

((Note: This story takes place during [chapter 12](#)..))

"Hey Strider, why do you carry seven swords anyhow? I mean really, you only need two," a black-haired, royal blue-eyed man asked his companion. He was in his mid-30s and wore white clothes, consisting of a dress shirt, dress pants, and shoes. Only his tie was of a maroon color.

"You know why I do Axle," Strider said a bit coldly. He was a 27-year-old man with spiky blonde hair and wore black leather garment with black boots. He had a dark metal shoulder guard on his left shoulder and carried swords on his back. Then he asked, "You still have not told me; why you're sticking to your human form?"

Axle answered, "It's better in this form, so that people don't freak out when I'm in dragon form." He could hear a river and started to get excited. "About time we found water; I'm thirsty," he said. The brunette started to run to the sound of flowing water.

Strider just walked to the river and said to himself, "What a child sometimes, even for being 487 years old."

Axle burst into the clearing to see another person sitting near the edge of the river, holding something to his neck. It was a silver-haired teen boy in an orange zip-up hoodie, black jeans and black & white converse shoes. He also had short horns on his head and dragon scent, indicating him as a hybrid. "Um, hello? Are you okay?" the "man" asked, smelling blood. The blonde followed shortly after into the clearing.

The horned boy grimaced and looked down at his hands as they were covered in blood. He turned back and stared at the two. Then he bared his fangs at them and snapped, "Why would some stupid humans care? You guys only live to serve yourselves." He put his hand back to his bleeding neck.

The men just looked at each other. "Evident that something happened here," Strider said as he pointed to the dead dragon body. Axle followed the blonde's figure to see the body of the dragon. Pity filled the brunette's heart as he saw the body. "Pity must fill your heart to see another dead body," the swordsman said under his breath.

Axle looked at the hybrid to see that color was fading from his face. "It is a pity, but I'm sure he had a good reason to do it," the shapeshifter said to his friend as the blonde started to walk away from the clearing. "Hey where are you going?" he called to Strider.

The swordsman said as coldly as always, "What does it look like? I'm leaving; it's evident he does not want us here."

"We can't just leave him here to bleed to death. If you are not going to help, then I will!" Axle yelled at

him. "Damn your cold heart!" The brunette walked over to the hybrid, who emitted another growl. "Not everyone is the same, little one," he assured. "Come let me heal you; after that, you can tag along with us or you can stay here. It will be up to you." Axle looked at Strider to see he pulled one of his swords and placed it in the ground. He sat in front of it with his back against the blade. The hybrid's glare softened after a moment and quieted his growling. He moved closer to the shapeshifter and slowly showed his injured neck. Axle looked at the gash in the neck. "That thing did a number on you. How did you manage to keep alive?" he asked as he started to heal the boy's neck.

The hybrid clicked his teeth and growled, "I'm not helpless."

It didn't take long to heal a gash that was not that deep, even for a white dragon's healing powers. The boy ran his fingers over his neck as if making sure that his neck was clean again before the damage. "There all better. Okay Strider, we can go," Axle said as he started to walk away.

"Good, I hate sitting in the dirt. The sooner we can get to town, the better," Strider said a bit coldly as he waited for his friend to catch up with him.

Axle looked back at the hybrid, who stood up and brushed his clothes off, and asked, "Want to come with?"

The boy slipped the hoodie on and mumbled, "Sure."

Axle saw as the hybrid walk with him as a quiet sigh escaped the teen's mouth. He looked back at Strider, who was no longer there. His sword was still in the ground though. "Strider will be Strider," he said to himself. A few seconds later, the blonde came back with some apples. Two in his right hand and one in his left, which he was eating. The swordsman threw the two apples at the shapeshifter, who caught both of them in his hands. "Here," Axle said as he handed one of the apples to the boy. Strider pulled his sword out of the ground and replaced it back in the 7-slot sheath on his back. The corner of the hybrid's mouth twitched in response at the fruit as if he hated the site of it. He started to teeth at it with his fangs, but was mostly unsuccessful in getting any pieces off. He did a good job at mutilating it on the other hand. Axle was a bit amused at how the boy tried to eat the apple. "Looks like I have to teach you how to eat an apple, or fruit for that fact," he said as he pointed to the hybrid's fangs in his mouth. "At first it can be hard, but you will get the hang of it," the shapeshifter said as he took a bit out of the apple.

The hybrid looked down at the half-mauled fruit and murmured, "I'm... more of a meat person... or marshmallows..." His champagne-colored eyes flickered to the "man" and murmured, "You sure you want to go to Windfall, human? It's under guard by a horde of dragons."

"Don't worry about the dragons. We are just going there for some supplies and we are leaving," Axle said with the apple still in his mouth. He swallowed the apple he chewed up and looked at the bitten fruit. "Plus, we have dealt with some dragons in the past. Some trying to kill us and others protecting

us." The dragon lord seemed a bit distant at his own words. Even this seemed to get to Strider a bit, but he showed nothing at it. The swordsman was as quiet as the night air; never showing feeling or care.

"It's not just some dragons," the boy amused thoughtfully. He stated blandly, "Aquios itself has taken Windfall under its guard. This city was leveled three nights ago. The Aquarians, a continent of soldier dragons came and rebuilt the city with magic in a day. They claim to be protecting it, but the humans are so distrusting. They fear the dragons will seek revenge. Pitiful." His brow furrowed at the apple. "Why did you want to help me? Everyone around here resents hybrids. We're 'bloodthirsty monsters' as Atlas would put it," he asked, staring accusingly at the "man".

"Hybrid or not, you still have life," Axle said. "And Strider does not care as long as you don't try and attack him." The shapeshifter was smiling now.

The hybrid flickered his eyes at him as they walked. He murmured, "Yeah, you may sing a different tune under extenuating circumstances."

The shapeshifter said, "Hybrid as a monster, not in my book. Only the people who made them are the monsters for leaving them to defend for themselves. Plus, if I did not help you, what kind of person would I be?" Strider was still following, but keeping quite.

The hybrid laughed out loud for a moment before catching himself with a hand. He said, "Heh, this must be your first time seeing a hybrid if that's what you think. You say that as if we were abandoned puppies. A hybrid, Albel, destroyed the lab and killed every scientist and hybrid inside after ripping his control collar off. Tell me more about how we're helpless."

"Now where did I say you were helpless, or hybrids for that fact," Axle said in a claim voice. "It's just that hybrids never really know the world from the lab; and for seeing a hybrid, again, I swear you all act the same; distrusting, distant, and always--" The "man" was cut off when he heard a faint snap in the forest around them. It was followed by more snaps and not a few.

The hybrid narrowed his eyes and grumbled, "You couldn't have met a hybrid before in the first place. No outsiders were allowed in the lab and there are only four of us around anymore. Don't yank my chain!" It was followed by a snort of laughter, after which he chided, "What really tells your bluff is that two of us are sickeningly nice towards humans and dragons." The shapeshifter ignored the boy as the smell hit him; undead wolves. They all came into view and it was a big group. The hybrid's face contorted in disgust.

Strider asked, "Hmm, looks like they don't give up that easy. What the group size this time, thirty to forty?" He already had 2 swords pulled out of his sheath and readied himself.

"No, I would say about a hundred to one-hundred and twenty. There's more in the forest," Axle said he started to back up a bit to his bodyguard. They were everywhere and all around them. The blonde handed a sword

to the dragon lord to use. "We both know that if one of us get a scratch or blood in our mouth, we are going to be in trouble."

Strider chucked a sword into the ground near the hybrid. "I want it back after this is over," the swordsman said as he pulled out 2 more swords. The boy glanced at the weapon and gave an odd look at him.

Axle was close to the hybrid now. "If any of that happens, you will be paralyzed for a bit and Strider will have to carry you all the way to town," he said as he readied himself.

The hybrid snorted at the man and muttered, "Oh please, like I'd ever need a chunk of metal." He shifted up to his golden dragon form. "Wolf teeth have no chance of puncturing my hide," he said with a laugh.

Axle picked up the sword out of the ground and watched the hybrid dragon take to the sky, flying over the horde of wolves and letting loose a fiery hot lightning beam across the front. As lightning hit the ground, it was not stopping them from coming closer. "So how many are left? A hundred or more?" Strider asked as he ran forward taking care of 3 as their heads rolled on the ground. Axle was doing the same as their blades danced in the air. Even for the "man" being a dragon, he was an expert with the sword. The hybrid breathed his electric beam over the mass again, burning a few more away. No matter how many they killed or thought they killed, they just kept on coming. The swordsman gasped for air and said, "Um Axle, now would be a good time to change to a dragon and kind of get us out of here."

The shapeshifter did that and grabbed Strider before he took to the air. He had pure white scales and blue eyes the same shade as his human form. "They just don't give up, no matter how many you slow down or stop," Axle said as he just hovered over the clearing.

The hybrid flew closer to them and asked, "Do you know what these are? Is it a necromancer controlling them?"

Strider was staring at the group of wolves now that was below them. The dragon said to the hybrid, "Don't know. We ran into them a few days back, but not with numbers like this." The hybrid frowned in response as Axle continued, "Sadly, we don't even know how to kill them. As for what they are, someone called them para-wolves."

The swordsman had put away all his swords except 1 now. "Um Axle, I think we have a problem," Strider said. He put away his sword and looked at his arm as he continued, "Ya, we have a big problem." Right there on his arm was a small claw mark. The man could not feel his arm now or, come to think of, move it. "Damn," Strider said as the rest of his body followed.

"Paralysis?..." the hybrid murmured. He paused to sniff and turned his head to look at the ground. He

looked back at Axle and suggested, "That necromancer down there is a potion master as well. They can probably cure paralysis." He flew down to a trio of humans that were a distance to the side of the wolf horde, fluttering his wings into a folded position. He looked to the blonde-haired person in black punk clothing, whose gender was unknown as Axle couldn't make out the scent. The hybrid asked, "Hey, you're a potion master. Can you heal that guy?" He pointed a wing up at Strider. Then his brow furrowed and asked, "And is this by your doing?"

The brown-haired boy in a black hooded robe looked over to the wolves as the blonde laughed, "Oh kiddie, sorry but I collect dragons, not mongrels. Though... there might be something in my collection for this..." The person paused, folding their arms across their chest. They smirked and said, "I may have a light dragon in my possession, which counters dark magic. Buuuut I don't see a reason to stick my neck out for all of you. If it's another necromancer, I'm not interested in pissing them off."

The brunette remarked to the blonde, "Some help you are then."

The blonde looked over at the boy and chided, "Listen twinkle toes, I hardly know you. So I'm not really going to stick my neck out for you. It's not good interest in my business. I collect corpses, not join them."

Even with a golden dragon flying not far from the wolves pack, it seems they were more interest in Axle and Strider. The dragon just hoped the hybrid was right and they could help his friend. If not, it would take hours for the effect to wear off. "Whoever brought them, they are more interested in us dead than anyone else," the dragon said to himself. He could not just stay in the air forever. It was a bit before the wolves gave up and left, vanishing back into the forest. Even their scent left with them as if they were not there. Axle decided it was safe to land back down and transformed back into his human form again. He set Strider down and pulled one of swordsman's swords from its sheath.

The hybrid frowned as he trotted over and peered down at the swordsman. Strider was growing stiffer from the poison. The blonde shoved their way to the front of the group and announced, "Alright, move kiddies." Their hands came to their hips as they looked the swordsman over briefly. They commented, "Heh, nice sword. I really collect dragons." They paused, smirking briefly at Axle and continued, "But a unique swordsman now and then is interesting, too." The hybrid's brow sloped downward. Axle growled at the necromancer. He kept to himself and held the sword facing the way the wolves have disappeared off to. The blonde snorted, crouching down to inspect Strider's cut and muttered, "Sheesh, stiffer than my stiffs." The necromancer dabbed the blood from his cut on their finger and looked at it. "Typical paralysis poison," they said. They dug through their pouch and withdrew a glass vial with a blue substance. They held it up to Strider's mouth and told him, "Drink."

The swordsman drank what he could, but it was hard for him to move with his body so stiff. It had a really bad taste when he drank it. With the vial halfway gone, the necromancer pulled it back, corked it and put it back in their pouch. "What's in that vial?" Strider asked as the effect started to work a bit.

The necromancer smirked and told him, "Mmm, a potion master doesn't give away their secrets. I will

say it has basil, so you may have a minty fresh feeling." They ruffled the man's hair before straightening up. They looked to the hybrid and pointed to the swordsman as they said, "I'd very much like a sample of your poison, though. Bet it puts that stuff to shame."

The hybrid narrowed his eyes and asked, "Would you now?" He bared his fangs in response.

The necromancer raised an empty vial and said, "In a vial preferably. It would be a bit tough to find a cure while poisoned myself."

The hybrid asked, "How do you know I have poison?"

The necromancer asked, "Oh please, I'm a potion master. I can smell poison on your breath. Besides, I don't suppose the green liquid on your fangs is saliva, is it?"

The silver-haired woman rolled her eyes and scolded, "The only way you're getting his poison is if he takes a ceremonious bite out of you."

The necromancer grinned and put the vial away. They shrugged and said, "Heh, worth a try. I'm a collector of multiple sorts."

The woman shifted with her bow over her shoulder. She dully said to Axle and Strider, "Thanks to you guys then, my hunt was a mess. Scared the game off. You should get your fan club checked out."

The hybrid snorted and corrected, "You mean you were hunting dragons."

The woman made a faint, clearly fake smile and asked, "Now where would you get an idea like that?"

The brown-haired boy looked over at Axle and Strider, asking, "Where did you two come from, and why do you bring this army in your wake?"

The shapeshifter answered, "Don't know where they came from. As for where we are from, not from around here and we will leave it at that." He sounded a bit upset about that subject. Axle walked over to his friend and put the sword back into the open sheath on the back. He picked up Strider on his back. The shapeshifter started to walk towards the city of Windfall before he stopped a bit. "We thank you for your help, but I cannot be in the presence of a dragon hunter and a dragon necromancer," he said as he started to walk again. The swordsman must be falling asleep now, which made it a bit peaceful.

The woman narrowed her eyes and snorted, "Good, it's getting stuffy in here with all you dragon huggers." She turned and walked away from the group.

The necromancer chuckled and called after Axle with a grin, "What? Don't want to meet the family?" The "man" just ignored what they said. The brown-haired boy turned to walk over to a tree and

rest against it, but he lurched forward, about to trip. The hybrid put his head up, swooping his tail intentionally over the group as he turned to follow the two men.

The brunette boy tripped as the tail flew over him and he said, "Oh clumsy me." He got up and chimed, "Wasn't watching my footing." He brushed the dirt from his robes.

The necromancer ducked out of the way and cocked an eyebrow at the brown-haired boy, "I'll assume that was for you, twinkle toes."

"What was for me?" the brunette questioned.

The hybrid easily caught up to the men in dragon form and shifted back into his human form. Axle was a bit surprised when the hybrid came up with him. The boy glanced at Strider with a curious look on his face. The shapeshifter looked at him and asked, "Hey, forgot to ask; what is your name?"

The hybrid glanced at Axle and clicked his teeth. "Akuma..." he uttered quietly.

The shapeshifter smiled slightly and spoke about his friend, "Not really surprising that Strider fell asleep. He had nine fights already in less than ten hours and he's been awake for another two days before that. He keeps on pushing himself too hard, but he could lose a little weight." Then he asked, "Hey mind me asking, but can you remove his swords off his back? They are a bit heavy and I don't see how the hell he sleeps with them on."

Akuma's face contorted into an expression of disbelief. "Well..." he looked down at his hands. He reached up slowly, grabbed the hilt of the sword and started to pull.

Axle said, "That's much better, even if it is just one sword." The sword slowly slid through the straps until it popped out. Then he crumpled to the ground under the sword's weight with a yelp, which caused the "man" to stop. The hybrid squirmed, wriggling until he found his balance and sat up. With some effort, he stood up again, holding the sword by the hilt while the tip was still on the ground. The boy simply frowned at the shapeshifter before shifting back into dragon form and grabbing the sword in his teeth. Axle calmly said, "I told you it was heavy. But it's just the center sword that is heavy. For some reason, the others are really light." He noticed that the necromancer and the brunette were talking with each other until the former yelled at him. He turned back around and they continued to walk to Windfall. "We will be there soon and Akuma, thank you for taking the sword. As for me knowing a hybrid before you, well where I come from, I'm called a hybrid because of my ability to change forms, but here, I'm not called a hybrid. So that's why I said I know a hybrid and how they felt." He was smiling, but he sounded depressed a bit. "And my name is Axle, and the one on my back is Strider."

Akuma said, "Hybrids here are something else... There are only four of us left... We're all here in the northeast." He looked at the surroundings. Then he added, "Usually even here in Windfall. This city is the capital of the northeast." He looked at the shapeshifter again questioningly and asked, "Where are

you going anyway? I don't suppose you're going to carry him around all day?" The corners of his mouth tugged into a toothy grin.

Axle said, "I wish for an inn, but Strider has the money and I don't know where he keeps it at. All I hear is a click and he'll have the money." He knew where his friend kept the money, though he did not know how to get to it. The swordsman was muttering in his sleep now about how he was to be forgiven and junk like that. The shapeshifter could see Windfall from where he was at. "I guess is now a good time to wake up Strider, but I would stand back if I was you," he said as he put his companion down. He grabbed his apple that was in his pocket and stood back some. After Akuma backed a few feet away, the "man" chucked the apple at the swordsman.

Strider caught the apple and threw it back at the shapeshifter. "Honestly, don't you learn, Axle?" he said as he sat back up.

Akuma snorted and set the sword down next to the swordsman before shifting back down into human form. His eyes skimmed from Axle over to Strider with a sharp look of distaste. "Problem solved, then? He's awake," the hybrid asked dully, grinding his teeth.

The swordsman got up and dusted himself off. He could see the town from here and decide to go ahead and get his money out, but not until after he hid himself in a tree. Axle could hear the click and then the sound of money being heard. About 30 seconds later, a pouch came out of the tree at Axle, which he grabs and put in his pocket. Strider jumped down from the tree next to his friend. "Well let's go and find an inn," the swordsman said as he walked to the clearing and towards the city gates. The shapeshifter soon followed. The swords on the blonde's back might bring some trouble and some on look, but they should be fine.

"Plenty of them in town," the hybrid assured. He licked his fangs idly as he went with them. His tongue removed the coat of poison from the fangs.

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In an empty part of the woods not far from town, deer was grazing on the patches of green grass that covered around there. The air then suddenly changed and the deer scattered. A few seconds later, about 90 people appeared. Among them were Marc and Spinx. The man called Marc, who resembled Strider but with black hair, looked at the black-hooded man and said, "I hate teleporting and I hate wizards as well. So mind telling me what you want with the Knight Riders of the Darkness, seeing how you paid us now?"

The black-robed man named Spinx said in a deep voice, "There is one person I need, but he has another two people with him." He handed some photographs to Marc with Axle, Strider, and Akuma in them. Some of the others had the blonde-haired necromancer and the brunette boy in it. Axle was circled red in the photographs as Spinx explained, "I want that one alive, the others dead. Afterwards, you will get



the rest of your pay."

Marc smiled and said, "So go after Cloud and his party of mismatch, very well. 5000 pay for this one alive, another 4000 for Strider dead, and that one 3000. Sounds fair to me."

"Deal," the client said. About 10 undead wolves came out of the ground now. "But you are taking a few of my 'wolves', so they can make sure you don't mess up."

The mercenary just grinned and said, "Suit yourself." He ordered his party to fan out looking for Strider, Axle, and Akuma's whereabouts. He soon followed and so did the wolves, leaving Spinx alone in the clearing.

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They soon reached the city gates. Axle was a bit amazed on how the city look. "Wow, never seen a place like that," the "man" said as he looked at the great city.

"People say it was rebuilt with dragons after it got destroyed," Strider said as he walked through the gates. "Hey, where is that best inn at?" he asked Akuma. The hybrid paused, staring blankly at the swordsman for a moment. Then he settled for clicking his teeth as Axle ran off into the shops. Weapon shop, item shop, and food stands, buying the stuff they need. He later came back with a backpack of stuff and two swords on his back. "Well that did not take you long," Strider said as he pointed how the time it took him to get the stuff.

Akuma finally pointed to a sign down the road hanging off a large building and piped, "Over there." It simply read "*The Golden Pony*". "It's an inn with a tavern inside," he added.

"The Golden Pony? Who the hell come up with a name like that?" the swordsman said. He was laughing at a name of an inn like that. The hybrid rolled his eyes. "But I guess it's better than the Dragon Shit Inn," he said. Strider walked into the inn and went up to the desk.

The man behind the counter asked him, "Hello sir, how may I help you today?"

Strider placed the money on the counter and said, "I need a room with two beds and a chair. No room serves; I don't want anyone to know we are here." The man handed him a key to the room and said it was on the top floor. The swordsman walked up the stairs and paid no attention to the golden ponies that were engraved in various and appropriate places to match its name.

Axle said to Akuma, "Don't worry about Strider, he ordered two beds, one for you and one for me. He does not sleep in a bed, never have." They followed behind the human up to the room, which the hybrid poked his head curiously in. The room was nice with a window of the south view of the city. There were two beds in the room, one chair and a bathroom. Before Akuma walked into the room, Axle grabbed a

bag of marshmallows out of his bag and placed it on the bed close to the door.

The hybrid's eyes shifted to the dragon suspiciously as he frowned slightly. He ignored it and sat on the opposite bed. Akuma looked at the shapeshifter again and asked, "So what are you here for? Touring Windfall?" Strider took the marshmallows and put them back in the bag. Axle was already passed out on the other bed for some reason. The swordsman did not say anything, but just walked over to his chair and sat down and closed his eyes. In the window was a chipmunk looking at the group for a few seconds before running off. "Tch," Akuma uttered under his breath. "I'm going for a walk then," the swordsman heard the hybrid mutter.

Strider heard him trying to be quiet as the light steps seemed loud in the silence of the room. The man assumed that the boy was just walking around before he heard the door open and close quietly. Strider decided to follow Akuma out of the room. He was a bit surprised to see the hybrid on the floor. "You know not everything seems what it looks like, but you look like you're a bit lost in your thoughts there," the man said as he closed the door. Axle was very much asleep, but he was going to be up here in two hours or so. Akuma narrowed his eyes as Strider leaned against the frame of the door. The swordsman had his eyes closed again as if he sleeping again, but he was very much awake. His swords were leaving indents in the wall behind him as he leaned. "Well I could use a walk. If you want, you can join me, show me around town a bit. Axle will be awake soon," the man said as he started to head for the stairs and then waited to see if the hybrid would follow him.

The hybrid muttered under his breath as he pulled himself to a standing position. Akuma stiffly moved forward, trailing after the man as he muttered, "Whatever..."

As the boy stretched, Strider opened the door to the tavern to see the same chipmunk. It did not budge from its spot, just simply looked at the man, who looked right back. It took the swordsman a bit to figure out why. He took one step to it and it ran off. "Hm," Strider said. He still could not get over the fact that the chipmunk was just standing there. He just let it slide and started to go on his walk.

Marc followed them everywhere they went. Even in chipmunk form, he was not going to let his targets get away. He knew Axle was asleep, but due to it being noon, he could not get any one of the targets. He ran across rooftops keeping up with the two.

Strider wondered if there was a place where they sold scrolls at that had teleportation in them. "Hey, you know where they sell scrolls at that have magic in them?" the man said in a friendly voice. He could hear a few people talk about him and then Akuma. One started to say something about hybrids before getting slug in the face by Strider, which got all the talk to stop on the hybrid now.

Akuma flinched, jumping back at the sudden motion before he recollected himself. "Well..." he finally piped up in a quiet voice. "I did see a place called Magic Emporium," he said, pointing and walking down the city road.

The man, Strider slugged, went to go tackle him. The swordsman grabbed the man and threw him down the street. A small smirk tugged at the corner of the Akuma's mouth as if he enjoyed the man's suffering. "Ah, a shop that sells scrolls. Good," Strider said as he stepped over the man he just threw, who was gowning in pain. The swordsman pulled out a pouch full of money and handed some to Akuma. "I would suggest to get something to useful or to eat," he said. The amount of money he handed to the hybrid was a fairly large amount.

"Thanks..." the hybrid murmured, staring blankly at the money for a moment.

Strider walked into the store and asked if there was any scroll with teleportation in them. The owner looked at him for a bit before he told him that they were a bit pricey for a set. Strider just laughed and slammed a large amount of money on the table. "I think that will cover it," he said. The man looked at the pile of money now on his counter and handed the swordsman seven scrolls for teleportation. Strider took them and put them away in his pocket. He looked around for a few more scrolls that came to mind. He picked out a few hoodies as well and paid for them, too.