. We are fine."

"We shall return in a while."

"You're safe to come back after I roar." The dragon chuckled, even getting the woman to laugh. "Actually, stop for a moment." She looked at him concerned. "Take your pants off."

"My... Pants?" He tossed his snout and closed his eyes, nodding.

"Trust me, I actually thought of this when I locked myself down a few hours ago." She laughed, remembering it. As she did, a large leaf grew over his neck. "Sit on that." Again, she was cautious, but trusted him. "Now start stroking my jaw like last night."

Outside a ways, the Kveldulf carefully traveled through the dark woods. Stopping when they heard the woman's cries. As they stood there to study them, they turned into moans of pleasure, and the beast relaxed. Laying down on the cool grass. "They are a strange couple." Feyon said.

"Yes, but it is not our way to treat them any differently. If they wish to do such things, they shall without our judgement." The other whispered.

"Especially for all they have given us." The two sighed. "I just fear that we might bring a burden onto them."

"As do I. But thankful they have taken us in. However..."

The left head nodded slowly. "We have seen it. The black one is charmed by the woman."

"Though, it is by accident, I'm afraid. The female does not know that she is an Oracle."

"But is it our place to tell her? To inform her of what she has done to him?"

"I struggle with the same question. In the meantime, we cannot let her powers control us either. We must stay away from her touch."

"Yes. If she begins to, she will attach strings."

Feyris nodded. "And we too will become tools of her commands. Even if she asks us to..."

"Give ourselves to her, we will have no choice but to obey."

"The only thing that could possibly break such a connection is..."

"Another Oracle." The right head nodded. "Perhaps this... Tia?"

"It's very possible. From what we've seen, they are often used to help the wounded. If the dragon's story is correct, for a creature that no one is able to understand..."

"Odds are they would give the patient to an Oracle if there is one around."

"If we can find Tia and talk to her."

"Then perhaps we can free Atlas from this spell? And give guidance to Elexus."

"We must follow them, then. Free both of them of her powers."

"It is the least we can do for what they have done for us." The two heads rested in the shadows. Waiting to hear the dragon's roar within the stone shelter.

The black one hated hiding in the dusty mountains. But they were expecting an ambush at some point from the enemy. What seemed to be some sort of dust storm was lasting for hours. "I hate this." The black one grumbled.

"Everyone does. But just try not to go blind for the time being." Vanitos said, still sitting on a nearby rock.

"I mean this saddle. But the waiting around is also killing me. If the giants were using this as a strategy, it's rather effective." It got the man to chuckle. "I'll be glad when this is all over. I'll never have to wear this forsaken thing again."

"It's not that bad. It actually looks good on you."

"Take that back." Shroud grumbled. "It's a scratch on the artwork that is my body."

The man rolled his eyes. "Dragons..." He muttered, only to have the other three dragons in their squad give him a glare. "I mean, uh..."

"Nevermind him, I think the storm is starting to clear." The black one said, getting the attention of everyone there. Slowly, the dust began to settle in, revealing several groups of giants in the distance.

Though they were taking cover behind some hills and mountains. "Showtime." He looked at Vanitos and the two nodded. Quickly getting on the saddle and strapping himself in.

"Formation everyone. And wait for the signal from the lead group." Their human captain said.

"Wait a minute."

"Quiet Stray." A red one snorted. Getting the black one to hiss at him.

"Look on the mountain to the southwest, wyrmling." The red one lightly tossed his snout, doing it anyway. Seeing a small figure on the mountain top. "What do you see?"

"That's... Too small to be a giant."

"Is that... The Ogre Mage?" Vanitos asked, getting a nod from the black one. As a bronze light began to glow from the Mage's staff, a heavy slam into the grounds sent a shockwave throughout it. Cracking the shell of the mountain in several places.

For a few moments, everything was quiet. Then the mountain began to shake as the Ogre teleported away and disappeared. As the rock and soil began split more and more, it began to shape a bit. Ripping out two large apendages from it's shell, and take a more humanoid form. "What the hell is...?" Another dragon asked.

"...It's a Construct. A massive one at that." Shroud answered. As it stepped forward through a very large canyon. "Damnit! It's heading towards the city!"

"Don't jump to conclusions!" The captain said. "It's just another enemy. Our ERT will take care of it-"

"They don't know how to take on something of that size!" The black one hissed.

"We have our roles in the strategy, once we complete that, we'll assist them if needed." Shroud growled at him, but stayed silent as they took off in formation.

"This isn't right-"

"Shroud, I know you like to take on the biggest target you can find and attempt to rip it to shreds, but if we don't obey our orders... Battles go into more chaos than they already are-" The dragon interrupted Vanitos by banking harshly to the right, just barely dodging a swing from a giant. Adjusting the saddle to the dragon's right shoulder, the man took a shot at the giant's face. Landing just beneath the left eye and igniting the steel arrow with a loud bang. Sending small shards of shrapnel into the eye and blinding it.

As the dragon skidded on uneven grounds, he slammed it hard. Sending a sharp spike of earth into the chest of the Giant. Feeling the man adjust the saddle once again to his throat and heard another arrow hit something behind him. As another giant wailed out loud, Shroud flew up to it's shoulders. "I'm just saying that I could do a much better job at it because I'm used to fighting against the odds." Freezing

the moisture in the air quickly, the black one shoved the icicle into the back of the giant's neck. Causing it to flinch a bit, but stand perfectly still. "They barely know how to kill one of these things. They're not warriors-" A quick take-off to dodge a large rock that was hurled.

"What do you mean by that? They're almost constantly thinking of different ways to create weapons." Another shot at a giant in the distance to help out a struggling ally, after the dragon rotated in the air.

"They tend to do that yes, but many of those are just-" Another swing, and the dragon hissed. Vanitos shot it in the face once again, giving the dragon an opening to lunge for the Giant's iron nosering, and shaping it to thrust into the giant's brain. "-Theories. Many of these instructors don't actually have experience with them on the field."

"So, they're more like Scientists?" A loud clap could be heard towards the Colossus, sending winds towards everyone. For a second, the black one thought it took out a dragon, but they were just thrown back into the grounds and rocks. With a loud growl, he began to fly towards it. "Shroud-!?"

"ERT- ON ME!" Shroud roared, getting their attention and withdrawing away from the construct.

"What's this all about!?" The red one asked, snorting loudly.

"You and your ill performance." The black one snapped, getting a hiss from the others. "You don't know what you're doing-"

"Like you could do any better, stray-"

"Shut up! You call yourself an Emergency Response Team? You need to work together to take that thing down!"

"We have been. It's not our fault that our arrows don't do anything to that thing-"

"Not with humans!"

"Shroud?"

"You need to work together with your Atonements! Sync with one another!"

"And what would you know about Atonements?" A bronze one snorted.

"Because he is all of them." Nitaka shoved herself into the circle. "You idiots have just been too blind to see it."

"Even I didn't believe it when Nitaka told me, but it made sense after a while." Phanto said. Getting the black dragon to glare at his mate. Only to have the purple one shrug her wings a bit.

"It just came out."

"Sure it did." Shroud grumbled. "You need to follow my lead to bring that Colossus down. We

have one of each Atonement here-

"We don't have a Gold." The white one said, looking around.

"Then I'll substitute for that. It's my least used, but I'm still good with it." The black one took a deep breath, getting his thoughts together. "The first thing we need to do is immobilize it. It seems to be attracted to the city itself, so we'll need to snare it by wrecking it's legs."

"Ice won't hold it."

"But earth will. If you Force spikes from under the foot, you can lock it down. Long enough for Articuno-

"Arty'Kukai." The white one said, unimpressed.

"Whatever! Long enough for Whitey there to start freezing the Knee solid. Nitaka, after he gives the signal, I want you to shatter it with a sonic attack."

"Got it."

"While they're doing that, I need Silver to snare it the same way. Make metal spikes under it with arrow-tips. But only after the first foot is stuck. It can still break free if one of it's legs are still functional. After you do that, Green, support the snare, then get some vines or something around the shin and the thigh. Red, you superheat the knee until it's about ready to melt, and Blue; you and Green can start pulling it apart."

"How?" The blue one curled her neck.

"That thing is made out of a mountain. There's bound to be an air pocket somewhere, and when Reddy starts boiling that Knee, it's bound to try to escape. That's your pressure advantage. Now, all constructs that move on their own have a brain somewhere. After we knock it down, we need to find that brain. It's usually in the head or the chest."

"And what will you be doing while we do this?"

"I'll be stealthing you guys and distracting it. But after you start moving, it's going to be hard to keep you invisible. They'll know something's up." He motioned towards the giants. "And they won't let us break their precious toy. That's where you humans come in. Shoot from afar if you need to, but if any come close-

"But our arrows can't stop the boulders that they throw." The black one sighed. Forcing his paw into the ground and pulling out another Earth Bow.

"Vanitos." Shroud gave him the weapon. "You're on Rock duty. You have Nine shots for now. Keep me updated if you need more."

"Alright." He said, nervously taking the thing.

"Understood? Move out!" The black one shouted, changing his scales gold and making everyone there invisible by letting light pass through their bodies. As they took off in groups, Shroud went straight for the creature. "You might want to hold on for this one!" Once he felt a firm grip on his spines, he revealed himself to the construct. Spinning in front of it and making a large axe-like blade with the wind and striking it in the Colossus' head.

Though it didn't seem to do much more than a large scratch, it got the Mountain's attention. Stopping in place and going for another clap with its massive hands. "Shroud!" Vanitos screamed at him to move, and the dragon pushed out of the two hands. But the clap itself generated a massive force near it, almost throwing the Gold one off balance and feeling something give on the Saddle a bit. "Be more careful!" The man scolded him, concluding that he was still attached to the dragon.

"Quit being a Kresskre." He snorted. Seeing the Colossus go for another clap at the Golden one. Only to stop for a moment and almost look down. The first team got the snare in, now revealed from Shroud's invisibility. Trying to struggle the foot free, the second team got the other leg snared as well. What almost seemed like a loud cry came from the construct, getting the attention of most of the giants. "Break Teams, Go! Humans, get ready to defend!"

"I somehow think that this almost should be in reverse." Vanitos complained, sliding the saddle for a better aim at a rock in mid air. The backblast of the conjured bow sent another snap on the dragon's neck. "Forgot how powerful these things were."

"Just warn me when you're going to fire one. If I can spread that knockback, it'll be easier on both of us."

"Alright, heads up." He fired another one, and the dragon rolled with it in mid air.

"Come on, what's taking so long!?" The now Black one hissed.

"It's too thick, I can't freeze it that quickly!" Grumbling loudly, Shroud changed to white and started on the back side of the leg. Freezing the shell quickly.

"That should do it! Withdraw and shatter it Nitaka!" The four dragons did, as the humans fired arrows at a distant group of giants. They were not close enough to take them down, but enough to distract them and slow them. With a massive roar, the dark purple one sent most of the shockwave towards the right leg of the construct. Cracking it deeply, then shattering it from the inside out. The weight of the Colossus falling backward assisted in the amputation of the left leg, and those four dragons withdrew as well.

"Shroud!" Vanitos warned him before he took another shot. "I have two left!"

"Discard it for now." The dragon said, landing and making another one for him. "Nine again, take out anything that gets close as well-"

"Shroud!" Another dragon shouted. Getting him to toss his snout.

"Now what?" The red one pointed towards the legs of the construct, beginning to reform slowly. "Damnit! You guys take care of the giants, I'll do what I can with it! Try to lure them over there!"

"Why?" The blue one asked.

"Because the rest of the dragons will be able to flank them!" A few of them tried to look past the giants. "Just do it!" The black one hissed, bolting for the prone Colossus.

"What are you planning to do? -Heads up!" Another shot nearly threw the dragon off course. Hearing a few clinks of metal around his neck began to worry him.

"Improvise. Like I always do. But we need to find a way to kill this thing!" Landing on the Mountain's body, Shroud shoved a paw into it. As the creature almost screamed, the dragon ripped out a large Morning Star. Made from solidified Sound, giving the impression of glass and built for two hands. As the construct shifted its arms up for another clap, Shroud shouted. "Vanitos! Aim at an arm!" Sliding the saddle down at the throat of the dragon, he fired a shot at the Colossus' arm. Blowing a hole through it, but not enough to destroy it. "Close enough!"

The black one jumped up and slammed the melee weapon into the construct's head. The massive impact causing its shell to break apart with an excessive roar, nearly making the dragon feel a bit woozy. Leaping off of the head, he spun around and landing one more heavy blow to it. Leaving the weapon to stick inside.

Landing, Shroud quickly turned Bronze and created a divider of dirt before the weapon exploded. Sending shards of the construct's head and vibrations in all directions. Digging himself out quickly, the two observed what was left of the Mountain. For a few moments, it was still, but eventually its arms began to move once again. "You've gotta be kidding me!" Vanitos said in disbelief.

"It's gotta be in the chest then!" The dragon grumbled. Shoving another paw into the ground, and pulling out a large Molten bow. "You might want to move to the back of my neck for this one." He snorted, taking off and spinning for the human's sake. Though he heard the saddle move a bit, something was off with it. Landing once again on the Colossus' chest, the black one aimed down, and began a heavy draw.

"Shroud! Wait-wait-wait!" The man's voice still came from under the dragon's head.

"Didn't I tell you to move?"

"The Saddle is jammed! And you can't fire that this close!" Another loud grumble from the larger one. "Get everyone to-" The dragon moved backwards just before the Mountain's arm came around to swat it.

"There's no time for that!" Shroud bolted farther away. Making the draw while he was still in air and firing it during a hover. The large red arrow struck the rocky chest and blew it wide open. Revealing some sort of crystal inside it. Though the crystal was cracked. "Everybody! Fall Back At Once!" Many of

them looked at either the black one or the Colossus. "Do it! NOW!" Another small explosion from the chest sent a large beam of energy out of the cracking crystal, almost hitting the Black one in the neck, but severing the two males apart. Feeling a large sting on his neck, he went down to reach his falling partner. Trying to catch him before the man fell.

One more massive explosion and a bright light almost blinded Shroud. Just almost reaching Vanitos before the force of the explosion pushed him spiraling away. Though the sound deafened the dragon, he swore he could hear the human scream out his name one last time.

That smell again. Instandly bring Atlas to that dreaded barn. Only this time, it felt... Warm. Almost hot. "Mother of Bahamut..." He grumbled loudly. Getting a giggle from the woman in white. "What did I do to deserve this?"

"Deserve what, exactly?" She playfully questioned him. "Aren't you happy to see me?"

"A little, but not in this place. Everytime I do, it feels like... You're not real." He studied her for a moment. "It means I haven't found you yet, and I'm going to wake up somewhere else."

"Where else though? Where do you wake up when you fall asleep here?"

"I don't fall asleep here, I just... Disappear from it." He looked around the area a bit. "Where is this?"

"It's the barn, silly." Another giggle put his ears back. "Where do you think it is?"

"But it's... Not." The dragon felt a pain inside his head again. "What happened to you last time?"

"What do you mean?"

"You... Kept screaming at me. Calling my name like you were in danger."

"I've never been in danger when you're around. You protect me, like a Hero." The word seemed to ache his heart.

"I'm not..." The woman just gave him a sad smile. "Who are you?"

"Me?" She asked, almost laughing. "I'm Tia. You remember me Shroud."

"Shroud?" He double taked at her. "You've... Never called me that."

"Shroud? I didn't call you Shroud... That's such a dark name." She looked at him a bit sadly. "I suppose it's not much better than Devil or Haytre." Another double take. "Is something wrong, Atlas?"

"...How?"

The black one woke up purring. Feeling the woman once again snuggled in his neck, as well as something furry on his side. The rough fur got him more awake, to the point where he was concerned with it. "M'for the love of... Don't tell me you're here to pester me again." He half yawned. "M'you're such a pain..."

"Atlas?" The woman moaned awake. Moving away from the dragon as he began to raise up from his back. "What's wrong?"

Looking down towards his haunches where the fur was felt revealed the Kveldulf, sleeping on the other side of the dragon and away from the doorway. "M'oh... It's you." He mumbled, laying down with a thud and stretching out a bit. "M'nevermind. Go back to sleep for a bit." Getting a faint response from the two heads on the far side of the black one. And for another hour, they rested.

Shifting once again got the two smaller beings to wake up as well. "I should make some breakfast." The dragon said, changing into a blue and once again cleaning himself off. "And stop making so many messes."

"That's half my fault though." The woman giggled.

"Half? It's completely your fault." He snorted. "You're just taking advantage of me until I make a mess. Now what do you want for breakfast?"

"We're up for anything really."

"Besides more talk about your bodily functions and attraction of such things." Atlas tossed his snout at the White one.

"You like it and you know it. Right Elexus?"

"Right boss. And they would enjoy it more if they got involved." She giggled, getting a pair of whimpers from the beast. "Even if you wanted to play around with At-"

"Annnnd-we're moving the conversation forward. I feel like Bacon and orange juice. But first I need to find something to hunt. Will you two be okay here alone?"

"Yes. We will be fine." Feyris said without a pause. As the dragon nodded and took off, the Kveldulf began to get up and stretch. Overlooking the white mess on the bed.

"We're not sure we want to know exactly what that is."

"Oh this? It's just the seed in his stones. It actually tastes pretty good." The two heads gave her a very odd look. "I thought the same thing really, but he really does taste good."

"There's an awful lot of it."

"Considering his size, we suppose it makes sense."

"How much do you guys give out?" The two looked at each other and lowered their heads. Getting the woman to giggle. "Embarrassed?"

"A bit..."

"We're not used to such conversations."

"He did the same thing really. Whimpering, getting his ears to turn purple, trying to change the subject."

"He still tries to do that."

"As a witness from yesterday."

"But what I can't understand is why are you males so embarrassed about it?" Elexus asked. Getting some leftover water from the other night. "What I mean is, Atlas described the act as a gift. Giving pleasure to another person, the right person... Or something. Why is it so embarrassing for you?"

The two looked at each other and sighed. "We... Don't have an answer for you, really."

"In our culture, it's viewed as a gift as well. But alot of that has gotten... Stale."

"Stale?"

"When we were... Forced to." A little bit of pain shot in her eyes.

"After that, the act of such a thing tends to remind us..."

"Oh... I'm sorry." The two nodded but remained quiet. Soon hearing a thud outside and the stone walls sink down into the grounds once again. "Welcome back, Atlas."

"Found a Gazelle... I think. But either way, we're eating it." She giggled at that as the two prepared the meal.

Chapter 7

"When a few of these plates under the planet's crust begin to shift, often enough it changes the pressure deep within it. Causing some of the gasses, ash, and quite often Magma down below to start to rise through the cracks the shift causes." The dragon explained. "From there, you start to get the eruption, which looks like a large stream of black smoke coming from the mountain."

"And that's what makes a Volcano?" Elexus asked, trying to understand it. "Can you make one?"

The two creatures double taked at her. "Here?" All three asked, getting her to giggle.

"I suppose I could. But it would take a very very long time. And I can't really control where it goes, so many things would be in danger to it. This entire forest could be set on fire very easily from it, and even nearby villages would probably suffer." The black one sighed. "There's a reason why the lands around them are often dead looking and deserted."

"I guess that would make sense." The woman said, awkwardly. Getting a nudge from the dragon.

"I'll take you to see one someday. When I know everything will probably be alright to make one active." She nodded. "I might even make some Volcanic Lightning for you. Dangerous, but prett-" A sharp pinch was felt just under the dragon's left wing. Causing him to growl loudly at it and find a bolt stuck in his side.

"Atlas?" Elexus worried when he turned bronze and made a large rock wall to cover them. Then another farther back to his right. "What's wrong? What happened?"

"I smell hunters. Most likely the ones that were tracking us." Feyris growled.

"Go hide. Feyon, keep her safe!" He leanded down for a moment.

The two heads looked at each other. "...Alright. Please be careful." And the Kveldulf lead the woman to the second barricade.

Turning Green, Atlas got a vine to pull out the bolt from his side. Though it still hurt alot, it was much easier to move without it sticking out. Trying to track where the hunters were was difficult. They were very soft on their feet and often made noises of animals to keep themselves hidden. "Fine." The dragon grumbled. "Two can play at that game, as cheap as this is going to be." He changed to a Gold, then made himself invisible.

Though he couldn't be seen by them, Atlas' steps were quite obvious whenever he took them. Moving very slowly around the large rock wall, he could see one of the hunters begin to creep up to it.

Pulling out a very small ball, and tossing it over the wall after cracking. Omitting a very strong odor that almost made the dragon woozy. As a thick smoke began to form, the Hunter began to quicken his steps. Drawing a short bow and aiming at the other side of the wall. Only to see nothing but the smoke.

A loud snap behind him got the man's attention, and he screamed at the large jaws that bit at his body. Snapping it in several places and then disappearing with him into the forest. Another few more animal sounds for communication, and the dragon could almost pin-point where the other two were. There was one in the far back on top of a small hill, hidden in the bushes. It was a good sniper spot really, and most likely the one that shot the dragon.

As much as he wanted to growl at the thought of it, Atlas let it go. He felt like he was having a hard time to breathe. As if his throat was tightening up. (Means I don't have much time, odds are they would be using poison to take something like me out. Suffocating... My second least favorite way to die, up there next to Famine.) He rolled his eyes.

Quietly making a bow out of glass and lightning, though it really wasn't that quiet, the dragon took aim towards where the sniper was. Or at least thought it was. Thinking he best make sure before he actually took the shot, Atlas created a light-based clone of himself to appear in the middle of the forest. Roaring at the small hill.

The bushes instantly shifted and another bolt was shot out. Taking his own shot, Atlas fired the glass arrow. The impact itself sent out a loud bang, and deafed anyone that wasn't hit by it, while turning the sniper inside out and making a horrible mess.

Though the sound itself was hard on the dragon, it was even harder on the last hunter, making the man stagger. Feeling his throat tighten even more, he changed to a Bronze and sent a rocky spike through the man's chest. Hoping that was the final one. After seeing no more movement in the forest, the black one began to stagger towards the others.

"Atlas? Atlas!" The woman called out, meeting him halfway.

"Elex-" The large one coughed. Trying his best to keep his airway opened. "Don't le-"

"What's wrong!? What can I do!?"

"He's probably been poisoned by them..." Feyon said sadly.

"It's a very fast acting one, found on plants to the far south. Even if we had an antidote, there wouldn't be any way to help him in time."

"No!" Elexus whispered loudly, holding onto the dragon's head. "Don't go Atlas! You can't!"

Several more coughs. "Stay h-" Struggling to breathe, his vision began to fade. As he heard the woman's cries, he felt his heart take a few last beats as it struggled to keep going. Soon, his body was limp.

The Kveldulf lowered his head in sorrow. "...This is... Our fault."

"They were probably after us..."

"...We are Sorry." They whispered. Though worried about the woman's touch, they placed a paw on her back. Only to have her immediately dive in between their heads and cry loudly.

He could hear her cries. Wails and roars of pain as they seemed to echo through his head. He knew what it was, but was fighting with himself to get awake. (Come on! Get up!) A few coughs from his burning lungs. (They're killing her! Get up!) Groans from him shifting his body. (SAVE HER!) His purple eyes flew open, and he forced himself up. It was still dusty and foggy, very hard to see. But he could make out silhouettes of several figures. "...No..." He whispered, getting up and staggering over to them. "No!"

As several giants were beating on a single dragon, the black one dove to cover her. In turn taking the blows directly on his back. The first one nearly knocked the wind out of him, the second felt like it wrecked his wing. Knocking his shoulder out of place, then a crack on his skull. "I..." A sharp pain on his lower half almost made it numb. "Won't..." Another on his neck. "Let..." A large swing on his other wing, but was caught by the dragon's claw. "You..." His breaths began to get heavier and heavier. "Hurt..." As the giant tried to pull his weapon away, it couldn't break the dragon's grip. Even after taking a few more shots from the others. "Her..." Several sparks of lightning covered the large club, giving a harsh sting to the giant's hand and forcing it to let go of the weapon. "Anymore!" The club exploded into a brilliant light, pushing the other giants back a few steps and blinding them a bit.

As they began to refocus, the black one was constantly shifting colors. More and more rapidly his breaths became louder. As one of the giants went in for another swing, the dragon roared loudly at him. Mending all the colors into one iridescent pattern, and shattering the club in mid swing.

Shroud then shoved his right paw into the giant's chest, feeling the very bloodflow begin to stiffen within it. As it tried to pry him off, the veins in its arms began to bulge out and solidify. Soon breaking through the thick skin in sharp spikes and ripping the flesh apart. As pieces of the blood and iron began to melt quickly, it gathered just above his left paw. Forming a large orb that seemed to shine a blackish red.

Letting his right paw go, Shroud slammed the orb towards the two other giants that wielded weapons. It kept its spherical shape until it came in close contact with them, then splitting off into several large shards that seemed to shoot outward as they touched the ground. The slightest touch of it seemed to freeze the giants in place, as the darkness seemed to hold a charge. Sparks of red lightning jumped across the large black spikes, and with a loud roar from the dragon, it shattered loudly with the giants. Leaving nothing left of them but shards.

the Iridescent one then looked at the unarmed giant, hissing at it and getting it to take a step back before flying after it. Within fractions of a second, the dragon rammed into the giant's skull and knocked it down on it's back. Grabbing a hold of the forehead, Shroud slammed the head into the ground a few times, then forced his right paw into the top of the skull. Causing the larger one to cry out for a moment before it's lungs collapsed. Grabbing a hold of something inside, the dragon began to forcefully tug on it. The giant's ribcage seemed to break inward, it's long legs began to shorten towards it's midsection. With one hard pull, a large greatsword came from the giant's body. Made from it's own bone and sinew.

Taking a few breaths, the dragon scouted for a new target. Seeing a few in the distance, he immediately took off in a blind rage. Coming to the first giant and giving it a heavy downward slice across it's chest. Though alot of blood was let out of the larger being, it seemed to be inhaled by the conjured weapon. Soaking the red liquid up before it even touched the ground. Leaving the first one behind, the dragon took another swing at one that was trying to defend against him with the club. Only to have the greatsword cut it cleanly, and once again gashing it across the chest.

Going after the other two in the group with a downward cut, and an upward slice with one fluid motion. Then landing in the center, slamming the weapon into the ground. As a large bone spike tied to a muscled cord shot out from the sword, it seeked out and drove into the wounds the dragon made. Pulling all four of them off balance and dragging them with immense force towards the weapon. As they tried to fight against the pain and get away from the weapon, it began to wail loudly and darkly. Shriveling up the four and draining them of what strength they had. Shroud left it behind heading towards one last group that could be seen.

Landing hard in the center of the four, he threw out pressure from all directions and knocked them down on one or two knees. Then quickly sending out large vines to wrap around their necks and slamming them straight into the ground. Large pillars of earth quickly followed up and uppercutted them, making it easier for the dragon to slowly lift them up with massive winds. Combusting them and sending a large charge of electricity through their bodies, he slammed them into the grounds. Again. And again. One last time where they rested on metal spikes. Draining the warmth from their bodies, Shroud roared loudly. Shattering them, and finally putting an end to the giants.

A few deep breaths to catch himself, the Iridescent one felt like something was wrong. He swore he could see large cracks in the sky, almost growing bigger like broken glass. A large woosh got his attention, as he turned around to see another large rock being thrown at him. Within one second, the dragon made a metal shield and parried it away. Only to see the Giant's Leader in the distance.

A loud wail of five giants roaring in pain and a loud snap of many bones breaking got the Leader's attention. Shroud then charged it. Slamming it's face with the shield and staggering it. Making a large rock wall behind it, the dragon punched it hard, forcing the edge of the shield into the giant's neck and back up into the wall. Though the shield did not go through the neck, instead it was morphed around it. Locking it against the wall.

As Shroud let go of the weapon, he roared loudly into the Giant's face. Kicking off of it, he

slammed the ground once again. Making two long rails of iron leading to the captive's neck. Flying the five mile distance quickly to the other side, the Iridescent one charged one rail with a positive charge, and the other one with a negative. Digging into the grounds, he made a very large Volcanic Bolt, and slammed it between the rails. Holding it steady, against the construct's will. With a few heavy breaths, and step backwards, Shroud made three air doughnuts. Winding his arm up and throwing his paw through, it connected the end of the bolt with massive force. Sending the projectile down the rails with immense speed and exploding on the Leader's neck on contact.

The force it created was unreal. To the point where it almost sounded like it cracked the sky before ripping apart the entire canyon, the lands around it, and a few nearby mountains. Throwing the dragon out of his rampage and back into a mountain. Where he fell once again unconscious.

There was no telling how long he was out for. The darkness covered the sky to the point where he thought he might be blind again. Coughing through his dry throat, Atlas rose up. Trying to remember what happened to him.

As the clouds began to part, shining some of the moonlight down, he slowly began to recognize the forest he was in. Most of it came back to him when he seen the two rock walls. How they were attacked by hunters, and the poisonous bolt they shot him with. Swelling up his throat to where he could not breathe. And he remembered... "Elexus!" He whispered loudly. Then began to call her name through the darkness.

"Damn girl. I thought I told her to stay here." The black one grumbled. But something within his heart ached to find her. Visions of her being taken or hurt began to flood his mind. "I-I need to find her... I must protect her!" He took off to the skies, constantly calling her name out to see if he could find any signal through the black forest that she remained down there. A few lights began to show in the distance, and he bolted for it. Landing heavily within a large opening of a village.

"Elexus!" He called out several times. "Where are you!?" Something caught his muzzle, her scent. Faint, but recently was around here. Following it the best he could lead him to a building. The trail leading inside. "Elexus? Are you in there? Come out. It's me, Atlas!" He tried to stick his head in the door, eventually breaking it opened a bit and causing a few people outside to cry out in fear. "Where are you?"

"E-excuse me?" A voice he could understand came from behind him. As he pried his head out of the doorway, he looked at the black haired woman dressed in a familiar white gown. Looking at it hurt his head. "Are... You alright?"

"Fine. I'm just looking for someone. Her name is Elexus, brown hair, terrible clothing, ignorant." It made the woman chuckle a bit. "I know she was here, I can smell it. But she's not answering me. I

need to find her!"

"O-okay. Just relax a bit."

"She could be in danger!" He searched through the crowds of people from a distance rapidly, until the woman caught his muzzle.

"Just relax." And he felt compelled to do so. "Lay down and rest for now. I'm sure she's fine." Once again, he obeyed. "My name is Shawn. What is yours?"

"She calls me Atlas."

"Atlas. Okay, tell me what happened."

He grunted at the pain in his head a bit. "We were... Attacked. By hunters. I took them out, but the poison got to me. She probably left after I died. She doesn't know though."

"Know what?" She asked, giving him a strange look.

"That I can't die. Well, can't stay dead. She's probably mortified. I need to find her."

"It's okay. We will. Why were you looking in here?" She pointed at the broken door. "You said you found her scent?"

"Yes. She was in this building."

The woman looked over at a few people. "Did you have someone here today? Brown hair, poor clothing?" The dragon looked over at the people as they nodded and said something he couldn't understand. "He said he seen her. She sold him some kind of amulet-"

"The Amethyst? The one with the golden frame?"

"Yes. Do you happen to know where she was heading to?" Another look at the man and he pointed to a road. Immediately, the dragon rose up and took to the skies, following that path as fast as he could.

Coughing out dirt and dust woke him up. Though dark, he was able to see the large crater that was slowly filling with water from the ocean. Everything was buried in mounts of rock and chunks of earth. And though dark, a large moon seemed to illuminate the dead lands.

Five Finger Death Punch - Wrong Side Of Heaven

Getting up, his entire body felt frail. Worn out and exhausted. But he pushed on, trying to remember where she laid. After a few minutes of searching, he spotted something in the distance. Staggering towards it, Shroud collapsed onto her body. Not a single movement remaining within it, and no life. It was now hollow, and it made his heart sink to the point where it nearly drowned.

But he didn't want her to be left here. Slowly, he began to dig her out of the debris and begin carrying her body on his back and shoulders. Even though his body felt like it was going to give out, he carried on. Taking it one heavy step at a time.

Through the dark canyon was the hardest part. Slipping halfway down it and falling head first. After picking his mate back up, Shroud began to walk north once again. But something caught his eye in the distance. A shine and a sparkle, then several.

His collar. What was left of it anyway. Following the trail of the dreaded thing lead to the body of his late partner. The one he could not catch in time. With a heavy breath, the black one picked him up with a single paw, and began to hobble towards the city.

Hours felt like days without the sun. Slowly getting closer and closer to the lights in the distance. Once he was spotted by some of the guards, they came out to ask him what happened. But the dragon ignored them. Walking straight up to Vanitos' family and setting his body down before them. Their faces would haunt him from this moment on.

As much as he wanted to, the black one couldn't speak. He had no words to say. He couldn't tell them that he was unable to keep her husband alive. He couldn't tell her that Vanitos wanted to see her in a wedding dress. Shroud wasn't the Legend everyone thought he was. He wasn't the Hero that everyone expected him to be. Instead, the dragon carried on. Exiting the town by foot, and making the long trip to his very home.

By the time he made it, the dawn was approaching. The last one he wished he would ever see; the last one with his mate. Laying her down into the grass within his cave, Shroud licked her between the eyes once again. Eyes that would never open. "...You're with First Place now." He whispered. "Nitaka... We both knew it would always end this way." As he laid with her, embracing her once more, the walls revealed the eight conjured swords that he created. Thrown into the walls around him. "...I love you." He whispered over the loud ringing.

Moments later, the loud explosion could be heard at the funeral of the men who fell that night. Shining brighter than the sun, and creating large fissures throughout the land. Tearing up the meadow the black one once slept in, and sending a threatening blastwave towards the dragon nest. An outburst that could even be heard and felt from Larriendale. The black dragon's final mark on his planet.

The two kept walking through the dark forest. Though the Kveldulf could see well, they noticed

that the woman could not. Occasionally tripping and stumbling over the uneven grounds. She looked so sad, that it actually hurt the two. "...Elexus..." Feyon whispered.

"I know it's tough now, but things will get better with time." She remained quiet.

"Once we inform Tia of what happened, you can start a new-"

"Feyon..." The two stared at her for a few moments. "...Have you ever not want to be what you are?"

"What do you mean?"

"...Humans enslaved me, for as long as I can remember. They rejected me as if I was somehow less than them. They also hunted your kind, enslaved them. And killed..." She choked a bit. "They're... Horrible, aren't they?"

"Some of them are, yes..."

"But not all of them. You are not..."

"But I'm still human. I just wish I was something else. Anything else..."

"Elexus..." The two stopped, looking backwards sharply.

"...What's wrong?" The woman asked, only to hear something in the distance rather thunderous. Then something large fly over the forest. As the dark creature roared the woman's name in the distance, her heart raced. "...Atlas?"

"He's alive?" Both heads looked at each other.

"Atlas!" She called to him, running towards him. Shouting at the top of her lungs. Hearing him roar once again and getting closer. "Down here!"

"Elexus!" He roared. Landing hard and recklessly plowing through the forest. Once he spotted her, the dragon bolted for the woman.

"Atlas!" She shouted through the forest, seeing the black one slide to a stop in front of her. The woman grabbed a hold of his head tightly, as he held her with his large paws. "You're alive!"

"Yes. I am." He panted. Just enjoying their moment together. "Are you safe?"

"Yes, I'm fine. I just thought you were..." She looked at him a bit sadly. "How...?"

"I..." He got that look in his eye once again, trying to hide it.

"Atlas... Tell me. Please."

He sighed, nodding faintly. "...Elexus. I can't stay dead." The woman looked at him puzzled.

"You... Were right. I died when we first met, when you slept on my leg. But I only stay dead for a few hours."

"So, back there when you were poisoned?" Feyris asked, the white creature still acting a little cautious.

"Yeah... I was trying to tell you to stay, so we wouldn't get lost. I started to trace you down to that village, and found out that you sold that gemstone."

"I'm sorry... I just couldn't look at it anymore, knowing you were gone." She hugged him again. "Wait... Is this what you meant by Curse?" Pain shot through his eyes, knowing what this would lead to.

"...Elexus... I'm tired of being forced to start over time and time again..."

"And... Tia...?" She almost cried.

"...Promised me that she would help me... End this. Stop me from coming back." He knew what was to come next; either a cry on his shoulder, or another punch in the snout.

"...So, this entire time..." The woman sniffed. "You were trying to find her... Because you...?"

The dragon lowered his head and gave her a slow nudge. "...Elexus. You need to realize that this needs to stop. One way or another-"

Sonic Syndicate - Jailbreak

"No..." She cupped his jaw.

"Elexus..."

"You can't... Atlas, you can't! You can't leave me again! Please!"

"Elexus..." He sighed.

"Let's just go away! Far away from everything! From everyone! Make a place to call our own, where we don't have to be treated as slaves or hunted like animals! Atlas, please! Don't make me lose you again!"

The dragon whimpered at her and sighed once again, quietly. "...Okay, Elexus. I'll make you a place to call your own. Give you a place to call home, and I won't leave you."

"Even if it means... Not finding Tia?"

"Even if it means not finding Tia." Another nudge as he looked into her eyes. "I'll do this for you."

It was hot. Hotter than he remembered. As if he was standing in a burning building, but the barn didn't seem to be on fire. "What's... Wrong?" He muttered out, getting a very odd expression from the woman in white. "Why do I...?"

"Keep waking up? It's probably just the medicine keeping you awake. You'll be okay, Atlas. I promise." She said, petting him.

"It's... Hot in here." The black one stated, getting up. "Why is it getting hot?"

"Relax. It'll be alright. For now, I just need you to think. Concentrate."

"On what?" A sharp pain echo'd in his head.

"**Atlas!**" The scream got him to flinch. "I need you to concentrate. Okay? For me. Think about those words."

"What... words?"

"The ones yo-**Stop!**-u told me. Before you went off to help -**Atlas!**-Bartan."

"Stop screaming!" He growled loudly. Startling her. "Now what words?"

"Come on, concentrate. You can do this. The one about the River."

"River...?" He grunted against the pain. Like trying to focus on a far away picture that was very blurry.

"When Two Rivers..."

"...When Two Rivers Run Together... They Can Never Be Disctinct Agai-"

"**Stop!**" Another loud growl from the dragon. "Good. Now what was the next line?"

"Line...?"

"Yes. The next-**Atlas!** one. You need to remember."

"Why?"

"Atlas... Please. You're almost out. Just concentrate."

With a heavy grunt, the dragon braced his head. Breathing harder as the room seemed to get hotter. "...Locked..."

"Yes, keep going."

"Locked In A Dream..."

"To...?"

"Filter Out Your... Polluted Stream-"

"**Atlas!**"

"Damnit! Stop Screaming At Me!" He roared. Again frightening the woman. Looking around at the walls of the barn, they almost seemed to be melting as if they were wax. "Where am I? Who are you!?"

"Atlas-**Atlas!** You need to concentrate. Come on. Please." Another loud roar from the black one.

"You already said that!"

"Atlas. You need to -**Stop!**" Fed up, the dragon shoved his paw into the ground and ripped out a metal blade, cutting a sharp gash into the melting wall.

"You're not real! None of this is real!" Another swing at the other wall. "Why can't I-?"

"**Atlas!**" The scream infuriated him once again, going for a heavy overhead swing at the woman. "**Atlas! Stop!**" It was a sharp demand that seemed to freeze him in place and shatter the fog in his mind. Stopping and breathing, he began to look around to witness a town on fire around him. And just below his blade... Tia. The woman in white. Holding her palm up to him. Stern, but a bit frightened.

"...Tia?" He almost whispered. Getting a faint smile from her, and a loud ringing from his weapon. Double taking at it, he quickly threw it in the air and covered her with his body. Shielding her from the weapon's explosive debris.

"Atlas..." She softly said. Placing a small hand on his chest.

"...What...?" He overlooked the town once again. "Who did this?"

"...You did." The black one looked at her. "What do you remember?"

He grunted, holding his head. "...I remember... A Girl."

"A girl, good. Who is she?"

"...A slave. She was someone I tried to help."

"Did she do anything to you? Feed you something? Touch you alot?"

"...Yes." He grunted, trying to remember. "Tia...?"

"Atlas..." She looked at him sadly. "I think you were charmed by this woman."