

Chapter 35: Azera the Mercenary

The car had gone over a quarter way to the Sundown, when Kathia looked out the window and saw a man dressed in black confronting a wounded silver-haired swordsman with a dark myst pygmy next to his good leg. Behind the swordsman were two black dragons with red eyes. The curious girl wondered what was going on over there and told the driver, "Megan, stop!"

The woman stepped on the breaks and halted the car. She looked to the girl and asked her, "What is it, Kathia?"

The redhead pointed at what she was seeing and told the driver, "Look at that; there's two people fighting each other and I'm not even sure who's the dragon hugger or not, and which's dragons are slaves or wild ones. I think we might have another citizen for Sundown, if none of those two are hippies."

Megan seeing how badly injured the swordsman was, felt wary and suspicious about the dark-clothed man and warned, "Or we may have stumbled upon a deranged murderer trying to kill an innocent man. I don't know if we should trust this person, the guy in the robes."

Kathia told a counter-point, "How do we even know which one's the good guy or not? For all we know, the other guy could be the culprit here. Look, how about you drive the car out of their sight and I'll stay here and watch what happens? Besides, we're like 1000 feet away; a safe distance. We'll be alright."

Megan still wasn't convinced that the girl was going to come out okay. "Are you really sure about this?" she asked.

"I am," the girl assured. "And don't worry, I can defend myself. After all, I do have magic."

The woman sighed and said, "Alright fine, but if it gets starts to get dangerous, then please come back to the car. Don't fight them."

"I got it," Kathia replied. She took the folk magic book with her and got out of the car. As the vehicle drove away, the girl hid herself behind a tree and peeked over the edge to watch the fight. While doing so, she smelled a horrible stench that seemed to belong to a rotting corpse. The girl squeezed her nose to block out the stench. Both men stood in ready positions as they faced each other with their blades drawn. The silver-haired man moved his foot slightly and with a quick motion, he threw his sword into the air. The glow of the sword blinded Kathia for a brief second. The swordsman took that second to pull his bow from around his shoulder, notched an arrow and fired. The arrow hit with a soft thud, but not at the target he was aiming for; one of the black-scaled dragons had blocked the arrow. The arrow was lodge in his leg as blood splattered against the ground. There didn't seem to be a reaction from the dragon at all; either the attack didn't seem to faze him at all or the girl was too far away to see the

reaction on his reaction. She thought it was most likely the former.

The black-robed man came from behind the black dragon as his opponent grabbed his sword that he had thrown in the air. The swordsman blocked the other man's sword as the blades met each other with their metallic ring. The black-robed man pushed away from his enemy and kicked him hard in the side. The silver-haired man grinned in pain as he grabbed his bleeding side. Kathia noticed what appeared to be white shards on his side; where had they come from? The silver-haired man slung his bow back over his shoulder and blocked another of his foe's sword slash, but he still got a gash across his cheek from a bone shard. The silverette punched his opponent in the chest, but it did not seem to affect the other man very much. The black-robed man just grinned even more devilish as he moved his sword so it came across the silverette's chest, leaving a slash and making him stagger back a bit. Kathia moved in about a few hundred feet closer to get a better look at the situation, but as she got closer, the awful smell became stronger. *'Just where is that smell coming from?'* the girl wondered.

Once she got to where she needed to be, Kathia heard the black-clothed man say, "You're just a hollow of your former self, so you're not worth my time." Then suddenly, he got clawed in the back by the dark myst pygmy that jumped on him. It ripped at the black-robed man for a few seconds before being grabbed by him. Then he threw the pygmy right at one of the dragons, who clawed at it in the air and left a gash on its lower body as it hit a tree. Its blood splattered against the tree, which oddly had a shadow poking out from behind it. The silverette charged at his enemy, but got no more than a few feet until a tail hit him father down the street, causing him to tumble a bit as well. There was a blood trail following him from his wounds as he went about ten feet from where he was standing. The silverette was trying to push himself up off the ground before the same black dragon, that attacked him, pressed down on him with its paw to keep him down. The other dragon stayed where it was as the black-robed man walked over to his enemy and said, "Not even worth watching you die ether." He turned on his heel and started to hum a very dark and devilish tone. He snapped his fingers as a sky drake came from the ground, cracking it wide open. Kathia stood there dumbfounded with her mouth open and her eyes astonished at what she just saw. A sky drake underground? That couldn't be right; air-type dragons or drakes weren't known to live underground. Well unless she had somehow missed out on this info on the breed. The girl made a note to herself to read up on sky drakes later.

The black-robed man got on the sky drake as the black dragon removed its paw from the silverette and took to the air. It was soon followed by the other dragon and then the sky drake with its master on its back. The silverette had a pool of blood that was starting to form below him as he pushed himself off the ground. He placed one knee in the blood and pulled his bow out to notch an arrow. As the black-clothed man and his dragons were getting fizz and farther away, the air around the arrow started to swirl with energy and heat as the tip started to glow brightly. The silverette pulled the bow-string back now and aimed carefully before releasing the arrow. Lightning flowed around the arrow as it flew to its target, but it did not hit anyone as a small black crow got in the way of the arrow. The bird exploded on the impact of the arrow and the energy of the magic, sending gore in every direction. Kathia looked at the result in amazement and thought, *'Oh my gods, that is so cool! Imagine what I can do to dragons if I had a spell like that.'* She thought about going over to the silver-haired man to get him to teach her how

to power up her arrows, but first she would need to help him. The silverette fell to the ground and dropped his bow as his last effort to even kill his foe was in vain. The other man laughed at the silverette's failed attempt and disappeared into the sky. The girl took out a bottle of blessed water and went over to the injured man, asking, "Hey, are you alright? I just saw you fighting that other man. What happened?"

The man looked weak and hurt from his injuries. But he did manage to say one thing though in a voice of shallow whisper, "Azera."

"Azera?" the girl asked; she wondered if the dark man who attacked him was named that. But Kathia decided not to press on that, because right now it looked like the man was dying from blood loss. So to save his life, the girl held her right hand, which glowed in a light green aura, over his wounds and began to channel healing magic energy into them. One wound at a time would be healed by her healing spell. Once she was done with that, the girl opened the bottle of blessed water and told him, "Here, drink this. It'll help you recover." Then she brought the bottle to his mouth and poured some of the water inside his mouth to heal any internal injuries he may have suffered.

The man's eyes slowly open up and looked to the girl before him. He asked in a loud whispered, "Why did you heal me?"

Kathia put down the bottle as she answered, "Because I want to learn from you. You know that magic arrow spell thing you did at the guy who attacked you? I want to know how to do that, so that I can teach everyone in my new city, so that we can liber... uh I mean hunt down animals in style. Yeah!" Good thing she stopped herself from revealing her plan, otherwise this stranger who might be a loyalist to the Aquarians would rat her out and then things would go bad. Putting on her cute girl masquerade, Kathia held her hands together, smiled and flashed her eyes as she asked, "So would you be a gentleman and teach this young lady like me how to use that spell, please?"

The man pushed himself up into a sitting position with great effort and simply looked at her with a blink stare. "Arrow spell? You mean that thing I did with the arrow? To be honest, I don't know how it happened or how I did it. It just happened," he said as he simply looked at the ground. "It's just a blare to me."

Kathia raised her eyebrow at him and asked, "You don't know?" She was puzzled as to how a spell like that could suddenly come out of nowhere without the guy learning it first. "Are you sure you didn't try to channel your magic energy into it or think about doing that?" she asked. She remembered how she managed to spread magic flames over her body when she was up against the vine dragon, despite the Burning Touch spell being limited to just the hands. But perhaps that was because the girl was trying to exceed the limit. The man here however seemed to have done his arrow spell by pure accident.

The silverette looked at his hand and said, "That's right, I do not know. I can say though, that power was more powerful than the fire spells I can use and almost pure energy." He sounded almost as if he was

about to pass out from the lack of energy.

Kathia wondered if developing her fire magic energy would eventually lead to being able to cast the spell. She thought about bringing this man back to camp, so that he can help teach her fellow settlers how to cast the spells he used and maybe in turn, help him to learn that arrow spell. But she still needed to know what he thought of dragons first. "Well maybe you can try to give it a shot at casting that spell to see if it can be controlled. You know? Channel lots of magic energy into the arrow and see if you can pull it off again," the girl suggested. If her theory worked, then she can try practicing that spell herself.

Then the man pointed to the dark tiny dragon, whose breathing was shallow. Its bleeding has slowed down a bit. He asked, "Mind me asking, but is that dragon with you?"

The girl had been meaning to get to the dragon, so that she can test his allegiance. In a haughty tone, she scoffed, "Oh that lizard? No. It's just some wild scaly. Speaking of which, it looks like it's going to die. I say we put it out of its misery, don't you agree?"

The swordsman looked back at her and shrugged his head. "I could care less if it dies or live; but unlike you, I don't kill the weak, which includes dragons," he said.

Seeing as how the man didn't seem to care much for the pygmy, Kathia took the man to be okay after all. Sounding admired, she said, "Ah, so you like to fight the strong, huh? I'm sure you'll find plenty of strong dragons to fight in the future if you were to come with me." Then she told him about Sundown, "I have a settlement at the base of the mountain, where we're going to build a city. We wish to take back our real city from those horrid dragons that burned down our home and turned it into a medieval mess that they took over. But to do that, we're going to need to learn magic and how to fight." Then she explained about herself, "I have a friend who can teach archery and I can teach magic, but I'm still a beginner at it. But you, my friend; you seem to be more experienced than I at combat. Perhaps, you will be willing to help my people learn to slay dragons? I can offer you money to do the work. I'll have you know that I'm a rich girl. So what do you say? Will you join me?"

The man shook his head and calmly replied, "I don't train killers. All I do is solo missions on my own and that is that. Yes, I may be a merc, but I don't train people. I thank you for the offer, but I must refuse and I don't think you can pay for my services."

Kathia made a grumpy frown; it felt like the swordsman was patronizing her. She thought with a bad temper, *'Don't underestimate my finances, just because I'm young!'* Then she put on back a calm face and said, "Well okay, I understand. Well if I ever need you, can you tell me where I can find you?" She may not be able to use him as a fellow teacher, but perhaps she may need him to raid supplies out of cities, buildings, and caves that may be occupied by dragons.

The mercenary shook his head and said, "I have nowhere to really call home. Plus-" He stood up this time and grabbed his sword. He removed it from the loose ground that has soaked his blood. "I will find

out what he knows," he continued, sounding like he meant it. He began to walk away from the girl before stopping and picked up his bow. "If you need me, look southeast, because that's the direction he went and I will follow," the man said to her before taking his leave. He picked up the arrow, which seemed to not have damage on it even from the impact. Then he picked up the dark myst by its tail. "You might be useful for later reason, or you might know something as well," he said to the dark myst as it seemed to have passed out.

"He?" asked Kathia. "Wait, do you mean Azera? Is that the guy who attacked you? That's his name, right?" Maybe if the mercenary won't train her people, then perhaps his attacker will. Perhaps even his slaves, if that's what these dragons were, could be useful for her society in building Sundown.

The man stopped and turned his head to the girl, to whom he snarled at, "No, that's my name. And if you value your town and life, I recommend not to follow or even try and find him. He's a necromancer and those dragons are already dead. He does not care who he kills as long as he finds the dragon he is chasing."

Kathia was mesmerized by what she just heard about the attacker. "A necromancer?" she murmured to herself. That was a wizard that brought the dead to life and controlled them, right? That would explain how the sky drake went underground. The power to control dragons after they had been slain would be something useful to her cause and pretty amazing, too. The girl had to learn how to do that, but she couldn't count on Azera's attacker to teach her since he was dangerous. Perhaps she may learn how to do that from one of the books she purchased. If they had nothing about it, then she can always go back to the book store to get a book she missed or look up it up on the internet.

Then the mercenary asked, "I do have a question, where exactly is Sundown located?"

The girl answered, "Do you know where Trident Mountain is? The camp is near that place and it's in the direction facing Windfall."

Azera nodded his head to the information. "I thank you for the information, now I will be on my way," he said as he started to walk away. "And if you need to contact me, just squeeze the arrow over there," he said as he pointed to the arrow over in the dirt that he shot earlier. The arrow was undamaged and looked brand new as well. The tip was a shiny silver green and the wood was dark. "Each of my arrows are connected to each other and will react and let me know if someone is trying to break it," Azera said as he walked away with the dark myst pygmy.

"Okay, I got it," the girl said. Then Kathia looked at the arrow again and thought, *'Hmm, I wonder if this is magic as well. I'll add that to my list of what-to-learn.'* The girl went back up the slope and got to the car.

Megan looked at her and asked, "Did everything go alright down there?"

Kathia answered, "Yeah, everything's fine. I saved some guy named Azera, who told me he was a mercenary. The other man who attacked him was an evil necromancer."

"A necromancer, well that sounds scary," the driver commented.

"Maybe," the girl replied. Then she smiled, "But not if somebody uses necromancy for good."

"For good?" Megan asked, intrigued.

Kathia nodded and answered, "Yeah! Like after you kill a dragon, you can control it to your will and make it do everything you want to do. A dead dragon would make a much better slave than a live one. No free will to turn against you at any time."

Megan liked the idea and said, "My, that sounds good! Makes me wish we thought of that earlier."

"Yeah, that could have saved us all those lives back then," the girl said, thinking about the night her parents died.

Minerva read the last two steps and finished off writing the notes to starting a business. After that, she clicked the back button to return to the search engine website and typed in "how to run financials." She read the entire article and got the process understood. Now with everything she needed done, she went to go look for Ronan. Minerva found him in his room. He sat in the window sill staring out blankly. He looked somewhat peaceful, but also appeared as if he was reminiscing. He kept triggering his hidden blade, which was attached to his wrist, and retracting it over and over. That kind of weapon looked strange to the woman; perhaps it was something made in the southwest region. She took her mind off it for now and said to the man, "Ronan, I'm done reading up everything we need to do business."

The man looked back to her as he retracted the blade one more time. "Alright, so what's next?" he asked. "Do we need to go talk to people now?"

Minerva suggested, "I have a friend whose brother is an architectural designer. We should go see him first before we go get our loans and license." Whitney's older brother, David, had graduated from a university with a bachelor's degree in architecture. He was also a very smart man whose grades were always excellent. He will be the perfect guy to hire for his services.

Ronan nodded and said, "Alright, let's go. I'll wake up Drake." He got himself dressed in his assassin's gear, but didn't equip all of his weapons; only his sword and dagger. He left his hood down since he had no reason to hide his face anymore. Minerva followed him downstairs and outside where Drake was sleeping. The man slapped his snout and the dragon snapped awake. "C'mon big guy, Minerva and I need a lift," Ronan said to him. Drake came out and stretched his wings to get ready. The woman got

onto the dragon and waited for the man to get on before they took flight.

Ronan hopped on too and Drake took off. "Where am I taking you two?" the dragon asked them, since he needed directions. He kept his flight low with only about three or four stories high.

Minerva answered, "Over to my friend, Whitney's house." She gave the dragon direction to her friend's house. Drake adjusted his course and flew to Whitney's home. There, he landed outside it lightly. Ronan hopped off and aided the woman in getting off, like a gentleman. "Thanks!" she said gratefully. Then they went over to the door and the woman and knocked on the door.

They stood there for a few seconds until the door swung open to reveal a ginger-haired woman with freckles on her face. Smiling happily, the woman greeted, "Hey Minerva! I'm surprised to see you here." Then she looked over to Ronan and asked, "Who's this?"

Minerva introduced him, "This is Ronan; the guy who saved me two nights ago."

The man put his fist over his heart and bowed to her. "A pleasure to meet you. We have some important business to discuss with you if you're interested," he spoke with a calm manner and a sense of hopefulness in his tone. He added, "I hope you don't mind my friend standing guard on your roof. He's a bronze dragon named Drake." The dragon had glided and landed gently on the roof.

Whitney replied, "Not at all; he can rest anywhere on my property as long as dad doesn't get home too soon." Then she lowered her voice a bit into a warning tone, "He don't like dragons, because of that rebellion a few days ago."

Then a feminine voice was heard from the house, "Whitney, who's at the door?"

The redhead turned her head around and answered, "It's Minerva and a friend of hers, mom."

The mother's voice sounded with delight at the kind of guests they were having. "Your friend's here? Well don't just stand there. Let them in," she told.

Whitney looked back to the couple and said, "Well, come on in guys." Then Minerva followed her friend inside the house and closed the door behind them. The redhead looked at them both and asked, "So, what brings you guys here?"

Ronan walked in with Minerva and said, "We have a favor to ask. Minerva is helping me to establish a school, a martial arts school. We would like to ask your assistance."

The redhead placed a hand on her hip and said, "Okay, what can I help you with?"

The man looked to the blonde, who said, "We're actually looking for your brother. Is he here right

now?"

"David?" asked the redhead. She nodded and answered, "Oh yeah, he's here alright. I'll go get him." Then she went into the room at the beginning of the narrow hallway. Minerva could hear her saying, "David, my friends need your help. I think they want you to design their school."

"Alright, I'll go see them," said the brother. Then Whitney came back out of the room with a freckle-less ginger-haired man, who was a few years older than his sister. David smiled at Minerva and greeted, "Hey Minerva, what's up?"

"I'm doing good," the blonde replied and smiled back. Then she introduced her companion, "This is Ronan, he's a new friend of mine who's staying with me."

David held a hand out for the assassin to shake as he greeted, "Hey there, nice to meet you!"

Ronan shook his hand and replied, "Honor to meet you. Minerva tells me you work as a contractor, handling the construction. I'm looking to establish a school, a place to train and teach the combative skills that I have learned myself. Minerva has agreed to be my partner and she has recommended you as the one to go to about getting the facility built. Can you help us?"

David responded, "Sure thing, man! So hey, what kind of combat are you teaching?"

Minerva simply answered, "Martial Arts."

The siblings smiled with interest as the brother replied, "Wow, cool!"

Whitney smiled with excitement and said, "That sounds like fun! I'll have to think about going there some day."

Minerva smiled at Ronan and said optimistically, "Looks like your business is going to be great." If her friend and her brother felt that way, then others would, too. There may be a lot of money in it for the assassin.

The assassin smiled at the blonde before looking back to the others. He inquired, "Minerva and I are going to be getting a few things done, but I would like to know how much will it cost us to pay you for this job?"

David paused briefly as if he was thinking before he answered, "Well Ronan, I'd say it would be 30 gold per hour when we get started. Does that sound fine?"

Minerva nodded, feeling confident with the price, and replied, "Of course. I'll be paying for it."

The male redhead said, "Okay good, I can get started." As he started to move, he told them, "Follow me, we're going to work out the layout on a digital blueprint." They followed him to his room, where he sat on a chair at the computer table. He opened up an architectural program and started a new blueprint file. David asked, "Okay so besides the bathroom and dojo room, do you need other places in your school?"

Ronan was impressed with the digital blueprint. He specified the necessary areas, "I will need a managerial office as well as a front desk at the main entrance. If any of my future students become trained enough to teach, I will need a break room for those who teach under me."

"Okay, got it," David said. Then he started drawing out thumbnails of the layout on a sheet of paper. "This will take a while, so you guys go hang out in the living room if you want."

The assassin nodded, while Minerva said, "Okay, we will." They left David's room and went back to the living room.

There, Whitney asked them, "So do you guys want to watch a movie in the meantime?"

Ronan raised a brow in confusion before responding, "Movie? What's a movie?"

Whitney raised her eyebrow as well and asked, "Did you live under a rock or something?"

Minerva came to the man's rescue and explained, "Actually Whitney, he's from the southwest region. Probably from a rural area." The southwest region was home to some cultures that didn't believe in modern-day technology as it was against their religion. It was most likely that Ronan had come from one.

The redhead nodded and said, "Ohhh, I see. Well, that explains the weird clothes he's wearing." Ronan smirked considering how little Whitney knew of him and smiled when Minerva defended him. Then the redhead turned to the man and explained to him, "Alright Ronan, I don't know how I'm going to explain it to you, but I'll do my best. A movie is like a story, but with actors pretending to be characters." She went over to the wide-screen TV and touched the black machine. "And you can watch it on the TV here," she continued.

Ronan explained to her, "I'm from the southern deserts. TVs don't exist out there. No computers, no televisions; nothing like that. I think it's because none of it has been introduced there yet. The various styles of clothing however, those constantly change and all styles are welcome."

After listening to all that, Whitney's surprised response was, "No technology in your country? Well dang, that sucks! We should start exporting over there right now." Then she went to the DVD storage and took out a few movies that her guests may like. She asked, "So Ronan, what kind of show do you like to see?" Then she listed the categories, "Horror, comedy, action?"

Ronan shrugged in confusion and looked to Minerva, saying, "Uh, you pick?"

Minerva went over to her best friend's side and took a look at the DVDs. There were movies like Of Doves and Ravens, Misfits and Outcasts, and The Little Monster Girl. The blonde decided to go with a different movie other than the three mentioned. Picking up its case, she suggested, "How about Bob and George?" It was a pretty funny movie that she had watched in a cinema one time. She figured that Ronan might enjoy it, too.

Whitney smiled and said, "Ooh, I love that movie. Let's all watch it together." Minerva took the CD out of its case and put it into the DVD player. Then the redhead put the TV on HDM2, so that they can see the previews of other movies first. The three sat together to watch the movie.