

Chapter 45: Akil, Literacy Class and Kidnapping

As they left the building and Minerva asked Ronan, "Okay now, what's next?" They got the school built and the loans are in the process of being sent to her account.

The man smirked at her. "Well, we've gotten so much done today, why don't we take the rest of the day off until tomorrow? Then we can gather our supplies and start setting up the school's inner workings."

"Okay," the woman responded, taking a liking to the idea. Some leisure time would be great after all the work they were putting into building up the school.

Ronan smiled and asked, "What would you like to do?"

The woman pondered her thoughts on what to do next. Her mind brought up the dragon literacy program that the ADR initiated. She would love to help dragons learn how to read, so that they can learn to interpret human-made signs and get by in society. Knowing where the program would be at, she said, "Why don't we go over to the Summer Park Community Center? The ADR's over there teaching dragons how to read. Want to help?"

Ronan smirked at Minerva's suggestion. "I don't think I'd be of much help. Drake would but... I'd be better off acting as protection over there. Keeping gangs or terrorists from doing any more harm to the ADR." His smirk changed to a smile.

Minerva smiled back and said, "Well I suppose we can always use a guard in case we get attacked again. Come on, let's go there." Then she went over to Drake and asked, "Drake, can you take us over to the Summer Park Community Center?" She told him where it would be at.

The dragon yawned, "I think for once I miss the days of traveling across the land and getting into skirmishes... not exactly fond of being used as a 'taxi' as you humans call them." The woman laughed while he smirked as they got on his back. He took off and flew to the park as Minerva instructed on how to get there.

As Aeolus and Firefly continued their sparring match, the horde leader heard Juna's telepathic yell, "Aeolus, get over here and bring your medic. Now!" She sounded like she wanted it done like yesterday and with urgency. Whatever the reason she to summon him, it must be an emergency that needed to be taken care of immediately.

Aeolus replied, *'I'll be there, right away.'* The leader stopped sparring with the crimson flare as he moved his head out of the way of the fireball. He told the pygmy, "It looks like we'll have to cut our sparing

session again. Firefly, why don't you train with Volkin? She'll need a partner when I take Hewey from her."

The crimson flare replied, "Okay."

Aeolus contacted the healer dragon, *'Hewey, Juna needs us right now. Come with me to the Shadow Wind replica. Firefly will train with Volkin for now.'*

Hewey replied, *'Sounds like it must be important. Alright, I'll come.'* The horde leader left the training ground as he telepathically let Volkin know that she will be training with Firefly. Hewey joined up with the leader and they went over to the city's replica.

There, they saw Juna looking over a chained green dragoness with ballista arrows stuck on her body like needles on a pin cushion. Beside her was a dead human, but the horde dragons paid no attention to him as human lives were of no concern. Aeolus told Hewey to go and heal her before he asked the halfling, "Juna, who is this dragoness and what happened to her?" The healer dragon removed the net and pulled out the closest ballista arrow out of the leg before he started to heal the wound.

Juna remained looking at the dragoness as she got healed up. "Meet Akil, Axle's right hand general. The human next to her goes by the name of Shadow, Axle's fastest and deadliest message deliver in Shadow Wind. Simply put it, he sacrificed his life so she would escape," she said as she turned and picked up the arrow that the healer removed from Akil's leg. Aeolus looked to the dragoness and noticed that her scent smelled almost familiar. It smelled kind of like Atlas, perhaps she was a blood relative of hers. Juna looked over then arrow and then looked back at Akil for a few more seconds. The halfling grabbed both ends of the arrow and snapped the wooden shaft into two before she removed the metal part of it. She put the metal part up to the collar that was still around Akil's neck and cut it clean off, almost as if the metal collar was butter itself. While Hewey was still taking out arrows and healing Akil, Juna walked up to the dragoness's head and used the arrow's tip to cut through the bars that connected the muzzle to the collar. Then she removed the muzzle for Akil, but left the collar on her. "Do not remove that collar at all," the halfling said as sheathe the arrow's tip in the boots she now had from when she broke out of the prison. "Now, I must find Mekarth."

Aeolus walked towards Akil and said, "Akil, is it? I am Aeolus, the leader of the Vulture Horde. We have allied ourselves with Axle and his siblings for the purpose of liberating Shadow Wind. I assume you must be one of Dracul's prisoners, am I correct?" Then he asked, "Has Dracul or any of his loyalists spoke of some valuable info that could be helpful to us?"

The dragoness looked at the horde leader and then turned her head to Juna, to whom she spoke to in an entirely different language than Draconic. Juna replied back in the same language. Aeolus had no idea what they had just said, but from the negative tone of the woman's voice, it did not sound good. The halfling shifted back to her dragon form and took to the air to look for her brother. Akil turned her attention back to Aeolus and said, "Yes, I'm Akil. And no, there was no information to be gathered

from Dracul or those things you call loyalists. If you ask me, those loyalists could go burn in hell." She snarled out the last part a bit. It seems her temper flared for a bit before it seemed to soothe out a bit. She stood up, a bit weak but manageable, and looked around, observing her surroundings. The leader noticed fresh scars on her, but also ones that were quite old, like they were inflicted a long time ago.

The horde leader said, "I see; I know soldiers don't like to mention any secrets to the enemy, but I was hoping they would have the misfortune to slip up. Well Akil, you look like you've been through some rough times. I'll let you rest in the village over there for now. Later, I may need you to teach the horde on how Shadow Wind fights so that we can be prepared for whatever moves they throw at us."

Akil looked at him, almost the same way Juna looks at him, coldly and said, "You want training from me, hmm. Fine then, but let me see how you fare right now."

Aeolus noticed how untrusting she was. Either every Shadow Wind dragon was reluctant to teach outsiders or... Aeolus didn't get a chance to think more as the messenger had struck him at his chest with almost no warning at all. "Gah!" he cried out upon getting hit. It seemed she was not the type to wait around for an answer, but one that takes it at that moment. She followed her slash right up with a spin tail slap that struck him in the face. It seems she was really not allowing the horde leader to have time to react at all. The blow dazed him a bit that he had to shake his head to get back to his senses. Then the messenger followed up with an uppercut of her talons extended out, aiming for the chest area.

After getting struck by the dragoness's claws again, Aeolus decided he had enough of getting treated like a punching bag. It was time for his turn to strike back. The disaster dragon swiped back at her before he blew out his lightning breath. Akil seemed not to be weak at all, even in her current state. She took the full blow from Aeolus's swiping attack, but dodged the lightning even at point blank range. Then she countered with sweeping his feet out from under him and pinning his body down by putting her feet on his neck and right wing. The disaster dragon snarled as he struggled to free himself from her before he retaliated by kicking up at her underbelly with his hindlegs to throw her off. Then he got up and jumped midair, before he glided around and blew down his lightning breath again. The dragoness slide across the sand for a bit than jumped back from the lightning bolts. She spread out her wings and with a powerful wind force from them, created a cloud of sand to throw at the horde leader. He shut his eyes shut when sand made contact with his face. Luckily none of the grainy substance got into his eyes. He flapped his wings to create a gust of wind that would blow back down the sand cloud. At the same time, Akil's claws made contact with one of his wings and drew blood. The horde leader opened his eyes tilted away from her before she could do any more damage. After flying up higher, he cast a tornado beam at her. But all she did was smile a bit as she took to the air and dodged his beam with no effort at all. Aeolus thought, *'She's pretty agile. She's dodging my ranged attacks as good as Juna did. I wonder if they teach their warriors there how to evade like that.'* It would be beneficial for the horde if they could avoid arrows and breath attacks with ease.

Akil climbed higher and faster than he did. Once she was high enough and was angled correctly, she

dived right towards his back. The horde leader crashed belly-flat onto the ground. Apparently, he was disadvantaged with the dragoness weighing down and being unable to turn over to free himself, but this fight was far from over. Aeolus used his wind magic to create a windy wall around himself and then closing it in to create a vortex underneath himself that would lift him up off the ground. The horde leader used Eitri's stone and teleported himself away from Akil. Then he turned the vortex into a tornado, hoping to trap Akil in it. Aeolus took in a breath of air and was about to blow lightning at the tornado, but then he saw the silhouette of Akil flying in the same direction as the rotation of the wind, causing her to gain speed. The faster she moved, the farther away she got from the center. 'What?' thought the surprised Aeolus.

Soon after about 15 seconds, the messenger was far enough away from the tornado to escape its grasp. She still kept the rotation of the tornado, flying just out of its threat range, but slowing down until she was slow enough to land. "You are a real pest, you know that. Always relying on magic to win your battles. What a joke!" she yelled to Aeolus before she turned and started to walk away. She sounded a little disappointed in his ability in fighting.

Aeolus huffed, not caring what she thought about his fighting skills. It looks like Akil won't be training the horde, but it's alright. He can always send out spies over to where she came from, so their espionage on the army's fighting ability will give the horde clues on what to expect and how to prepare for them. Plus, there was always Atlas to learn from. Her being the recurring dragon champion meant that her skills used to win tournaments would be useful for the war against Dracul and Arch. When she returns from Trident Mountain, he will ask her to teach the dragons. Aeolus decided to leave the green dragoness alone for a bit, so that her anger will cool off for a bit. He went back to where the other dragons were and decided to end the sparring session. "Vulture Horde, it's time to take a break." The horde stopped fighting and relaxed, turning their eyes upon their leader. Aeolus hinted about lunchtime and continued, "Feel free to go out and hunt if you need food."

Bam smiled, enjoying the thought of eating up a delicious meal. "Sweet! I can't wait to eat more of those prickly pears." Then the navy blue dragon rethought, "Though I should probably eat something different." Having the same thing to eat could feel boring and make the taste bland; a variety would be more mouth-watering. He looked around at the dragons and asked, "Anybody want to come with?"

Akil approached him as she spoke up, "I'll come, but only because I'm hungry. And I rather get my own food instead of letting someone else get it for me."

Bam replied with a smile, "Okay, no problem. I'll be going over to where I found the prickly pears. Maybe there will be some food around there for you." Then they left the desert and went in the direction, he found the pears among the cacti.

As the autumn dragoness continued to comfort Pendra, they heard the sounds of metal banging against

stone outside the nursery. Knowing that there was a human approaching, the dragoness told the hatchlings, "Everyone, get over to that corner over there. There's a human coming!"

The hatchlings became scared as they all screamed and Pinky cried, "Oh no, a human! It's going to get us!"

Smasp cried as well, "I don't want to die!" Her mother let go of Pendra to let him join the others who all ran to the corner furthest away from the cave way and huddled there together.

The dragoness stood fearlessly and watched the cave way as she waited for the human to come, so that she could blow down an inferno of flames at him before he even gets the chance to attack. As the sounds of movement drew nearer, a draconic scent could be smelled, but it didn't belong to any of the villagers. Even more strange, was the absence of human scent. The dragoness found this to be peculiar and confusing. She thought, *'Strange, there should be a human coming, but I'm smelling a dragon instead.'* She thought about going outside to look who it is, but decided against it, for it could be a trap set up by the human who was using this scent to disguise his own. The sounds suddenly came to a stop, almost as if they were never there. Soon, the scent followed. The dragoness sensed that something was wrong. Why was there this sudden silence? What was the person waiting for? It was a few seconds later that the sound of something being thrown through the air could be heard. A large blue scythe flew through the air right at the dragoness. She got startled and her cyan eyes went wide. The weapon's curved blade struck her in the chest, causing the dragoness to let out a pained scream.

The hatchlings gasped in shock as Smasp shouted, "Mommy!" Pinky let out a horrified scream, worrying how badly did their mother get hurt. The dragoness dropped to her side and writhe in pain as blood spilled from her wound. Then a human in blue armor appeared out of thin air. He ran past the dragoness and made a dash towards the hatchlings, who all let out terrified screams and backed all the way into the corner as if this was the safe space that would protect them from the big bad ape coming to kill or take them away into slavery.

The dragoness heard their screams and looked around to see the warrior going towards them. In his hands were two metal rings. Thinking that he was going to make new slaves of them, she glared at the man and shouted, "Stay away from them, you fiend!" She considered spewing a fireball at him, but decided against it as that would put the hatchlings in harm's way, since the man was close to them.

When the man got to the hatchlings, he reached for only two of them: Danielle and Kylie. He went to grab them by the necks to put on the small collars that were concealed in his hands. The Firestar sisters screamed and tried to beat at the man to let them go. Danielle screamed, "No, wet me go!"

Kylie cried, "I dun wan to be a swave!"

The whiptail telepathically called to her aunt for help. *'Aunt Atlas, a human's going to take me away. Help me!'* she screamed. She waited to hear from the magi, but she got nothing in return. The hatchling

tried again, *'Aunt Atlas, help!'* Again, there was no response. Even Kylie did the same thing and got no word from their aunt. The human then took a link of chain and pulled it through the rings on the collars as if he was making sure it was firm and secure. Then the sisters yelled, when he tugged their chains. As they were dragged away from the other hatchlings, their fearful tears turned halfway into those of frustration. Why wasn't their aunt answering their pleas? Their lives were in danger and they needed help now. Danielle and Kylie started to wail after their aunt failed to hear them.

The human stopped at the dragoness, who growled at his presence. He grabbed the end of the scythe from her wound and shook the blood off it before he sheathed it. The dragoness snarled, "You let these poor hatchlings go!"

The man looked down to the Firestar sisters and told them, "If you have anyone you wish to say goodbye to, now would be the time."

The sisters refused to leave their friends' cave as Danielle wailed, "I dun wan to say goodbye! I wan my aunt Atwas!"

Kylie sobbed, "Let me go!" The sisters tried in futile to break free and return to their friend.

The dragoness bared her teeth at the man as he spoke in perfect draconic language, "It's best you don't try anything. It would be wrong to leave your children without a mother. Also, I won't let anything happen to these two to the best of my ability, but I can't promise anything with the others. One more thing. That wound is not grave, but it will get infected if not tended to soon."

Before she could say anything to him, the man took off his helmet. It was obviously a human, but something about his eyes told something else. His eyes were that of a dragon. His skin was black and his hair was almost the color of silver. The mother was speechless and amazed. This man might seem like a halfling, but he wasn't. His scent was like that of a dragon's and not a human's. The autumn asked him, "What are you?"

After feeling the shame of not doing anything to help out of fear, Pendra gathered up his courage to save the younger sisters and avenge his father. He charged at the man, baring his fangs and growled heroically, "I'll defeat you, human!"

The dragoness thought the imperial fleshcrowne to be crazy trying to pick a fight with a full-grown warrior. Fearing that he would get hurt or killed, she called out to him, "Pendra, no!" The male hatchling bit at the "man's" leg and tried to pierce his hard armor, his teeth failing to break the metal.

The "man" looked down at the hatchling and placed the helmet on the ground before gently removing him from his leg. Then he pressed hard on a few pressure points, causing Pendra's eyes to go wide with shock before he became paralyzed and fell limp to the side. The dragoness gasped in shock as her daughters worriedly cried out, "Pendra!" The man placed him next to the dragoness who looked at the

fleshcrowne and noticed him still breathing. She was somewhat relieved; it looks like he was going to be okay.

The "human" put his helmet back on as he said, "What I am is a dragon. A cowardly dragon that only follows orders given to him." He then picked up Danielle and Kylie, not letting go of them as he turned and started to walk away from the dragons. The dragoness wondered if he was a slave who chose to stay with his masters, even after the Spell had freed the dragons. After crawling two steps to try and follow him, the "human" told her, "Oh and don't follow. The others might end up killing you from the moment they see you." Then he took off running down the cave.

Danielle shouted her aunt's name one last time with all the frustration and fear she had, '*AUNT ATLAS!*' The autumn dragoness looked down to the ground in shame of herself and let out a sad sigh. She had failed the Firestar sister's aunt in keeping them safe, the task the village had promised to do. She could only hope that everyone would be able to forgive her. As the "man" carried Danielle and Kylie on the way to the cave entrance, they saw wounded and defeated villagers carrying dead bodies of those who slain in the battle towards the deeper section of the cave. The dragons stopped moving when they heard and saw the screaming hatchlings being taken away. Their expressions were that of shock, worry and anger at the kidnapping. When the "man" made it outside the cave, the sisters could see the dead body of Quartz, who apparently had been killed, lying on the side of the entrance. Also, outside were 6 of the villagers who had been captured by the black-armored humans, who were in the process of putting collars on them. Among them was a human in red armor and Arch, who was holding the other guard down as if he was a hostage. The red dragon guard had been wounded with his legs badly damaged almost like they had been crushed by something. The villagers heard the crying hatchlings and looked behind them. Stunned expressions had formed on the dragons' faces.

Once the blue-armored "human" was far enough away, he stopped and set both sisters on the ground, putting his foot on the chain and sat down. "There is no point in trying to call for your aunt. She can't hear you and you can't hear her," he said to them, kind of feeling their pain. "We are to wait here until they are done with whatever they are doing," he said as he wrapped the chain around his foot and crossed his legs in a meditation pose. With this knowledge of knowing their aunt not being able to hear them, the sisters were now more terrified than ever. They tried run and pull their chains free, but man's strength made it too tough to do so. If they can't summon help or get away, then what can they do to save themselves? The sisters sobbed some more after giving up and feeling too helpless to get away from this man. Then they saw with teary eyes a golden massive shape approaching them and their captor. They weren't pleased to find that it was Arch, Dracul's accomplice from the attack on the Incarus brothers. The sisters thought he was going to hurt them, too. They went away from him to the farthest point their chains would allow them to go. Danielle ducked down defensively and placed her talons over her head, while Kylie stood shaking with her hands held together under her chin, watching to see what this fearsome beast would do.

Arch placed his claw on the chain and sent a small jolt of lighting down it, causing the sisters to let out shrieks from the shock. Danielle looked at the gold dragon through teary eyes and wailed, "Waaah, dun

hurt me!" Kylie just let out a loud sob in response.

When the dragon turned his head to look at the "human", who seemed to have felt the shock, there on the "man's" face was the look of anger. Arch took his paw off the chain, turned halfling and slugged him in the face. The halfling snarled, "Remove that damn look from your face right now or I'll remove it for you." The "man" did what he was told like an obedient slave.

Arch grinned at the hatchlings and went to reach for the chain again, but what met his hand was the blue glove of the "man's" armor. The "man" told him, "That is enough Arch. Leave the hatchlings alone now. The mission is completed, so can we just go home now?"

The halfling lord pulled his hand away from his grip and snapped back, "Don't forget on what is being held, so learn your place and leave me alone to have my fun." Then he teleported everyone to a courtyard in front of a large government building. In the center of the courtyard were ten poles and on all but two were humans, who all wore the same kind of clothing. All of them had a white golden trim type of clothing and they were all dead. All of them have starved to death. Arch went and grabbed the chain that was attached to the hatchlings and attached it close by the pole that was emptied and locked it in place. Then he teleported away, leaving the man and the hatchlings behind. The man stood up and started to leave the hatchlings in the open of the courtyard. The Firestar sisters were now let alone to cry by themselves until their eyes and mouths became exhausted from being able to produce anymore tears and sobs respectively.

Drake landed just outside the Summer Park Community Center. Ronan helped his girlfriend down before he told the dragon, "Drake, this time, you get to help some people.... others of your species. I'll be guarding the perimeter. Keep an eye on Minerva; if anything happens, get her out." He patted his friend's side before he climbed up the building and began his task.

Drake looked at Minerva and said to her, "Lead on, milady."

The woman took the lead and went inside the building through a human-sized door. The other door, which Drake went through, was for large dragons so that they'll be able to get in. Minerva knew which room the program would be in, but she didn't know where exactly it would be in since this was her first time coming to this community center. They went up to the receptionist, who saw them approaching. The woman asked, "Excuse me, do you know where the room 1C is?"

The receptionist nodded and answered, "Of course, you go down that hallway and it'll be on the second door to your left."

Minerva followed the man's instruction and went to the room's door. She opened it to see the ADR volunteers getting the literacy class started as they helped each other to set the big textbooks on each

oversized desk. The blonde said to her dragon friend, "Looks like they haven't started yet. Let's go get you introduced to my friends." She went over to the person in charge and greeted with a smile, "Hello, Ms. Linsen!"

The brown-haired woman with glasses turned to her with a surprised smile and said, "Hello Minerva, what brings you here?"

The blonde responded, "Ms. Linsen, this is my friend, Drake. We're here to volunteer to teach dragons how to read."

Drake bowed his head to the older woman, "A pleasure, young lady."

The teacher enjoyed the compliment with a smile and said, "Why thank you, sir! It's great that Minerva found a dragon to help teach others to read. I'm sure he'll be more of an excellent role model for them than any of us humans will."

Minerva nodded in agreement, "I'm sure of that, too." Looking up at the dragon, she continued, "Right, Drake?"

The dragon nodded his head, "We dragons live long lives. When a dragon reaches his or her first century of life, it becomes clear that part of our duty to our race is to teach and pass on the wisdom we have learned. The older we get, the more wisdom we obtain, the more we must teach." He looked around the room at the few early students, who mostly consisted of hatchlings. A couple of them were doing some roughhousing to pass the time. Drake said, "Some of these young dragons look as rowdy as some of your human teenagers on the streets. A little discipline may be in order. Wouldn't you agree?"

The teacher nodded and agreed with him. "Yes, it would most certainly help. This is a learning program after all and everybody needs to be mature about this, whether they be dragons or not." She pushed her glasses back into place and continued, "Anyway, we'll be having lunch soon before the program starts at one o'clock. Is there anything you like us to get you, Mr. Drake?"

Drake shook his head and declined, "No, there is nothing I require. These rowdy young dragons simply need to be shown who is in charge and that it is not them." He glanced to the hatchlings whose playfight had taken them closer to the supplies. One of the volunteers had to tell them to be careful and play safer, so that they don't damage the supplies by accidents.

Ms. Linsen said, "Well alright then. If you change your mind, let's us know."

Once they reached the group of cacti, Bam picked off a few pears and started eating them. He enjoyed the sweet taste of the juices on his tongue. As he ate more of the pears, he noticed that the green

dragoness wasn't eating any. Thinking that the fruits weren't a part of her diet, he asked, "Hey, do you not like pears?"

The dragoness looked at the pear with wondering eyes, almost as if debating on eating it. She studied the pear carefully and soon removed it from the prickly thing that held it. After she tried it, her eyes lit with surprise and expressed delight at the taste. The dragoness said, "Surprised that it's good, but me eating too many of these might get me sick. Do you by chance know where there is some prey at?"

The dragon shook his head and said, "Nope, this is as far as I've been outside the village. Maybe my cousin, Aeolus, might know, since he went out to hunt with me this morning. I'll talk to him." He made a telepathic bond with the horde leader and started, *'Hey Aeolus.'*

His cousin's voice replied in his mind, *'What is it, Bam?'*

The navy blue asked, *'Did you find yourself some breakfast today? I'm trying to get this dragoness here some prey.'* If his cousin didn't find any animals in the desert, then Bam would have to ask another horde member or a get a magi to warp them to the jungle.

Aeolus answered, *'I found some flamingos at a river, that I never got to eat until now.'*

Bam asked, *'So you over there?'*

'Yes.'

A smile appeared on the navy blue's face. He would be wonderful having the company of a family member while they all ate lunch together. *'Sweet! We'll meet you there! Say uh, how do you get to the river?'* he asked. It was better safe than sorry to ask. It wouldn't do any good for them to get lost in the heat while try to find the river.

The horde leader answered, *'Just continue go straight south from where we go out to train. It'll take a mile to get there.'*

'Gotcha!' Bam understood. After the bond was cut, he looked to the dragoness and told her, "Come on, we're going to the river. He says he found some flamingos there." The pair started going on their way to the river. The dragoness followed silently behind him, but every now and then, there was a mutter from her in another language that did not sound good. Bam heard her strange language and noticed that it wasn't human as he and every slave has understood the language they learned from their masters. Turning his head to her, he asked, "Hey, what kind of language is that? I've never heard it before."

The dragoness answered, "It's Shadow Wind's native tongue. Not hard to understand; just a bit tricky to speak. So how long till we get to the river?" She sounded a little bit impatient with the speed they were going.

The navy blue answered, "Well Aeolus said that it would take like a mile to get there from the village. So right now, we only got like half way to go." The dragoness remained silent on the way; her expression still held a bit of disappointment. Bam wondered if she was one of those grumpy types who were generally found displeasure in almost everything.