

## Chapter 30: The Horde Meeting

Aeolus was now back at the lake with his two recruits. Baltia fluttered, surprised and disorientated by the teleportation spell. "Huh? What happened?" she said, turning around wildly.

The horde leader ignored her and started to make his announcement to the horde, "Vulture Horde, we have two new members with us." The dragons all turned their attention to their leader and the newcomers. The disaster dragon looked at the big cassare and said, "This is Yopple, a part-magi cassare dragon whose abilities of both breeds will come in handle." The magi cassare stood taller in appearance as if he was trying to have a good representation.

The horde was surprised by Yopple's very large size as well as his breed. "Wow, he's huge," said one of Fakoo's albino sisters.

Orion asked, "I don't think I've ever seen a cassare this big. What has he been eating?"

A wasp pygmy asked, "A cassare who's part magi? How did this happen?"

Then Aeolus looked over to the dark myst and said, "And this is Baltia. She doesn't really fight, but she is good at distracting humans with her annoying pranks. Helpful for when we need their guards away from something important. She'll also spy and steal, too." Yopple's orange scales flared and glowed in annoyance at the mention of the pygmy.

Baltia stopped turning and hovered. "Ummm... Hi?" she giggled nervously.

Aeolus continued by explaining his story, "I found these two over at the home of Pyro's clan; they're not members though. I was trying to convince the leader to lend us some of his clanmates to join the horde. He is currently considering whether to support our cause or not. I have all day to wait until I hear an answer from him. If there is no telepathic response, then we won't have new members."

Kekul raised his voice over the horde and asked, "Aeolus, is this clan full of cassares?"

The horde leader answered, "It is. Are you concerned that their presence will stop you from using magic?" He knew he was going to get something like that from one of his horde members, especially the magis.

Kekul expressed his concern, "As a matter-of-fact, I am. Having only one cassare is fine; but how are my mate and I suppose to do our jobs if we got a bunch of them around? They're going to be a liability."

Aeolus answered, "It's simple; just stay far away from the cassares and you'll do fine. And don't worry; I will put them in places where they can't affect you every time we go to raid settlements."

"Well okay, that's fine by me," the magma magi said.

But Kekul wasn't one worried as Hewey the healer dragon also asked, "Aeolus, I don't mind having cassares around, but I'm concerned about how I'm going to heal any wounds they have. As you said, they have the ability to disable the magic powers of anyone nearby. Because my healing is magic; I'm afraid it will be impossible for me to use my powers on them."

"Hmm yes, that would be a problem," the disaster dragon said. An alternative to heal cassares is a must and he had a good idea what to do. Aeolus said, "But we can solve this by going into human cities and raiding whatever medicines they have there."

Corona added her suggestion, "And we can also be on the lookout for medical herbs as well."

The horde leader nodded and said, "Yes, good idea Corona." When nobody else had anything to say about Pyro's clan, Aeolus went on to the next topic, "Now that we're done talking about cassares, I believe it's now time we have a talk with Axle about Shadow Wind. Where is he?"

Tavurth the brute dragon said, "I think I saw him go into the woods with Atlas and his family."

"Bring him to me; I need to hear more about his side of the story," Aeolus told him. The brute dragon went into the woods to fetch the dragon lord.

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Atlas kept on running through the woods. Her heart was beating fast with energy, but now she was panting from the tightening strain on her chest. She knew she was tired and thought, *'Damn, Axle was right when he said that I wouldn't be used to it.'* She didn't want to stop though, not yet. She wanted to go on until she was really tired. The woman went on until she saw her nieces and a navy blue dragon in sight. The bigger dragon had been chasing the laughing hatchlings for fun. Their game soon ended when the navy blue saw Atlas and stopped his pursuit. The woman also tried to stop, but she ended up skidding on dirt and throwing her upper body forward to the point where she nearly fell over. The dragon yelled, "Oh my gods, a human! Hang on, hatchlings. I'll go kill it for you."

As he ran towards the woman, the sisters tried to tell him, "No Bam, that's Aunt Atwas!"

Their words seemed to have fallen on deaf ears as Bam kept charging. Seeing how her life was in danger, Atlas transformed back into a dragoness and growled at him. The navy blue stopped and realized his mistake. "Whoa, whoa, whoa, you're a dragon?" he asked.

The magi snarled, "Yes, I'm a dragon and you just tried to kill me, you numbskull!"

Bam felt ashamed and apologized, "Oh geez, I'm so sorry. I thought you were a human. I didn't mean to..." Then he saw Axle behind her and cried, "Oh my gods, a human! Hang on, I'll go kill it."

As he ran towards Axle, Atlas growled, "What the fuck?! That's not a human either, stupid!"

The man slid his foot across the ground and came to a quick stop without falling over. He changed into his dragon form and walked by the navy blue dragon, who tried stopping himself by pushing his front feet back as his bottom skid on the ground for a few seconds before he crashed into a tree. Bam was seeing stars for a short time before he shook himself out of daze and went over to the sisters to whom he said, "Well false alarm. Come on, let's go back to playing tag!" Then the three went back to their game.

Axle went to the magi and said, "Now that you have the basic down, you can train in weaponry, archery, climbing, swimming, and free style running. The whole nine yards if you wish." Axle sounded if he was happy about Atlas progress on her training of the basic. "And don't worry about permission from now on, once it given, it does not go away unless you wish to stop the training."

The dragoness grinned and replied, "Sweet! I can't wait to get started on them."

Then Juna and Mekarth returned with the latter asking, "Done with training already? That did not take long."

Juna then spoke, "That was quick. But then again, most of your training sections were. Now that you got that out of the way, can we get to the more pressing matter." She said with almost authority in her voice, sounding like a high rank officer now.

Atlas asked, "That's going to be about Spinx or Dracul, right?"

Axle nodded to her as he turned to his sister. "Could we discuss that issue in a bit?" he asked. Then he soon followed it up with a whisper that was loud enough for Atlas to hear, "Too many wondering ears are around to discuss about our home land or those who threaten her people." Juna nodded her head. Atlas knew that by 'those who threaten her people', Axle was talking about the Vulture Horde. Apparently, Juna must have shared her wariness of Aeolus with her brother. The magi was about to defend her friend and tell them how he's a changed dragon, when the brute dragon from last night showed up.

Their heads turned towards him as Juna asked, "Can I help you with something?"

Tavurth answered, "Aeolus wants to see Axle about who he really is. I don't know why, but it might be important. So come on and let's see what he has to say."

The magi was dumbfounded and asked, "What? I just told yesterday that Axle's the good guy? What

more does he want?"

"I don't know, but I bet he must be looking for more details I guess," the brute dragon said.

Axle shook his head for a bit. "If Atlas told you what I told her, there really is no need for him to go deeper in to the subject," he said, sounding a little disappointed with Aeolus. "But might as well see what he wants."

The look Juna gave the brute was not a very nice look, almost like she did not like the idea of Aeolus being talked with. "Hmph!" huffed Tavruth with an equally disdained look that she gave him. Then he walked with Atlas and the others back to where the horde is at.

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Baltia looked up at Aeolus like a lost kitten and asked, "What just happened? Where are we? How did we get here?"

The horde leader answered, "I used the stone to teleport us here, Baltia." The dark myst fluttered in wonder. Then he turned his attention to the horde and told them, "Alright Vulture Horde, listen up! After we ambush Axle last night, we learned that Atlas and Axle's family were human-friendly." The disdained words and growls from the horde filled the air, even from some of those who were there last night. "Yes, I know how upsetting it is to hear about a dragon who loves his oppressors. But that is only because they have been deceived by the humans' seemingly kind appearances. They have no idea that these same humans will one day show their true colors and end up betraying them later. I have seen these events happen a few times in my long life; even when it's humans back-stabbing one of their own." Then he went on to explain some environmental reasons, "But even if some of the humans are somehow genuinely kind, they are still a threat to this planet by how much they pollute. They kill plants that give us our oxygen, they dirty up our waters with their wastes, thus poisoning any of us who drink them, and they even contaminate the air we breathe. And because they don't know when to control their own population, the whole lot of them will kill our world faster." The horde leader sighed and said, "If only those four fools knew the dangers of humanity."

One of the leaf pygmies shouted, "Then we should tell them now before it's too late."

"No," Aeolus declined. "I doubt any of them will be willing to listen to reason; especially that Juna, who distrusts me." Given everything he's heard from Juna, the disaster dragon knew that the Incarus family would so inclined to defend their human citizens. "Besides, I lied to Atlas about how we're going to spare the 'good' humans, so that I can get the transformation spell for us to learn."

"A transformation spell?" asked a curious canopy dragon.

Aeolus nodded and replied, "Yes, a spell that'll turn us into humans so that we can infiltrate their places

and spy on them without suspicion. I intend to us to train with that spell later." He glanced at Baltia, thinking about how one of his magis would use that spell on her to give her the appearance of a child so that she would look less threatening around the guards when she's distracting them. Looking back at the crowd, he told them, "Now anyway, I need everyone to pretend that we're a changed horde, so that we don't upset Axle and others when they get here. And don't even breathe a word about any of this or our true intentions, understood?"

The horde responded, "Yes sir!"

"Good!" said the leader. Then he saw Atlas's nieces bursting out of the woods with Bam running after them as they all laughed.

"Stop, I can't catch you!" the navy blue dragon said playfully.

Aeolus frowned at how his cousin wasn't around to hear his message. Now he was going to have to go over with him, or better yet make someone else do it. *'Bam, where were you while I was talking to the horde?'* he asked telepathically.

Bam stopped and replied, *'I was out playing with the hatchling. What did I miss?'*

The disaster dragon answered, *'The introduction of our two newest members and how we're going to keep our horde's purpose a secret when Axle gets here. Now I need you to stop this silly game and sit with us. And please stay silent at all times until our guests are gone.'*

*'Yes, cous,'* Bam replied. Then he looked at the sisters with a sad face and said, "Sorry girls, I got to go." Danielle and Kylie made protesting "aww"s as they wanted the fun adult to keep playing with them. Bam went up to the horde and sat with them.

Baltia asked the horde leader, "Who are Atlas and Axle? Or more importantly, what do they look like? Also, could you show me around? I'm afraid I'm a little bit new here." She chuckled slightly, still hovering with no signs of tiring from being in the air so long.

Aeolus started with the first question, "Atlas is a magi dragoness and is a friend of mine; she looks like your typical magi, except that she's got a red tint to her scales. Axle is a white dragon and a dragon lord from Shadow Wind. He may come to us in human form. So if you see a dark-haired man in white clothes; don't attack him, even when there's other humans with him. They could be Atlas and his siblings." He stopped to breathe a bit before going onto the next question. "And lastly, there's nothing of interest around here. We, the Vulture Horde, are a traveling group. We don't set up permanent territories at places we stop. Our goal of worldwide human extinction should have clued you in on that," the horde leader told her.

The dark myst nodded and said, "Reddish magi; white or dark-haired human. Got it! And I didn't expect

a permanent territory to be set up, just a temporary camp or something. Like, 'over here we eat, over here we hunt, over there we sleep and this is where we hold meetings.'" She looked around. "What does everyone do at about this time? More importantly, what should I be doing?"

"Nothing," Aeolus answered. "We're all sitting here to wait for Axle to come, so we can hear from him and see if any parts of Dracul's story about Axle are true. And then after that, we're going to do some combat training to prepare ourselves to fight Dracul and capture him." Having a horde learn how to fight other dragons would improve their chances of survival against enemies such as whatever dragon soldiers Dracul soldiers and the Aquarians. The disaster dragon thought to get Atlas to participate in this too, since her fighting skills as a dragon champion of the coliseum fights in Northeast Rudvich would likely to get passed on to his horde through teaching.

Baltia shrugged and said, "Guess I'll hunt then. Hey, any way I could collect lots of small stones and keep them with me? I normally carry a few, but I can only have four at a time. I'll find them, I'd just like a way to carry more than one or two with me while I fly. Gotta be invisible or black though, so I can still hide with it." Her green eyes were bright but serious and she stayed still in the air for once, looking at the horde leader.

"Yes, go ahead," the disaster dragon told her. "But be sure to get back when Axle and the others get here so that you don't miss out on anything important."

The dark myst gave a slightly annoyed chatter, but nodded. "I'll be quick. What I meant, though, was do you have any kind of magical contraption that would let me carry more than one or two at once?"

"Unfortunately, I don't have anything that can help you out," Aeolus responded. Then he thought about a certain dragoness who could help her out by using magic. "But you can try asking Enamora, the pure-bred magi dragoness, for help. She may have some spells that will help carry the extra stones," he advised. Then she angled herself for a quick flight into the forest.

Just then, Tavurth had returned with the group for the meeting. The brute reported to the horde leader, "Aeolus, Axle's here."

The disaster dragon looked at the group and said, "Good, now let's get down to business."

Atlas asked him, "Alright Aeolus, what is it you want with Axle?"

Aeolus answered, "I need to see him about a certain story that Dracul told me. The wicked indeed do lie, but they can also tell the truth if they are willing." Then he looked at the white dragon and said, "Axle of Shadow Wind, we heard that you killed someone named Crimsrion Drago and have purchased slaves of all races. Is that true?" Axle's mouth fell open in shock at the mention of the name. Both Juna and Mekarth let a small growl out at the horde leader and gave him that look like they were going to rip his throat out. The disaster dragon was unfazed by the two sibling's angry looks.

The magi looked at him dumbfounded and asked, "What?! I just already told you that this was all a lie!"

"Indeed you did, Atlas," the horde leader said. "But I need to hear an answer from Axle himself, since there are some things that you don't know that goes on in his life."

"Aeolus, is it?" the white dragon asked. "Well I have to deny you a lot of information of Crimsrion Drago, whose real name is Drago Rionscrim. I hate to say it, but that certain event is classified to just the lords of Shadow Wind and us. The only thing you can know is that Drago was turned to a vampire dragon and what was done to him was not death, but was sealed away. Everything else I can't say." Axle sounded nervous and Juna and Mekarth seemed uneasy now.

Aeolus noticed their nervousness and wondered what made the former dragon lords weary of the vampire, but decided not to press on the issue as it was unimportant compared to the next one. "Okay then," he simply replied.

Axle continued, "Then the slave thing. Though that is partly true, he did however forgot to tell you that soon after within about 20 minutes, they were freed. Soon after that they were given the choice to live among the city as legal citizen or to leave and find their own path. The ones that left were always welcome to come back if they need to and a few did. The ones that stayed mostly lived among my walls and get provided education, work skills, training, and nature knowledge. I provided everything for every race, human, halfling and dragon alike. Food, shelter, water, and a place to call home. Most of the guards that protected my castle are former slaves; even my generals are former slaves as well. If you don't believe me on that, contact a dragon by the name of Akil. She's currently the one in charge of protecting my castle when I left. Though that is her name, I had to give it to her because she had none." Axle then looked at his sister, who seemed to have that look at Aeolus like she was just waiting for him to make a move, like she wanted a reason to spring on him.

Atlas decided to tell her friend, "See Aeolus? That red-scaled bastard was lying to you! He tried to get you to go after Axle so that he can keep Shadow Wind in hell."

"Yes, I see the truth now, Atlas," the disaster dragon said. The white dragon did seem pretty honest about his story and even backed up his innocence by suggesting to contact Akil. "Clearly, Dracul is the guilty one who needs to be punished for his crimes." Looking back at the white dragon, he asked, "So Axle, what will you do from here on out? Do you plan to return to Shadow Wind someday and retake back your home?"

Axle looked at Aeolus for a second before replying, "I have to finish the quest my father sent me on first before I can return back home. Once I do return home, I will have no choice but to take back our home and force Dracul out and who ever follows him." Both of his siblings seemed to have calmed down.

"So you'll be fighting Dracul then," said Aeolus. It was just as expected; Axle was going to war against his

own relative. But before the horde can get themselves involved for a chance to learn Shadow Wind's layout and plan a strike there for much later in the future, he asked, "Will you be expecting large number of Dracul's forces when you return home? Or will this be a duel to settle things once and for all?" Hopefully it was the former, so that the horde leader will have an excuse to "aid" the three siblings and dethrone the tyrant. If not, then he can always use Atlas to telepathically show him the image of the location in case they ever need reinforcements to come.

Then he heard a telepathic message from Baltia, *'I have a deer, but I'll need help getting it back. I'm not that far into the forest, so just follow the scent.'*

*'Alright, I'll send someone to help,'* the horde leader replied. He made a telepathical connection with Enamora and said, *'Enamora, Baltia went hunting in the forest and needs your help to bring back the deer. Also, she's trying to collect some stones for herself. Can you create something that should help her carry everything she needs?'*

The magi dragoness replied, *'Certainly, I'll go track down her scent and help her out.'* Then she went into the woods to look for the dark myst.

Axle had been silent for a bit as if he was trying to think about what to say. Before any word could escape his mouth, Juna stepped in and said with a shaking head, "Dracul is a bit of a loose cannon. He would more likely go to war against us."

The white dragon agreed with his sister, "She's right. Both him and Arch just recently took Shadow Wind, which would mean they had to have an army to back them up. So a war over our home is more possible than a single-on dual. Though your help would be welcomed, there a small problem. Due to the layout of Shadow Wind, there are too many places for slip and ambushes. We would have to teach each dragon here, single handed, the whole layout of the city." Axle sounded calm but upset a bit and continued, "There's more risk than reward in that option. The last thing I would want is for Atlas to follow me all the way back to the city with the young she has with her. If she does though, I would have no choice but to protect her and the young to the best of my abilities."

Aeolus understood that last part of Axle's words well and agreed with them. The hatchlings would certainly be a liability in this war. They needed a safe place to be in until the war against Dracul was over. "Your concern is in the right place, Axle. And fortunately, I know a good place where Atlas's nieces will be safe," he said.

"You do?" asked Atlas, eager to hear what her friend had to say. "Show me in my mind where it is, Aeolus. I'll gladly send them there right now."

The disaster dragon replied, "Okay then, this is the place I am talking about, Atlas." He telepathically sent her an image of the largest room of Doubloon's cave village and said, *'This is where I stayed for one night before forming the Vulture Horde. The leader of this village is Chief Doubloon. When you meet him,*



*tell him that I sent you here for your nieces to stay at until Shadow Wind has been saved. There'll be hatchlings there for them to play with.'*

*'Thanks Aeolus, I owe it to you,'* said the magi gratefully.

The disaster replied, *'You're very welcome.'*

Atlas went past the horde dragons and made her way over to the hatchlings. "Danielle, Kylie, say goodbye to these dragons. I'm taking you over to a village," she told them.

Taking what their aunt said literally, the hatchlings looked at the horde and said their goodbyes to them. The dragons smiled back at them with a few returning their goodbyes. Bam waved at them and beamed, "Bye, it was nice having fun with you. We should play again sometime!" Then Atlas teleports herself and her nieces to the village.

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A bright flash appeared at the village entrance and the two guards, both of them male geode dragons, got startled by sudden appearance of the magi and two hatchlings. "Hey, who goes there?!" cried one of the guards.

The magi answered, "My name is Atlas and I need a safe place for Danielle and Kylie to stay until we save a city from an evil dictator who needs his ass handed to him." She looked down briefly at her two nieces. Looking back at the geodes, she continued, "Aeolus told me to come here for that."

"So you need shelter, huh?" asked the guard on the left. "Okay, I'll let our chief, Doubloon, know about you and Quartz here can take you to him." The guard closed his blue eyes telepathically contacted the chief. When it was done, he reopened his eyes and tilted his head to the inside of the cave to gesture allowance of entrance. "Well welcome to the village. Go tell Chief Doubloon about your story and he'll let these hatchlings stay."

Quartz stepped from his post and said to the family, "Right then, follow me." The Firestars followed the geode through the tunnels and got to the chieftain's cave. "Chief Doubloon, Atlas and company are here."

The orange-winged light brown dragon, who was laying on a hard soil slab, looked at the guard and replied, "Okay, send them in." Quartz stepped back to the side and allowed the Firestars to pass. Doubloon looked at the magi and said, "So you must be Aeolus's acquaintance, Atlas, right?"

"Yep, that's me," Atlas confirmed.

The chief told her about Aeolus, "Your friend helped out with the building of this village and possibly

saved us from the getting hunted by the humans near us."

The magi smiled with pride and said, "He sure is a good guy, ain't he? He even destroyed a group of humans who were going around killing dragons. And now he's going to help me and Axle save Shadow Wind from that bastard, Dracul."

Doubloon smiled and said, "Ahh, always playing the hero, isn't he? You're lucky to have a friend like that, Atlas."

"That I am!" the magi beamed with a grin.

Then the chief went on to business and told her, "Anyway Atlas, we'll keep these hatchlings with you safe here until your return. Just don't let anything bad happen to you until then, okay?"

"You have my word, sir!" Atlas promised. Then she looked at her nieces and told them, "Danielle, Kylie, you two be good while I'm gone, okay?"

"Yes, Aunt Atwas!" said the hatchlings simultaneously.

Looking back at the chief, Atlas said, "Alright Doubloon, I'll see you later." Then she teleported back to the lake.

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Baltia and Enamora had returned with a magic-made bag of stones and two prey to eat with the crimson flares. Axle looked at Juna before he asked, "Juna, can you and Mekarth train them in the basic layout of the city?" The silver grinned at the idea before she spoke back.

Juna turned her head towards Aeolus as she said, "Sure, but I won't like it. I know we need the help, but I honestly don't like the idea." Mekarth heard what his brother said, but didn't say anything.

Axle turned his head back to Aeolus and spoke, "So that's settled; Juna and Mekarth will train those who can be train in the city layout, so you are a bit more prepare when you are needed. I have to return back on my journey, and I would like it if Atlas came with me as well."

The horde leader replied, "That is fine by me, Axle. Just make sure she doesn't get killed. Her nieces already lost their parents; they don't need to lose another caretaker."

Axle promised, "I will not let that happen, Aeolus. Not while I breath air and still have a beating heart." It seems he meant every word he said.

Then Aeolus looked at the magi and asked, "Atlas, will you be alright on your own? Do you need any of

my horde member's help?"

Atlas assured him, "Don't worry about me, Aeolus. I know how to get around Spinx's tricks and know when to warp away. He won't get us." She was pretty confident on how she would fight the necromancer in the future.

The horde leader told her, "Well if you're sure of yourself, then I have no further concerns. But Atlas, if you ever need help on this journey; don't hesitate to talk to me, alright?"

"Got it, thanks for your concern, Aeolus," the magi replied. Then she looked to the white dragon and asked, "Ready to go, Axle?"

Just then, Baltia flew close over to the pair and asked, "Where are you going? Should I come? I'd like something to do..."

Axle told her, "I would not wish to get you into harm's way. It's best if you stay here for now." Then he turned his attention to Atlas and calmly said, "We may leave now, if you wish." His brother and sister walked away, sounding if they were discussing something.

"Oh, we're going right now," the magi said to him. Then she said to the disaster dragon, "Bye Aeolus." Without waiting for a response from him, she teleported herself and Axle out of Solomos.