

Chapter 16: Zeditha

At the light of dawn shining through the closed blinders of the windows, Kathia woke up and removed herself from the covers of her bed. The first thing she had on her mind was the state and position of her father's construction company, Rittevon Inc. She wondered how its business was doing recently since the new law changes. Some of the dragons they had probably went from owned slaves to hired employees. The girl frowned at the thought, because that would mean some of earned cash would go to these overgrown lizards, while leaving less for herself and the schools they funded. But perhaps maybe that wasn't the case. So just to check, Kathia went over to the cordless telephone that was on her dresser and picked up the receiver off its base. She dialed the company's number onto the receiver's buttons. Then she pressed the receiver against her right ear and waited for the person on the other end to answer. But instead of the receptionist, a voice machine delivered the bad news to her, *"We are sorry to inform you that the Rittevon Construction Company is no longer in service as the Aquarian Army has taken over the city's jobs of building construction. It has been great pleasure doing business for the city of Windfall, formerly known as Cypress, for all these years. Thank you and have a wonderful day."*

Kathia slowly put the receiver back in its face as the feeling of shock and despair swelled up in her. She couldn't believe what she has just heard; her father's company, no longer functioning now that it was obsolete compared to what the Aquarians can do. It was bad enough she no longer had parents and a car to drive, now both her source of income and her intern job was lost as well. Every day it seems like the dragons were taking away things that were important to her life. Who knows how long it would be until she lost everything?

A savory smell of bacon and sausages cooking came into the girl's room as Mrs. Merryweather called from downstairs, "Mistress Kathia, breakfast is ready!"

The girl looked at the open door leading to the hallway and stairs with a frown. With the terrible news in her mind, she didn't have much of an appetite. But at the same time, she didn't want to keep her maid waiting after all the work she slaved over the stove. "I'm coming," said Kathia. She left her room and made her way down the stairs to the dining room. There she saw a plate of bacon, scrambled eggs, toast, and a pair of turkey sausages on the plate accompanied by a glass of orange juice sitting on the table. The girl pulled the chair out, so she could sit at the table and eat. She could only eat a little at a time as she wondered how she was going to find another way to make money to survive. Getting a different job would suffice and probably be easy too, since some of the employees died in the massacre. She didn't want a job in the fast food service or a retail store, since Kathia felt that an upper class girl like herself was above that. Perhaps job searching online would get her the job that fits her the best. But the job she needs hopes that it does involve working with or for dragons, since she felt they didn't deserve anything good after everything that's happened. Something like a job in data entry for example would be good for her.

Mrs. Merryweather stopped by the doorway and said to her mistress, "Mistress Kathia, don't forget that

you have to meet your friend, Jason, at the backlot to show off your magic spells."

Kathia turned her attention away from the food to look at her maid. She hid her stress beneath a calm tone to avoid worrying the woman, "Thanks for the reminder, Mrs. Merryweather."

"You're welcome, my lady," the maid said as she went away from the door. Kathia thought about the nice black man and wondered if he could help her with her problems. Getting a bit hopeful, the girl ate her breakfast a little bit faster this time and drank her orange juice, so that she could have some more time to practice her spells until then.

Aeolus woke up to the smell of blood and fresh meat near him. His eyes opened to see Zylanon's feet standing before him. The leader looked up and noticed the two brocket deer the shadow dragon held in his mouth. The shadow dragon dropped them before his leader and said, "Eitri and I went to do some morning hunting and brought the horde some breakfast." Before Aeolus could call him out on them leaving the group defenseless, Zylanon said, "Don't worry, we took shifts. That way we can both guard the horde and hunt at the same time."

The disaster dragon was pleased with his soldier's smart idea. "Well that was brilliant of you, Zylanon. I couldn't be more grateful for you and Eitri," he said.

"Why thank you, my leader. It makes me feel honored to be praised by you," said the proud shadow dragon, who bowed his head. "I do enjoy serving you and the horde."

"I'm glad you do," replied Aeolus. Then he thought the other horde they had rescued last night and asked, "Also, did you bring food for the Sunlight Horde as well?"

Zylanon answered, "Yes, we did. We even got each of their diet right." His head turned to look over to the Sunlight Horde eating up the breakfast suited to their different breeds.

Aeolus looked behind to see them along with the Vulture Horde eating animals and plants. He turned back to his subordinate and said to him, "Very good, Zylanon. Your knowledge and consideration were very helpful to everyone."

The shadow dragon smiled and humbly replied, "Oh you flatter me, my leader. But I do admit that the idea was mostly Eitri's. If anything, he should get more thanks than I."

"I see; well then, let me thank him," said the disaster dragon. He pictured the dark purple magi in his mind and made telepathy with him. He expressed his approval and said, *'Eitri, Zylanon told me how it was your idea to have one dragon hunt and the other remain to guard. I am impressed with how you thought about this without needing me to tell you. You have saved us some time and energy, so that we*

won't need to hunt. For that, you have my thanks.'

Eitri's self-satisfied response sounded in his mind, *'Why you're welcome, Aeolus. I'm glad I thought of this idea as well. Bam, especially, was happy to find food sitting in front of him.'* The navy blue dragon beside him was happily munching on a mound of granadillas, maracuyas, and custard apples. He was clearly enjoying their fruity tastes.

'It looks he is,' Aeolus said after observing his cousin.

Seeing his leader caught up in his telepathy, Zylanon got ready to move. But first he reminded his leader, "Don't forget to eat your food while it's still fresh." Then the shadow dragon left to join Lutarn and Orion and sat with them.

Taking Zylanon's advise, the disaster dragon took one of the brocket deer and chewed on its body. After most of its meat was eaten, save for the head and limbs, Aeolus ate the other one. Bam swallowed the last of his fruits and turned to his cousin to say, "Hey cous."

"Hmm?" hummed the disaster dragon, wondering what Bam wanted with him.

The navy blue looked over to the Sunlight Horde and asked, "Think these guys will want to join us?"

Aeolus had intended to recruit the survivors into his horde right after breakfast. He answered surely, "Of course, they will. With their leader lost and their horde is scattered. It'll be easy to get them on our side. Even my fame will help me out. And I got just the right words to convince them." He rose to stand up and speak to the other horde, "May I have your attention, Sunlight Horde." The dragons of both hordes turned their attention away from their food and whatever conversation they were having to look at the disaster dragon. "Last night, your horde went up against an army of humans terrorizing the lives of dragons in this forest, only for it to end in failure. We all watched your leader died right before our eyes and your comrades slain. Even one of ours was killed by the magic spell of their halfling child." Corona lowered her head in grief while Hewey wrapped his wing and tail around her in pity and sympathy. A canopy dragon and a wind dragoness looked over at the phoenix dragoness and assumed that one of the Vulture Horde members killed was someone she had a bond with. The two felt sorry for her. Aeolus told everyone, "We don't know if any of your comrades beside yourselves had survived the battle. But if they did, I would like for you to contact them telepathically and see if they are alive."

The Sunlight Horde immediately started contacting their friends to see if they were alive. At first their faces were full of hope and worry about the status of their comrades for nearly a minute. But then their expressions gradually became dispirited as if something had gone wrong. One of the two ember dragons told Aeolus, "I'm not hearing anyone. I think they're all dead." The other Sunlight dragons told him the exact same thing as well.

The disaster dragon frowned and said, "Well this is quite unfortunate. I was hoping to see if Eitri can

bring them here so that we can all band together and travel to look for more dragons to build up a larger horde. We're going to need a big number of powerful dragons if we hope to destroy the army. Speaking of... how many dragons did the Sunlight Horde have?"

A black ghost dragon told him, "We had thirty-three, sir."

"Thirty-three?" Bam said in slight awe. "That's a bigger number than Dedries's horde."

Aeolus told his cousin, "Yes it is, but it's only by a few numbers. We're going to aim for two hundred, unless we can find really useful dragons like cassares and magis who can thwart the halflings." With breeds like them, they would be capable of removing the army's only source of magic and overwhelming the humans with their spells.

Orion took a liking to the idea of having those two breeds in the horde. "Hey, that's a great idea. We should have had guys like those in my horde," he said.

The brute dragon agreed with the magma dragon and said, "And mine, too. I would have saved us our friends' lives."

After a chorus of mm-hmms and yeses, a gray dragoness asked, "So where are we going to find these dragons?" She suggested an idea, "We could like have your night magi friend here place a tracking spell on those we know and teleport to them?"

Aeolus thought that this was a good plan indeed. He thought about two dragons in mind, other than Atlas, that he could recruit. He turned his head over to the night magi and said, "Eitri, I need you to cast a tracking spell on these dragons in mind."

But before the disaster dragon could give the night magi the mental images of his fellow slaves, Eitri replied, "I'm sorry, sir. I can't cast that spell. I'm unable to." Magi dragons who weren't purebred would have some spells unable to them, depending on what their genes were.

The disaster dragon felt a little disappointed, but he didn't mind as he said, "Then we'll just have to travel and find them ourselves." That way, they would destroy any settlements in sight without having to skip over them. "But first, we need to know who each of the Sunlight dragons are." He looked at the gray dragoness first at the far left side and asked, "We'll start with you first. What is your name?"

The gray introduced herself, "My name is Stormy, sir."

"Okay, then," said Aeolus. Then he looked to the male brute next to her and asked, "And you?"

"Tavurth," the brute dragon answered simply.

Aeolus looked at the dark navy blue ember dragon next and asked, "And who are you and what are your powers besides those associated with your breed? You don't seem to look like a pure-bred ember dragon."

The ember dragon answered, "I'm Udiya, sir and that's because I'm part electric on my mother's side. I inherited her powers of lightning."

"That sounds good," Aeolus said to Udiya. He turned to the other ember dragon, a pure-bred, and inquired, "Now you, what's your name?"

"Drakor," the ember said.

After that, the disaster dragon went to the pair of black ghost dragons next and asked, "Now tell me your names and about your breed, because I haven't heard about your kind before."

The male of the pair answered, "I am Eatorn and this is my mate, Volkin. We're black ghost dragons, a breed native to Dominina. Our special power is to turn ghost-like and pass through anything solid. It's because of this ability we were able to escape slavery."

The female, Volkin, added, "But when we're in ghost form, magic attacks do us more harm than ever." She looked down to the burned scar under her wing, where flesh and bone was seen.

Aeolus thought the wound looked quite painful to the eye. Thankfully, Hewey went over to her and healed her wound. Volkin thanked him for his help. After asking the 4 remaining Sunlight Horde members their names, Aeolus said to them, "Now that we all know who each of you are, I hereby welcome the survivors of the Sunlight Horde into the Vulture Horde. Together we will crush the army and all other humans around the world!" A chorus of roars filled the air as all the dragons were eager to get their revenge on the species that had caused them so much pain.

The Vulture Horde was on the move again; this time they were flying over the treetops. Earlier, Aeolus had told all the dragons in his group to spread word about his horde needing recruits to annihilate the army through telepathy and to tell him if there is anyone interested. So the horde is on their way to get those dragons until their numbers were big enough for the raid. On the way, Aeolus had heard Atlas speak to him about all her friends' responses. *'Hey Aeolus, I spoke to everyone about the Vulture Horde and I got some bad news for you. Nobody wants to join your horde,'* she said.

'Why is that?' the disaster dragon inquired.

The magi told him why, *'Some of them have families to take care of; others are in different hordes; and only one of them, who with some dragons, is living in that rebuilt city, that they named Windfall.'*

Aeolus was perplexed as to why some dragons would destroy a city and then rebuild it. *'They rebuilt a city, but why?'* he asked.

'I have no idea, either,' said Atlas, who was just as confused as her friend was. *'But apparently, some fire warrior dragons calling themselves the Aquarians came over to Cypress and turn that place into Windfall. So it's now a city where dragons and humans live together as equals. But the humans there don't seem to like it though.'*

'Of course they wouldn't,' said the disgruntled horde leader. *'This is humans we're talking about. Why on Veleia would they think the humans would want to suddenly live peacefully with them after what those fiends did to us after all these centuries and what we did to them a few days ago?'* Knowing how humans were treacherous by nature, Aeolus could see the disaster that would befall Windfall. *'Those fools are playing with fire; it's only a matter of time before the humans turn against the dragons and slaughter everyone inside that new city of theirs.'*

'I totally agree with you Aeolus,' replied Atlas in disbelief. *'I couldn't believe that no one was seeing this. It's outrageous!'*

The disaster dragon shook his head and said, *'Well let them mind their own business for now. They'll learn their lesson when the time comes.'*

The magi replied, *'And in the meantime, I'll put a tracking spell on my friend right now so that he can be safe.'* After a long pause, *'Okay done, so what are you going to do now, Aeolus?'*

The disaster dragon answered, *'Well since none of your friends are interested, I may as well look for those willing in Solomos by myself.'*

'Alright then; hope you get lots of them!' Atlas rooted for him. Then the telepathic connection ended.

After some minutes of travelling later, Bam caught whiff of a scent and looked down to see a dark purple female dragonet laying on the branches of one of the nut trees. She was long-necked and floppy-eared with a whip-like tail and swirls of maroon, black, and different blues on her body. "Hey look, Aeolus. There's someone down there. Perhaps she can join our horde," he said.

"Very well, let us go down there and meet her," Aeolus said. The horde flew down and landed by the tree with the sleeping dragonet. The leader approached the tree and talked to her, "Excuse me, young one. Wake up."

The dragonet uncurled herself and climbed down the tree. She had her wings tucked to the sides and asked, "What are you here for?"

The horde leader explained, "We're looking for dragons who are willing to join us in the fight against the human army that has terrorized these woods. We will take anyone with us, but I do prefer someone with exceptional skills like magic and great agility. Tell me, what are your skills and powers?" He wanted to see what this dragonet had, so that he could think of a good strategy to place her and the other dragons the next time they attacked humans.

The dragonet dithered and stared at Aeolus for a few seconds before relaxing slightly. "I'm not the best of magic-users, but I have some skills," she said, quickly setting a small bush alight to prove her point. "I prefer to use claws, teeth and tail." She leaped back to the tree and made a quick circuit of deft leaps, up, down, backtracking, and digging her claws into a trunk as she climbed.

Aeolus watched her nimble leaps and thought, '*She's certainly agile, that's for sure.*' This agility would be useful in evading some of the enemy's attacks. On the last jump, the dragonet opened her wings as she gripped the tree. The horde leader caught sight of a holed wound underneath her wing. After she snapped it closed in half a second, the disaster dragon asked in concern, "You, what happened below your wing? You look like you've been struck there." He figured he should get Hewey the healer dragon to look at her wing.

The dragonet trembled slightly and admitted, "Er... It got caught by an arrow. I can't fly."

"An arrow... So a human has shot you. You should get healed immediately," Aeolus said, noting the obvious. He turned his head around to look at the healer dragon and said to him, "Hewey, come over here and help this one out."

"I'm coming," Hewey responded as he made his way over to the dragonet. He lifted up her wing to examine the wound. "Hmm... This one looks recent; but it's nothing too hard that my healing magic can't fix." Charging up his healing magic, he told her, "Okay, just stand still and your wound will be all gone in a matter of a few seconds." He hung his foot over the wound and it glowed in a light green aura as he repaired the torn tissue and sealed the bleeding hole. The dragonet watched in amazement as her wound healed. "There it's all done!" the healer said, smiling at a good work done.

"Thank you," she said as she stared at her repaired wing.

"You're welcome," Hewey replied before moving back to join the others.

The dragonet flapped it gently and then opened the other wing. She rose into the air and did a few maneuvers. The dragons watched her fly around, observing her turns, loops, and glides. After she dropped back down, Aeolus judged her flight and told her, "You're very agile and flexible in your flight and leaps. If you have quick reflexes to go with them, you can dodge almost every kind of attack. But enough about your maneuverability, let's see your powers now."

The dragonet rolled her eyes and quickly set fire to a bush. Then she leaped into the air and hovered.

The horde watched her to see what she would do next. But when half a minute came, nothing happened. Sighing, the dragonet brought her tail in front of her before she settled back onto the ground. "I've been trying to use magic for years," she explained to Aeolus. "Never got the hang of it, though. I just tried to summon a lightning ball, *supposedly* one of the easiest forms of magic. Ah well, I have my fire." She curled herself around the flaming bush and separated it further from the forest.

The disaster dragon said to her, "Well young one, perhaps you would like to learn how to use magic from the night magi, Eitri. His breed is the descendant of the true magi dragons and because of that, he exceeds well in magic. He will teach you how to use magic the proper way. But of course, if you want to learn from him, you'll have to join the horde." Having another magic user would be a valuable asset to the horde, as she would combat the magic of the humans' mages they encounter.

"I don't want to embarrass myself," the dragonet said, shaking her head. "Anyway, my teacher was a magi dragon. He never told me who he was descended from; he never had time. He taught me how to focus on creating a lightning ball, but our lesson was cut short by a group of human warriors. They slew my mentor before he had time to fight back," she told; her voice was bitter, but resigned. "That was a long time ago. I keep trying, but..." She flicked her tail towards where she had just utterly failed to conjure anything. "As you saw, I'm still no good at all. I work fine with tooth and claw."

Aeolus closed his red eyes in respect for the deceased mentor and said, "It's a shame you never got to spend much time with your mentor. You would have been a great magic user if not for the humans." Then he reopened his eyes and reasoned, "But young one, you shouldn't be afraid to try to learn magic again. You weren't good at it because you didn't get enough training time. You won't know how good you are at it until you've had proper training. With magic, you'll become a better fighter and add more arsenal than just fangs and claws. You'll be even stronger that way. You would want that, would you?"

The dragonet shrugged and placed a paw over the fire. It sizzled slightly and went out. "I don't care, really. I just hate magic, because it killed my mentor and my only friend, and I could never use it." She closed her emerald green eyes and continued mournfully, "I couldn't save him." Her eyes again with an expression of anger on her face. "I'll never have a friend again!" she hissed madly, her eyes flaring with fear and anger. She backed into the trees and raised her wings.

Aeolus could see how distraught she was about her past that made her bitter. "Such pain... The humans took away someone very precious to you. I know that feeling well," the green dragon said, understandingly. "Because I had the same thing happen in my life. The only difference between you and I was that I lost my family."

Bam, the horde leader's cousin, looked at the dragoness and emphasized the detail, "His immediate family. I just happened to be Aeolus's cousin."

With his eyes furrowing to look mad, Aeolus growled, "The humans had taken everything away from me."

They took everything away from all of us! Even today, they're still going at it. That's why I'm building this horde so that we can crush the humans once and for all."

The dragonet closed her eyes for a few seconds. Then when she opened them, they were their normal color. "I'll join you," she hissed determinedly. "But promise me this. If we ever find the people who killed my mentor, I get to rip them to shreds. Personally. *Slowly*."

Aeolus nodded and said, "That I'll let you do." Keeping promises he can do and making them happen would surely increase his charisma that would be necessary to look good in the hordes and other dragons' eyes and attract more fighters for his cause. "Now that you're in my horde, I think we should get to know one another's names. My name is Aeolus, the leader of the Vulture horde. What is your name, young dragoness?" he asked.

"My name is Zeditha," the dragonet answered as her tail twitched like a cat's. "Well, what does the horde do? I assume we do more than crush humans?"

"Well Zeditha, while it's true that our horde's purpose is to eradicate the humans. We will also help out any dragons we find who are in trouble," the disaster dragon answered her. The helping out part wasn't just his good will towards his kind, but it was also a necessary tactic in earning adoration and admiration that would inspire dragons to join his horde.

Bam came up to add in the conversation and said with an open smile, "And we also hunt for food for when we get hungry and need to eat."

Aeolus turned his head to give his cousin a disapproving look for the interruption and said, "Bam, we know that. There's no need to speak of an unimportant detail that's biologically instinctive among everyone."

The blue dragon shrunk his head back in guilt and folded his wings close to his body. "Sorry," he apologized.

"Well, I'm not a bad hunter," Zeditha nodded and said. "I sometimes watch cats playing with mice and I like to try that. Sometimes I play cat with deer, but mostly with rabbits. It's fun to block their holes so they can't escape down them as well, or to block them into their burrows and terrify them in their own homes." She grinned evilly. "Mostly I do that when I've encountered humans. They make me so *angry*!" she said as she slapped her tail onto the ground hard. Then picked it up and curled around it. Aeolus could tell that her action had hurt herself as she was licking the tail gently to reduce the pain.

"Well Zeditha, I'm sorry to say that we won't get to be playing with animals much as we are a very busy horde," the disaster dragon told her frankly. "But maybe you might get a chance should circumstances call for it." After all, the humans aren't going to get themselves killed quickly enough. And who would be there to accelerate the extinction than the Vulture horde?

"It doesn't matter too much anyway," Zeditha said and shrugged. "I won't want to do that if I can just kill every human I meet. After all, it's them who make me angry." She jumped into the air and hovered. "So," she said, "Shall we go?"

Aeolus replied, "Of course, we were getting to that." He looked at his whole horde and said, "Everyone, move out." The horde moved on through the woods to search for the next potential recruits.

Atlas flew out of the Castle of Fire to go do some hunting for breakfast. She had taken a set of armor for herself and renewed it with her magic she learned from the book on armory, so that it was fresh and without rust. But before she left, she raised a thick earthly wall up the double doors to make sure that no unwanted intruder would go in and possibly do harm to her nieces. The magi flew over the forest searching out for fruits and wildlife to kill and bring back. A deer had sensed her movement in the air and dashed off to leave before its predator would strike it down. But Atlas saw the animal's tawny pelt and movement from the trees below. She predicted where the animal was going to be when the spell hit and cast her wind blade to sever its head off. The spell had also cut off a thin branch that had been in the way. The dragoness flew down to her prey and lowered her head down to eat it.