

Chapter 18: Free the Slaves!

A while later, the Vulture Horde found a trio of albino dragonesses eating leaves from the trees. Aeolus went up to them and said, "Hello there, are you the three albinos that your friend told me about? He said that you were willing to join the Vulture horde."

The albino dragonesses stopped eating as they turned their head to look at him. One of them swallowed her food and said, "That's us alright. I'm Fakoo and these are my sisters, Albina and Belina. We want to squash those humans and make them regret trying to hunt us down."

The other albino said, "Yeah, yesterday they caught Ursula and took him over to their settlement. They're making him a slave again."

Zeditha flew over to the albinos and landed on a nearby branch. "Hello," she greeted.

Belina the youngest albino looked at the dragonet and greeted, "Why hello there, young one. It's nice to meet you."

Aeolus wasn't surprised at all that the humans would go back to using slavery. After all, it was in their blood to kill, take, and enslave. "So do you know where this village is that's keeping your friend and maybe some others held as slaves?" he asked.

"Yes we do," said Fakoo. "Follow us, we'll show you the way." The horde took off over the woods following after the albinos to the human village. After a while, they landed on ground that was of higher elevation, so that they could see the village below. "There, that's where they're keeping Ursula. We tried to go in there ourselves, but there were too many humans to fight off."

Aeolus inquired, "How did they fight?"

Fakoo answered, "Well, they were all armed with those metal sticks they swung at us. They were sharp like claws. And some of them also fired off those flying slimmer sticks with piercing tips at us." From what this dragoness had said, it sounded like she was speaking of swords and arrows.

Zeditha suddenly cut into the conversation and suggested, "We should get the best fliers to fly high, higher than the claws can reach. They should catch the flying sticks until the humans have none left, and then it should be easy to avoid the claws." Then she seemed surprised and covered her face with a wing. Behind the translucent membrane, she added more quietly, "Just a suggestion, of course, I'm not the leader..."

The horde leader analyzed her plan quickly and carefully to know if it would work. "Your suggestion

sounds like a good idea, Zeditha. Of course, we can make it more effective by using the magic crystal to create a barrier against the arrows or the gray dragons blow them back down," he said to her.

The dragonet nodded in relaxation and asked, "That sounds like a good plan. Shall we do that then?"

"Yes," the disaster dragon replied. "But first we need to plan out our strategy for the village's destruction. Since there are slaves inside that place, I won't be able to cast my tornado without putting their lives in danger. So we'll have to start our first strike a different way." He looked to the albino dragonesses and asked, "You three, what are your powers?"

Fakoo said, "Well the only thing we can do is breathe fire and that's about it."

Aeolus told them, "Okay then, you shall stay up with the horde until I give the order for us to go down there." Then he explained the rest of his plan, "So anyway, Lutarn and Stormy will cover the sky with thick clouds before we move in and rain down our fireballs and spells at the humans. Zylanon and the black ghost dragons will sneak into the village and free all the slaves." Taking into consideration of the crossfire involved, he cautioned, "They should also warn us beforehand when coming out of the buildings with slaves, so that we don't hit them at the places they're coming from. Everyone understand?"

"Yes sir!" the dragons responded.

"Good, now let's do this!" The horde and the albinos flew off with Tavurth carrying Orion and they all headed to the village. Pretty soon, the humans had seen them approaching and immediately knew of the impending danger that was about to happen. Screams filled the air as people raced into their tents and cabins, while their fighters got themselves armed with weapons. As soon as the humans were ready, they fired off their arrows at the horde. "Eitri, now!" Aeolus roared. The night magic cast a magic shield beneath the horde to block off the arrows that bounced off and fell back down to the ground. "Eitri, release the barrier. Everyone fire!" The barrier disappeared and the dragons blew down fireballs and lightning bolts. Tavurth put Orion on the ground, so that the magma dragon can breathe a wide pool of lava onto the ground to prevent people from trying to escape their deaths.

Zylanon and the black ghost couple descended to the ground outside the village entrance. They touched land and the black ghosts made their bodies dematerialize so that they were able to travel through solid objects such as walls and human weaponry. The shadow dragon was about to melt down into the ground to become an animated shadow, when Zeditha came up next to him and asked, "Hello; mind if I join you?"

Zylanon wondered why this dragonet would come down to be with the infantry team and asked, "Didn't Aeolus say for you to be with the offensive team?"

Zeditha shook her head. "Aeolus didn't tell me to go on either team," she said. "I just decided that I'm a

useless range attacker; I'd join this group."

"I see," said the shadow dragon nonchalantly. He looked away and continued speaking, "First you can't use magic and now you can't fire from a distance. What kind of dragon did Aeolus recruit if she's only good for her speed?" The dragonet shrugged in response. After a brief pause, he looked back at her and said, "Fine, you may join this group. Let's see how well you do in this raid. Maybe you might prove that you're not a dud."

"I can be unnoticed when I want to be," Zeditha said. "So yeah, let's see how I do."

Zylanon watched her speed ahead of him inside the village as she was eager to prove herself. "Let's see how you do, indeed," said the shadow dragon. He melted into his shadow form and crawled along the ground as he went into the village. The humans saw the black ghost dragons and became quite alarmed as screams filled the air. Those who couldn't fight fled in panic for their lives; while those who can charged at the couple and swung their swords at them. However, because the black ghosts were dematerialized, the swords became non-effective as the blade passed through air instead. The pair didn't bother to attack as they would need to materialize in order to do the humans any harm. So the black ghosts ignored the humans carried on to the chained slaves that were held in their posts.

The humans were surprised to see that their weapons did nothing to them and stopped attacking altogether. "What? But how?" one man asked. Aeolus's group quickly took advantage of their distraction and rained down fireballs to kill them.

The black ghosts went through the wall of a slave shed and found hatchlings and pygmies inside in small cages with inadequate spacing. A slaver was looking at the two intruders with overwhelming fear on his face as his shaking hand dropped the whip he was holding. Next to him was a crimson pygmy tied to a post. It looked like he had just been flogged as his red scales were covered with fresh scars. The two mates began to look at the man with hatred burning in their eyes. They immediately materialized and walked towards the man as they bared their teeth and growled. The slaver backed away from the hostile threats before him and began pleading for his life, "Now, now, I'm sorry. I mean I didn't want to whip him. He was being bad and provoked me. He was a naughty boy and he-"

"He's lying!" shouted the crimson flare in his raspy voice. "He whipped just so he can have some fun." The black ghosts were disgusted with the slaver's sadism and lie.

The slaver began to sweat and feel sick to his stomach. In more desperate attempt to avoid death, he cried, "No, no, no, no, no! He's the one lying. Yeah, he is!"

But his words fell on deaf ears as the horde members refused to believe him. Eatorn roared, "Enough of your lies, coward! It's time for you to die!" He lunged his head forward and the man screamed before he got clamped down on by sharp jaws. The black ghost began to chew and crush every bone in the slaver's body and tear his flesh and clothes. After a good meal eaten, he spat out the torn clothes as they were

indigestible. Looking around at the slaves, Eatorn said, "Alright everyone, he's finally gone! Now let's get you all out of here."

The slaves cheered out in happiness. The black ghosts burned the ropes that tied the pygmy and broke open the cages to let the slaves out. The slaves followed Zeditha towards the door that would lead them all to freedom. One of the humans saw the slaves trying to escape and pointed at them. "Stop them!" he told the men.

Another man shot down the command and reasoned, "No! We need all the men here to defend this camp from the dragons. We'll hunt them down later. For now, we kill those blasted scalies." Then Aeolus's lightning breath electrocuted him and let the toasted man drop stiff and dead.

That got the other guy back on his toes and back into action immediately. He fired off an arrow and it shot Drakor on his chest. The ember let out a pained roar as the flapping of his wing started to get slower and his altitude started to decrease. Aeolus saw what was happening to his fellow horde member and told the night magi, "Eitri, send Drakor out of the battle immediately." The spellcaster used his teleportation magic to warp the ember dragon out of the scene.

Zylanon slithered on his way to the next slave tent. People who saw his shadow form on the ground and on the walls ran away from the beast that they thought might attack them. The shadow dragon did his best to avoid the light from the flames of his comrades by taking cover behind solid objects. Because if the bright light hits him, then he would automatically revert back to his normal dragon form. The coast was clear after the horde exterminated a group of warriors, thus enabling Zylanon to slither by. He went to the slave tent and changed back into dragon form. He took the key that was sitting on the table and opened up the cages to let the pygmy slaves out. "Go now!" he told them. The little dragons took off into the air and flew off into freedom.

As the slaves had escaped, Aeolus saw the refugees trying to escape out of the village. "Vulture horde, I see humans trying to flee for their lives. Do not let them escape! Kill them before they leave!" he ordered. The gray dragons sent lightning bolts down from the dark clouds at the escape routes. The sudden strikes startled and terrified the humans more as they turned and tried to get around the fires caused by the bolts. Some of them found that they were blocked by a river of lava right in front of them. With over half of the refugee soldiers dead, the horde started to attack civilians as well. Aeolus breathed down lightning at the humans, both civilian and warrior alike. Bodies flashed and showed their skeletons before they dropped dead in a burnt state with hairs sticking up. The other dragons assaulted the refugees with their own attacks as well.

After the disaster dragon zapped a man dead, Zeditha flew over to Aeolus and shouted at him, "Stop this! How can you murder innocent children?! And if you do, how are you any better than the soldiers who killed our brethren?" Her tail lashed angrily as she continued, "Don't all creatures deserve their lives?"

The horde leader looked down at her and growled with disdain, "The humans have lost their right to live after countless of atrocities committed against us for centuries. Besides, they're not trustworthy enough to keep around; not after we saw that they're still holding onto slavery. If we were to leave them unchecked, then it'll be a matter of time before they find new ways to work around the Spell and turn us all back into slaves. That's why they all need to die!" He breathed another breath of lightning at the three people below him and killed them.

The dragonet shook her head and said, "I was raised deep in a forest, away from the humans' influence. My parents taught me about the humans as *equals*. Cruel, heartless equals at times, but they still have the same feelings as we do. If I, raised to believe that humans are equal, save the humans when others would kill them; then a human child, taught that slavery was wrong, would stand and fight against any who said otherwise." She worked her wings into a fury and hovered now a large distance from the ground. Her eyes blazed with anger and she continued, "They attack from self-defense. They enslaved us because they thought we were monsters, and then because it was the norm. We attack from self-defense. We kill them because they enslaved us, and then we will kill because it is the norm." She paused for effect before yelling, "I do not want to be part of this killing. We are no better than the humans - in fact, we are worse! At least we were alive!"

Aeolus thought that the idea that there were good humans was ludicrous. 99% of the world supported slavery and Aeolus had no time to go around looking for the rare good eggs among the bad ones. Plus, there were already children that were taught to believe that dragons were beneath them. And because of the Spell revolution and the fact that there were dragons killing humans, they would be more likely to resist changing their views. If these children were spared, what would stop them from growing up to be dragon slayers to avenge their lost friends? The disaster dragon growled, "Fine, if you will not help us to eliminate the humans, then feel free to leave the horde." Besides, he can always find a more useful dragon who would be willing to put all of his/her abilities to use.

"If you won't stop killing the innocent," Zeditha said as she stood firm. "I'll help to break the Spell myself! It's better to have slavers rule the planet than *RUTHLESS MURDERERS!*" she screamed the last words before she ran back into the crowd of humans.

The dragonet's outrageous words had created anger in Aeolus. As Zeditha ran towards a human mother holding a baby and offered to carry it, the horde leader snarled, "Insolent hatchling! You would rather have us live in suffering than in a secure and liberated world?! You're a fool to say something like this and that makes you no better than these humans and us."

The mother half-hesitantly let Zeditha take the child in her teeth. The dragonet ran back out of the crown and over to a small hill. Setting down the baby, she cried, "The humans enslaved us only because they thought we were mindless, ruthless murderers! They lock up their own kind who are murderers! It is for the good of the many! And if dragons are to wipe out their race, with no consideration between the evil few and the innocent, if caught in tradition, many; then I, horde leader, do not wish to be a dragon. I will not be known as a ruthless murderer!"

Aeolus refused to listen to such bleeding heart rants. "I'm afraid that's where you're wrong. The real reason the humans enslaved us was because they needed our powers to do all the grueling work for them. In their society where murderers are imprisoned and killed and dangerous pets put down, why would the humans need murderers to work for them, knowing that they would turn on their masters at any time? Dragons who tried to attack their slavers were often put down. Death also claims the lives of wild dragons that the humans hunt for resourceful hides and body parts the humans need to turn into something for their convenience," he bluntly explained to her.

Then he went to downplay the innocence of humanity, "And how dare you downplay the humans' atrocious nature as simple ignorance when they have a violent history that not only affects dragons, but themselves as well. They go into wars with each other over greed and religious, they would restrict the rights of certain groups that were different than them and persecute them, they would consume too many resources and leave none for the rest as the pollute the planet further and further, they would steal from one another, and they would commit all other kinds of horrific acts. It is forever in their blood and it'll never go away. We, dragons, kill them for the one righteous reason: to keep our kind and the planet safe from them. So if you wish to be a blood traitor, then know that this horde will not back down from this mission without a fight!" Electric bolts ran course around his bared teeth as he growled.

After searching the rest of the camp, Zylanon and the black ghost dragons found no other batch of slaves to set free. The shadow dragon spoke telepathically to the leader, *'Aeolus, it looks like we've set all the slaves free. I see no one else in this village.'*

'Very well then, take flight and rejoin us in the air,' the disaster dragon ordered them. Zylanon crawled into the sunlight and reverted back to his normal form. The black ghost couple materialized and flew off with the shadow dragon. Aeolus looked to the other aerial dragons and told them the next plan, "Vulture horde, the liberation is now complete! I shall now use my earthquake power to stun the humans. That's also when you'll finish them off for good." He relayed the message to the Orion and told him to gather the hatchlings and those who haven't been healed yet off the ground. As the magma dragon went to do his job, Aeolus landed on the large clearing and slammed his paw down hard on the ground to cause an earthquake. The ground shook forcefully with power and the fleeing humans stumbled, tripped, and fell over. Sheds and tents broke down and fell apart as well. The horde went to finish off the rest of the refugees with their breaths and spells. The dying screams of Mankind filled the air as each and every person was slaughtered without discrimination.

Zeditha clutched the baby and flew off. "I am no longer a member of your Horde," she said, flinging the words over her shoulder. "But I will be a dragon; I will be a GOOD dragon. I will be better than the humans; not the same as them. I knew they were ruthless... but it is a learned behavior. We can teach them otherwise." She looked at the child in her claws and continued, "Starting with this little one." Looking back up, the dragonet flapped her wings faster and accelerated back towards the woods.

Aeolus huffed through a closed mouth as good riddance to having this naive fool out of the horde. Eitri,

having watched Zeditha go, flew up to him and asked, "Aeolus, that dragonet is escaping with the human child. Shall I pursue her?"

Even though the dragonet was faster than the night magi, the disaster dragon knew that the long range spells of Eitri's would make short work of Zeditha and allow him to kill the infant. Plus, he can teleport to her and catch up. Aeolus replied, "Yes, and hurry! I need that baby to die."

"Yes sir!" Eitri responded while going off ahead right now to pursue Zeditha.

A short time later, all the humans were slaughtered and the camp was roasted down to ashes as usual with every other destroyed settlements. The albino sisters went over to their crimson pygmy friend and rejoiced his safe return. One of them licked his face affectionately and the pygmy smiled in return. The slaves have been healed and Hewey lead them over to Aeolus, who was standing next to the corpses. "My fellow dragons, you now free once again from the humans' barbaric holds on you. I'm sure all of you are in need of some decent food to fatten yourself with. So we give you your deceased tormentor to feast on," he spoke. He moved out of the way let the former slaves have their meal. The starving dragons tore off the clothes to get to the flesh and eat of the meals. Some of them paused first to looked at the dead masters as they remembered all the pain that these humans had caused them with bitterness and anger. The disaster dragon waited for them to finish eating, so that he can invite some of them into the horde. He then saw Eitri flying back to him and asked, "Did you kill the baby?"

"I didn't," the night magi answered. "I almost had Zeditha, but then she suddenly disappeared as if she teleported somewhere else." He lowered his head a little and apologized, "I'm sorry, Aeolus."

"It's alright. We'll get them next time," said the disaster dragon. Either they'll kill the baby for good or someone else would, if Zeditha ran into another dragon wasn't keen on humans. He sent a telepathic message to the dragonet threatening her, *'Zeditha, your little human may live for now. But next time we find you, I promise you that it will surely die.'* No response was heard; perhaps the dragonet didn't want to respond or that she had put up a mind barrier to block telepathic messages. A half an hour later, the slaves were done eating and felt satisfied with the delicious meal. Aeolus looked to each and every slave and observed their sizes, "I see that most of you are pygmies and hatchlings. How pitiful that the humans have to resort to enslaving the small to make them do their dirty work."

"I know, right?" said one of the pygmies who rolled his eyes at mankind's ploy.

Another one spoke sarcastically, "No surprise there."

"Indeed," agreed Aeolus with a nod at him. He looked back at the rest of the slaves and spoke, "Which is why we invite you, those who are old enough to fight, to join our horde and eliminate the humans who may have others such as yourselves under their hold. We must not let them continue their heinous acts as long as they live. For as long as one human lives, no one will be safe." He didn't need to ask for those with exceptional powers as he knew that all the slaves here were of those kind of breeds with special

abilities. Plus, he needed the small for spy work and scouting.

The crimson flare pygmy flew over to the disaster dragon and said, "Hey Aeolus, right? I want to join your horde."

A female pink pygmy with petal-like wings piped in, "So do I!"

A male leaf pygmy, who looked like an older version of Leafwing, volunteered as well, "If me doing something will help prevent others like myself from going through the same thing as us, then count me in."

More slaves joined in as well before a wasp pygmy looked at the hatchlings and asked in concern, "Hey Aeolus, what are going to do about the hatchlings? We can't leave them alone out in the woods."

But some of the male hatchlings looked determined and brave as they thought that the war was as easy as they believed. "Don't worry, we can fight!" said one of them.

The other hatchlings piped, "Yeah!"

The horde leader turned them down, "No, you're not strong enough to take down the humans. We only need adults in the Vulture horde. So instead, you'll all be taken back to your families." Young lives weren't just too precious and valuable to be wasted as soldiers in the war; hatchlings were also too weak and mentally immature to do a lot of critical thinking necessary to make wise decisions in battles. That is why Aeolus didn't want them in his horde.

The hatchlings groaned in disappointments and said, "Aww, that's not fair!"

A green hatchling kicked the dirt and said, "I wanted to fight..."

Bam went over to the young dragons and with a smile said, "Hey cheer up, maybe if the war lasts long enough, one day you'll be grown-ups and get to join in."

Hope was renewed and the hatchlings said to Bam, "Really? I can't wait until I grow up!"

"I'll be an adult in three years!" another hatchling said with an enthusiastic gleam in his eyes.

The navy blue giggled heartily and said to them, "That's good, kiddo! For now, you guys can just defend your families from the evil humans. Don't let anything happen to them, alright?"

"Okay!" the hatchlings promised.

The horde leader was grateful to his cousin for helping to dissuade the hatchlings out of recruitment. He

resumed his speech, "So anyway, if anyone wants to join the Vulture horde, please remain here. Everyone else who's not interested please leave. You can take any orphans among the hatchlings that you want to raise. We will take the rest of the young back to their families and find dragons who will raise the other orphans." The uninterested slaves left and took all the few orphans with them. The disaster dragon looked to the night magi and told him, "Eitri, I know you and Zylanon should be going back home to get some sleep. But first I need you to warp all these hatchlings here back to their families."

The night magi smiled and said, "It's alright, sir. I can wait until the job is done. I mean I know their parents are worried sick about them. So they'll be glad when they have their sons and daughters back." Eitri was happy to try and help reunite the hatchlings with their parents.

"I'm glad you're willing to get this done," said Aeolus, grateful with Eitri's understanding of the situation. "Now start returning them all."

"Got it!" the night magi obliged.

Aeolus looked to the hatchlings and instructed them, "Hatchlings, I need you to contact your parents and have them show you where they're living now. And then show this night magi where they are, so he can take you back to them." The hatchlings used their telepathy to ask for their parents' locations. Then they looked at Eitri, who then felt overwhelmed by the mass images sent at him.

The night magi put up a mental barrier to block out the incoming telepathy and said, "Whoa hatchlings, whoa! I don't need all these places coming to me at once." Then he suggested an idea, "How about I do one of you guys at a time, so it'll be easier for me." So he went to one hatchling and ask them for their parent's places for he sent him over there. He did the same thing for each hatchling until all of them were gone. The night magi got words of their thanks sent to him, making him feel flattered.

Aeolus was satisfied to see the job done, so he gave the nocturnal dragons permission to return home. Eitri warped himself and Zylanon back to Chief Doubloon's village. The disaster dragon looked at the former slaves and said, "Right, so now that our little job is done. I need to know which of you dragons have abilities outside your breeds, so I can put you in the best positions when we go on our future raids."

Two dark-scaled leaf pygmies stepped forward and told him, "We have night vision, sir."

The disaster dragon smiled and replied, "That is very nice. We could use some spies to explore the human camps at night."

Then a spring dragon came up and said, "I have a special pollen that can soothe our comrades when they need to be relaxed."

Aeolus didn't seem impressed with the spring's ability to soothe others, but maybe perhaps it would be useful someday. "Okay then, any others?" he asked.

A female spring dragon told him, "My son and I are descended from wind dragons, so we have the ability to blow sharp petals and pollen in a very long distance."

"That's really great," the horde leader replied, finding how useful their abilities would be. Spring dragons could make their pollen toxic, tranquilizing, or soothing at will. With the long distance ability, the springs will be much safer from human harm. Looking around, the leader asked, "Anyone else?" When no reply came, Aeolus said, "Alright then, I guess that's everyone. It's good to see that such unique breeds are contributing their valuable powers to the group. But with some training, we can make you all much more valuable soldiers. We, experienced horde members, teach you how the humans now fight and what we do to survive. So listen well and carefully." The disaster dragon started teaching the slaves the humans' weak points where they are easily killed, how they ambush their foes, how they shoot with bows, and how they fight with close-range weapons.