

Chapter 48: Wounded Friends

The storm had started to get worse on the way back to Sundown. Rain was pouring at the hardest rate that Kathia had seen in all her lifetime. Good thing the girl knew the bubble barrier spell or else she would have gotten soaked like a sponge and end up becoming sick. The girl was now almost home to Sundown as she saw the camp get bigger and bigger in her perspective as they went closer. She told the hunter's spirit, "We're almost there. Let's just keep going." This time, she ran even harder to make it to Sundown faster.

After Aeolus, Bam and Akil teleported to the lake, Doubloon looked at the horde leader urgently and said, "Aeolus, I just heard from my people that the village is still under attack and this time by that gold dragon who brought the humans over to attack us."

Aeolus said, "How damning, I should have made the team check for Dracul's comrades. It looks like we'll have to send them back to intercept and capture Arch as well. But this time, he will not be here at this lake. We need another place to keep Arch there, for he will teleport Dracul away if we bring him here and he wakes up."

Bam asked, "So where can we send him?"

Aeolus thought about the places he has been before and came upon one of the good places. He answered, "I think I'll send him over to the power plant I was forced to slave at. After that, I'll have to get one of the magis to send flower pygmies to keep Arch asleep until we get to him."

Soon, Juna, Mekarth and the cassares arrived. Like Akil, the lords did not look happy to have seen even a slumbering Dracul in front of them. The cassares circled the red dragon as their anti-magic field kept all from using any spells. With a bit of disgust in her voice, Juna asked, "So Aeolus, what are you planning to do with this monster of a being?"

The horde leader answered, "Juna, I'm not sure if this applies to Shadow Wind. But in Solomos, when a dragon commits a crime, we charge him for his crimes and then give him his punishment. As you know, Dracul has done many terrible things in Shadow Wind and now recently, he has attacked Chief Doubloon's village, killed & enslaved his people and kidnapped Atlas's nieces. We will also interrogate him on the whereabouts of those hatchlings. I suspect he has some means to keep us from teleporting right over to them." If the bad guys kept his spies from warping over to Juna, then there was no doubt that the same thing would happen on this rescue attempt.

Jarilo looked at the horde leader questionably and asked, "But can we really apply our laws to a foreigner? Especially when he's a monster as Juna calls him?"

Aeolus replied, "I understand how you feel, Jarilo. Killing him on the spot would be easy, but we must follow our continent's laws. Otherwise, we may very well be just as cruel as Dracul here."

Bam asked, "Can't we just let Juna and Mekarth do the punishing? I mean Dracul is from Shadow Wind and so are they." The navy blue figured that using Shadow Wind law in this case would be more appropriate since the lords being here mean that this was more of an affair related to them.

Doubloon said to Bam, "I kind of agree with you, sir. But Dracul has also done terrible things to us Solomese dragons as well. So I feel we should be involved as well."

Aeolus considered his cousin's and the chief's opinions, feeling that both were right, but he was leaning more towards Doubloon's suggestion. "He's right, Bam. Also as long as we're in Solomos, we follow our laws. So, we will punish Dracul according to Solomese law. Banishment will not be used this time as he had returned to Shadow Wind and ruined it. No doubt he'll bring ill will in this land as well. A permanent imprisonment in the form of a crystallized state in this continent will do much better." Then he turned towards the sibling lords and asked, "Juna, Mekarth, what do you think?"

Juna, Mekarth and Akil all looked at each other and spoke in their native tongue, well Juna and Mekarth did, as Akil seemed to have slightly struggled with it a bit, but not very much. Dracul and Arch's names were thrown around a bit, until Akil's name was thrown in the mix. The messenger shut her mouth right then and there, and seemed a little pissed, but that was normal it seemed. After what seemed to be a bit of argument between the brother and the sister, with Dracul's name popping up like it was spring, ultimately it seemed Juna won that argument over Mekarth with what she said as the end. She explained to the horde leader, "Aeolus, in Shadow Wind's law, he would already have been killed on spot. If he was captured, as he is now, he would still have been killed, either by being burned to death or beheaded. What it came down to was what country we were on, and what the laws are. We are foreigners, and it wouldn't be right of us to do our laws in a foreign country, as for how he has done crimes on this country as well. So therefore, he is held on your country laws." But then she warned, "But then it comes to the rank of which he holds in Shadow Wind, which could cause a full-out war with the city and this country, so really we can't do much to him without an army breathing down our backs. That would cause more lives to be lost and more power he would gain, because there is a very slim changes that you would win against a fully trained Shadow Wind army." The dragoness was right, bringing the whole continent, even if the whole populace was a lot bigger than one city, into their affairs wasn't necessary. It was their war, not other dragons'. Mekarth and Akil stood behind her quietly. It seemed that she was not done yet though as she continued, "Now this brings up the point about Atlas's nieces and your clanmates. There is very little we can do from here and Dracul's just not going to freely give them up or their location, even if we burn his damn eyes out and come close to killing him or leave him in extremely painful states."

Realizing his objective had failed, Aeolus said, "Then it looks like there's no point in keeping Dracul around or capturing Arch. We'll just have to send him somewhere else." Looking to the magi cassare, he

said, "Yopple, send Dracul far away from here. Do not send him to any place the horde has been or he'll know we're responsible for his state." The magi cassare obeyed and teleported Dracul to a destroyed city in Rudvich.

Bam asked, "So what now? It looks like capturing him has been a waste of time."

The horde leader answered, "We're just going to have to rescue the villagers. But the question is... how?" This problem was a difficult one indeed. It doesn't matter where the villagers end up, Arch has already seen them and will just teleport directly over to them. Killing another dragon would keep Arch from harming more, but as Aeolus and Juna said, it would break Solomese law and put the horde in danger with the army. The horde leader tried to think hard on coming up with a way save the village.

Just then, he heard someone talking to him telepathically, *'Aeolus, this is Eitri. I'm not sure if you've heard this already, but my village has just been attacked by-'*

The leader decided to save his subordinate the story by replying, *'Yes, Eitri. I've already heard about it. Uvanis told me everything from Dracul's assault to yours and the hatchling's capture.'*

'Alright then,' replied the night magi. *'So anyway, after the prisoners and I were taken to Shadow Wind, a human, who served Axle, rescued me from the enemy and told me that Dracul's going to kill the rest of the villagers.'*

'And I was alerted of that, too,' said Aeolus. Then he told Eitri how the problem was handled and that they got Arch to deal with next. That was when the night magi had gone quiet. The horde leader imagined that he must be sighing in despair. He can easily sympathize with that as he would be just as unhappy or worse if his clan went through the same situation.

Eitri sighed unhappily, *'Bummer, so we can't do anything to the lords or we're all dead. That's terrible.'* Then his voice lit a bit in relief as he continued, *'But at least you were able to save my people from one of them. I just hope we can all stay alive through this.'*

Aeolus replied, *'I hope so too, Eitri. It's really hard trying to figure out how we can keep your people safe for a long time. Dracul and his cronies can pull out any unimaginable trick at any time.'*

'Which is why we need to end this war as soon as possible. The longer we take, the more danger we and our loved ones will be in. Anyway, after we got to the hideout, Verona, that human, gave me rescue squad for me to save everyone with, but I figured we could use more dragons. That's why I contacted you, to see if you would spare us some of your soldiers.'

Even though, the horde hasn't received the training, Aeolus figured the squad's knowledge of the city's layout would prove beneficial for the horde. *'I will be glad to assist you. But first, tell me what kinds of soldiers your squadron has and how this rescue will go, and I'll send the right dragons over.'*

'Okay, I will,' said Eitri.

There was a pause of silence between the two as the night magi was apparently checking his squad to see what breeds the dragons were and what weapons the humans had. Soon, the night magi reported the information to his leader. Aeolus said, *'Sounds like the squad is being used for fighting. That makes them the perfect distraction while our magis and pygmies sneak in to rescue the captives. I'll get a few select dragons for this mission, you and the squad stay there until they arrive.'*

The night magi replied, *'Yes, Aeolus.'* Then after a second, he said, *'Oh Aeolus, there's something I need to tell you.'*

'What is it?' the horde leader asked.

Eitri answered, *'There was this man in blue armor, but he wasn't really human. He was a dragon lord in disguise. I think he has this ability to know where everyone is or something like that. That was how Dracul and Arch knew where the cave was when they came to us.'*

This new information Aeolus just heard made him think back to what happened this morning. That was when he realized something as he said, *'So that explains how that one human came to us this morning.'*

Not knowing what his leader was talking about, Eitri asked, *'One human?'*

Aeolus explained, *'He came here alone to get Juna, but left through teleportation after hurting Mekarth. But anyway, this is really bad news to us. Now Shadow Wind knows where we are at any time. They could easily get to us first before we do them and all because of that one lord with them.'* This was a very dire thing he learned. The Vulture Horde was now in a very vulnerable position unless they do something about that blue dragon lord.

The night magi understood his leader's feelings, *'I know. But Aeolus, I don't think that lord is a bad person. I heard he's being forced to fight alongside Dracul and Arch for some reason. Maybe they're keeping someone hostage or something.'*

The horde leader was a tiny bit relieved, but was still dreading over the fact of the blue lord's spying ability. *'So he's just a pawn then. I guess that makes our situation a tiny bit better since we can solve his problem if we knew what it is. Anyway, enough talk. Everyone's wondering why I'm silent. I need to speak with them right now. So wait for our help to arrive.'*

After the telepathic bond with Eitri ended, Aeolus formed a new one with Kekul and said to him, *'Kekul, I have another task for you. But first you must warp over to me.'*

The magma magi said, *'Yes, Aeolus.'*

After Kekul appeared before him, the disaster told him, "I just got in contact with Eitri. One of Axle's followers rescued him and now he's over at their hideout where he's given a squad of dragons and humans to rescue the villagers and Atlas's nieces."

Doubloon insisted to the horde leader, "What about my village, Aeolus? I'm happy that I'm getting a few of my people back, but lives are at stake back there and that's more important than the prisoners."

"I know, Doubloon," replied Aeolus. "And I think I've finally got an idea on where to send them." He just thought of a place where another group of soldiers will be able to protect them without getting the horde involved.

The village chief asked, "Really where?"

The disaster answered, "We will be sending them off to the city of Windfall. They have warrior dragons there who can fight and protect. Your people will be safe there." Should the crooks from Shadow Wind come for them, some fighting could cost the lives of not only the Aquarians, but also humans as well. It was a good tactic in eliminating enemies from both sides, or rather three if the humans didn't appreciate the egalitarian system.

Doubloon looked glad as he said, "Thank you, Aeolus. You have once again saved us all. I think our village would make you the next chief should anything happen to me someday."

Aeolus appreciated the praise and replied, "I feel honored if that were to happen someday, but I would have to turn that down as I have recently found my clan."

The village chief asked, "Oh, is that so?"

Bam nodded and confirmed, "Yep! And Aeolus is the chief now. He fought his cousin to earn that title fair and square."

Doubloon smiled at the disaster and said, "Wow, congratulations!"

Aeolus said, "Thanks chief, but enough talking. We need to get to saving your village now." He looked to Kekul and the spring dragons and said, "Kekul, change of plan. You and the spring dragons will go back to the village and teleport everyone over to Windfall." Through telepathy, he added, *'And be sure to tell them to not mention to anyone in Windfall that the Vulture Horde sent them. Remember, the Aquarians have made themselves the enemy. They'll probably kick the villagers out, thinking that they must be our spies.'*

Kekul and the springs nodded as the magi said, "Got it."

The leader ordered, "Now go, save them." With that, the team of three teleported back inside the village cave, where they captured Dracul. With the first team gone to save the village, Aeolus began to get the second team out to help Eitri. He told the magi cassare, "Yopple, go over to Eitri and wait for me to send the other team there."

"Got it," Yopple said before he warped over to the night magi.

Then Aeolus formed a telepathic bond with Enamora and said to her, *'Enamora, I have a mission for you.'*

The magi asked, *'What is it?'*

The leader briefed her on how Eitri's situation and what he's going to do. After that, he told her, *'I need you to take Onslou, the black ghost dragons and flower pygmies with you for the rescue mission. Their abilities will make this mission easier. I have already sent Yopple to Eitri. He should be there waiting for you.'*

Enamora replied, *'Understood, I'll let them know what we're doing.'*

'Good,' Aeolus said before he broke contact with her. After he turned back to the siblings, he noticed that they were looking back at him with troubled expressions on their faces. Juna's look was that look of thinking something bad was about to happen, while Mekarth looked confused. The leader wondered what was on their minds to make them feel this way. So he asked, "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," Juna said, but the sound in her tone was that she was worried, but about what is questionable. Aeolus decided not to press the issue and instead just focus on the two things at hand: the rescue of the village and the rescue of the prisoners. He hoped the two groups sent to their respective missions would succeed with desirable results.

After reaching Axle's side, Atlas shrunk down into her human form to get a better look at his injuries, though her size was a little bit bigger than an average woman and her arm joints were more like that of a standing quadruped than a human's. This was due to her having rushed her spell out of anxiety and not putting enough concentration on her transformation. The "woman" knelt down in an awkward position and asked, "Axle, are you okay? Do you need me to take you back to that healer dragon?" Ohimia, who had turned her head behind her at the moment of Axle's name being shouted, had seen Atlas's transformation and was taken by surprised as her mouth dropped wide open.

Axle's breaths were very shallow and his wheezing was not a good sign. There was blood running down his burnt wing and blood coming from his mouth. He could not really speak with blood filling his mouth half the time so he telepathically told her, *'I'll live from these wounds, but I have broken ribs and a few of*

them pierced my lung, so it's rather hard to breathe. Also, teleporting me around might make it worse because of the ground. Plus, I still have something to do.' He started to push himself up, even though it was extremely painful for him, that much was evident as Atlas winced like she was feeling that pain herself.

The woman was about to tell him not to push himself up when she heard Ohimia say, "Atlas, Axle, you two can turn into humans?"

The woman looked behind herself at the lumina who appeared to be surprised by what she saw. Atlas knew that Ohimia hasn't seen any of them transform before, so she decided to tell the dragoness about it before she got the wrong idea. "Yes Ohimia, we can. But we're not hybrids or anything. We just use this magic spell to transform ourselves into humans."

The lumina was amazed by what she just heard and said, "That's sounds cool! Can you teach me how to do it?"

Atlas replied, "I will, but not right now. We got to heal Axle first." They can't continue on Trident Mountain like this and she mustn't waste any time, lest the dragon lord dies from blood loss. Looking from Garin to the lumina, she told them, "You two watch over Axle for me. I'm going to get some help." There was one dragon in mind she could think of right now and that was the healer dragon from the Vulture Horde.

Ohimia said after her, "Okay, just don't take too long." Atlas went away from Axle, so that her after spell clouds don't get into his injured lung before teleporting herself over to the healer.

Kathia had finally made it to Sundown, but when she got there, she saw a long-haired halfling woman with wings and tail of a dark myst pygmy carrying Azera's injured and unconscious body. The man had a bleeding hole in his chest. The redhead and the ghost were both shocked by what they thought the woman had done to the swordsman. Azera may have been rude the last time they saw him, but he didn't deserve to be attacked like that. Holding her purple dagger out at the halfling to stab and getting ready to zap her with some spells, Kathia yelled with all the fury in her voice, "You! You wretched, vile half-breed! Did you do this to Azera? You're going to pay!"

But just then, the spirit of the woman that Kathia sent out earlier came rushing over and tried to stop the girl, "Kathia, wait!"

The redhead turned her head to the female ghost, hoping that the spirit better had a good reason for trying to prevent Azera from being avenged. "What?" she asked.

The ghost woman told her, "This creature here is the same girl you've sent me to look after."

"What?!" Kathia cried out in a disbelieving surprise. But how can this be? She refused to believe that this halfling was the same child who was always at Azera's side. Children don't grow up this fast. Sure the creature may have the same type of shirt, the same hair color and the same skin color... But was that just a coincidence? After noticing the similarities between the two and how the ghost woman had been following the halfling, Kathia realized that this was indeed the same girl. The teen's eyes widen with shock and she said to the halfling in a racist disgust, "No way, you were a halfling all along?"

The woman looked up at Kathia, but not making eye contact. She looked back at Azera and kind of sighed before she got up from the ground. "To be honest with you, I still don't know what I am. All I know is it linked to him, and I only figured that out recently when my form changed on its own, and some of my memory came back. The only thing I remember is what connects us is called a soul bound spell. I don't know when it was done or who casted it on us. All I know is that our fates are linked and our lives chained together, where if one parish so does the other," she said as she started to walk past the girl. "I entrust his wellbeing in your hands, but I will keep watch," she said as she found a nearby tree and went up inside it.

Kathia looked back to Azera, who was now lying on the ground. The halfling did say that their souls were linked together and that they literally can't live without the other. So if Azera dies, then so does the halfling and vice versa. Kathia's goal was to kill all dragons, but can she really take the life of someone she didn't know what she truly was? The girl would have to ask Azera everything about the woman who saved him, but only once he was awake. Kathia lifted the man up and carried him on her back like she did when she was taking him to the girl-now-halfling earlier. She made her way to her tent where she would let him rest at for the time being. She noticed the camp seemed to be devoid of life outdoors, and that was because the people had to shut themselves in their tents from the heavy rainstorm. The girl thought that she was the only one out here until she heard someone calling to her, "Kathia? Is that you?"

The girl looked up and found a guard who was at the now completely-built watchtower. Remembering the plan she had to make herself look strong, Kathia put up a triumphant face and said, "Yep! I'm back in one piece."

The guard smiled and said, "That's great! We should tell everybody the good news once the rain stops." Then he looked to Azera and asked, "Who's this you got on your back?"

Kathia answered, "That's Azera. He's hurt and I need to take him over to my tent to heal. So no time to stop and talk. He's needs help now."

The guard replied, "Okay, I understand. I hope he gets better soon." With the conversation over, Kathia resumed her path to her tent until she finally made it there. She unzipped the tent and went inside. The girl placed Azera on top of her sleeping bag and began to use her healing magic on his chest wound first before fixing the other wounds.

The dragons of the Vulture Horde were individually laying out in the sun or staying in the cool shade of the caves. As they were busy having their conversations, Atlas teleported right next to Hewey, who jumped up in surprise. The others who were inside one of the caves with him were just as surprised by the sudden entrance of the "human". The new recruits of the horde, who never saw Atlas's human form, were alarmed by what they thought to be a bad guy. Lythnara said, "Oh gosh, it's a human!"

One of the cassares growled, "It must be in the same league as that human from before. Let's kill it!"

The recruits got up to get ready to attack the intruder. Atlas knew the danger she was in and had to speak to them quickly. "Hey wait, I'm just a--" Before she could say another one, the dragons, who already knew her, were very fast to hold their comrades back from harming her.

Hewey told the recruits, "Hold up guys, this one here doesn't work for Dracul."

Sunburn, who had two dragons holding onto his wings with their jaws, asked, "She doesn't? Then who does she work for?"

"Axle," the healer told him. "She's a dragoness in disguise; she made herself look that way."

"Oh..." said all the recruits as they relaxed their tensions and lied back down as their restrainers let them go.

Glad that there didn't need to be any fighting to defend herself, Atlas thought to herself, *'I need to try to remember to always come here as a dragon.'* If she did that every time she needed to come to the horde, there wouldn't be any surprises or alarms from any of the dragons. Looking to the healer dragon, she said, "Hewey, I need your help again."

Hewey, knowing what she was going to say, assumed, "Let me guess, it's Axle again, right?"

Atlas nodded and said, "Yes, he's got broken ribs now and one of them pierced his lung."

The healer shook his head, "Oh boy, this won't do. I can't just use healing magic on him, the lung's tissue will just close around the rib and he'll be stuck like this. I'll have to cut his chest open and get the rib out of the lung before I can heal him."

"What?!" the woman cried in appall. Axle was already hurt badly from the battle he went through. Can he survive another devastating damage while losing blood like he is now? She can imagine the agony he'll feel when Hewey tears his chest apart with his claw. That was certainly not a nice way to go about being healed. "That's crazy! He's hurting like hell right now and you're just going to put him in further

pain?"

Hewey assured, "Don't worry; there won't be any pain if I have a flower pygmy to put him to sleep with. I'll call one over now." Atlas watched in silence as he formed a telepathic bond with one of the flower pygmies. His face soon had the look of discontent, which made the woman wonder what was bad going on. After a few seconds, the healer told her the bad news, "I'm sorry Atlas, but it looks like all the flower pygmies are out on a mission to save some prisoners."

The woman was dismayed as she said, "Damn it! Of all the fucking times, this had to happen." Although it was a good thing that she was getting her nieces back, she just wished that they could have kept at least 1 flower pygmy behind for Axle's sake.

"Well do you know any sleep spells?"

"No I don't," Atlas answered. There were some spells that she and every other magi dragon shared, and then there were those she had yet to learn.

Hewey said, "Then I guess we're just going to have to work on Axle the hard way. Come on, we should get back to him quickly." Atlas let out a quiet sigh of surrender, feeling that there was nothing else to reduce her friend's pain. She teleported herself and Hewey back to Axle.

Once they rejoined the others, Atlas asked her new friends, "Guys, I'm back. Anything happened while I was gone?"

"Not much," Ohimia answered. "The man who helped us out suddenly disappeared on us. We don't know where he went."

"I see," said Atlas as she could find no trace of the swordsman.

Hewey looked around for the white dragon, or at least his human form, but didn't see him anywhere. He asked, "So where's Axle?"

Ohimia looked to where Axle was as she answered, "He's right over-" She stopped talking when she found to her surprise an empty spot instead. "Huh?! That can't be! He's right here a few seconds ago."

Atlas looked around for her friend in worry, but he was nowhere in sight. She said, "Damn it, he must have left without us. I don't think he could have gone too far. Let's go look for him." The dragons and halfling went to search for Axle.