

((Note: The following sections take place during [chapter 25](#).)

Seliss yelped as water began to pour from the sky as if someone had dumped a million gallons of water on her head. All at once, the streets became chaotic; mothers dragging crying children and men in dripping suits seeking shelter. The woman was thrown in the middle of it all; the blood pounding in her ears as she was bumped and pushed. She tripped and fell into a puddle, splashing in the mud. She tried to get up as people walked over her. Suddenly, the streets were empty. The last of the people were scurrying into their homes. Those who weren't as lucky got to their feet and wiped the muck of their clothes and face, letting the rain wash it away before trudging away. But Seliss didn't move. Instead, tears filled her eyes and small sobs escaped her mouth. She had come to Windfall seeking freedom and independence, a cozy home and a good job to put money in her pocket. But instead, all she got was misery. Her silver cloak was ripped, muddy and dripping wet, and her boots were covered in muck. The only thing that seemed unharmed was her golden bracelet, but even it seemed somehow miserable. The mint dragon that had bothered her earlier came scurrying back, tugging at her hand. She stroked the creature's back, sobbing quietly in the middle of the empty street. Just then, she heard a man say, "Howdy, name's Jericho. It seems you need some help." Seliss looked up to see a man in black standing over her.

Sparks glanced up at the sudden flames that leapt up from the trees, casting shadows over the city. The girl could feel the intense heat from her place at the edge of town, the orange light warming her cheeks. Several water horses and a gray immediately flew over and dowsed the flames, creating a huge storm cloud. The fireworks stopped and the cloud grew, drifting over the city and pouring rain. Sparks cursed and pulled up her hood; but honestly, she didn't mind the rain. She needed a shower anyway. She continued along the street, where the remaining people were fleeing from the water pouring down from the sky. By the time the girl reached the woods, she was soaked to the bone and she shivered in the cold weather. The trees around her were burned to the crisp, evidence of the fire's rage. She crouched down and felt the ash under her feet, and furrowed her eyebrows. This couldn't have been a wildfire; the air was too moist and the night too chilly. This fire was caused deliberately by a dragon. Sparks stood and put a hand on her hip, puzzled. Windfall was a dragon-friendly city, so why would someone do something like this? She had heard of the Vulture horde, a horde of dragons that were trying to exterminate the human race. But the Aquarians would have found them; and last time, she heard the horde was in Solomos. The girl shook her head and looked up at the clouded sky, dripping wet in the middle of a charred forest.

Just then, a light shone on her. Sparks jerked her head up, all of her senses alert. She knew that someone was watching her from the shadows. She could feel their eyes staring at her. She reached for her bow and swore silently. She had left it at her cottage in the sudden hurry to meet Jupiter. Jupiter... Her cottage... The girl gasped, the ashes falling from her fingertips. Had her home survived the fire? She looked back to make sure she wasn't being followed and then ran off deeper into the woods. Her home

wasn't far from here and she was worried about the dragons. She let out a huge sigh of relief as the burnt trees fell away to the luscious green of the forest. Her cottage came into view and Sparks ran up the steps, unlocking the door and disappearing inside. The girl slammed the door shut and collapsed on her bed, exhausted. Her pygmy friends climbed onto her and curled up. Together, they fell asleep.

((**Note:** The following sections take place during [chapter 26](#).)

After her brief encounter with Jericho and leaving him, Seliss spotted a friendly-looking inn and headed in its direction, hoping to find a nice place to spend the night. The young woman pushed open the door of the inn and a rush of warm air washed over her, carrying the scent of baking bread. She was standing in a small lobby that reminded her of a medieval castle. Her footsteps echoed on the tiled stone floor as she walked up to the reception desk. An elderly woman was sitting at the desk, her straight gray hair pinned up in a tight bun and a permanent frown creased onto her pinched face. The receptionist looked up at Seliss and scanned her from head to toe. Her facial expression was a mixture of surprise, annoyance and disgust. Seliss cleared her throat as her ears burned with embarrassment. She said, "Um, I'm looking for a room."

The woman scowled at her and responded, "I'm sorry, we're closed."

"But your sign says 'Open 24 Hours'."

The receptionist turned back to the papers she was examining and told her, "I said we're closed." Seliss sighed and took out a small leather pouch from her bag, spilling some of its contents on the desk. The woman's attention was torn from the papers to the gold coins littering the desk and her scowl transformed into a warm smile. "Follow me, dear." The receptionist led the dripping woman down a hallway, stopping halfway at a painted wooden door. She unlocked the door and pushed it open, smiling as she handed over the key. "Have a good night!" Seliss entered her room and was greeted by a soft wool rug that covered the floor. A queen-sized bed stood in one corner, accompanied by a pretty wooden nightstand. In the other corner stood a red leather couch and a coffee table, enveloped by a white tablecloth. Another door led to a bathroom, tiled with white marble. The woman sighed with relief and rushed into the bathroom, stripping out of her muddy cloths and stepping into the shower, washing the night's memories away. She put on a fresh nightgown and collapsed onto the bed, out cold long before her head hit the pillow.

The Vulture Horde were about to attack the army camp, but first they had sent the black ghost dragons to find the army's best fighters, the halflings, and Pyro to go out and kill them. After having found them, Pyro slipped through the entrance to the tent, where the several halflings were sleeping. The cassare

killed the first two without trouble, but the others were already awake. He killed them before they could react. He came out with his claws caked with blood and a stupid smile on his face.

((**Note:** The following sections take place during [chapter 27](#).)

Pyro's eyelids flickered and he groaned. He didn't remember falling asleep, but now it was mid-morning and last night's events seemed like a distant memory. He forced his eyes open and scanned his surroundings, reassuring himself that he was still at the lake. Scrambling to his feet, the cassare stretched and padded outside, feeling suddenly hungry. He caught a deer in no time and dragged it over to the lake to eat it.

A deer grazed in the forest meadow, oblivious to the danger it was in. In the shadows, a young girl sat and waited, gripping a bow in her hand. The deer wandered closer to nibble on a patch of green and Sparks nocked an arrow, taking aim. A sudden boom echoed through the forest and the deer jumped, dashing into the underbrush. Cursing as her prey ran off, Sparks scrambled to her feet and sprinted towards the noise. "Jupiter!" she called. The brute dragoness appeared in the trees overhead, diving down to soar next to the girl. They reached the edge of the woods, where a big cassare dragon was lying helplessly on the ground, surrounded by hunters, who were marveling over their catch. Nearby stood a hybrid boy, but he made no effort to help the dragon. Anger bubbled inside of her as she readied her bow, aiming at the nearest man. Jupiter roared and jumped at one of the other hunters. Sparks released her arrow, hitting the man in the leg. He roared in pain and she unsheathed her dagger. "Leave him alone!!!" she shouted.

((**Note:** This section takes place during [chapter 28](#).)

Since it was midday, much of the cassare camp was deserted with most dragons out hunting. Minus the leader, the only dragons in the camp were a few females that had stayed behind to care for the eggs and hatchlings. The leader's name was Salvo Elduth. Like the rest of his clan, he could be hot-headed and arrogant, but he was intelligent and wise beyond his years. He rarely left the sanctuary of his den at the very top of the cliff, but now he stood at the edge, scanning his camp with intelligent ice blue eyes. "Greetings, fellow dragon," Salvo heard someone say politely. The leader turned at the sound of a voice behind him with his teeth bared.

"Yopple, Baltia, let's go," Aeolus said before he and the others flew off. Salvo retreated to his cave, lost in thought. He knew the disaster dragon was right; human technology was evolving quickly. His clan wouldn't be safe forever. But he was afraid to trust the outsiders and he knew his kin wouldn't either. And yet... Salvo shook his head and lied down on the stone floor of his den, exhausted after the day's activities.

((Note: The following sections take place during [chapter 32](#).)

Seliss yawned and rolled over in her bed. What time was it? She sat up and looked at the clock through half-closed eyes. She had slept through half the day! Groaning, she heaved herself up to her feet and shuffled to the bathroom. After getting dressed and attempting to tame the mop of tangles that was her hair, Seliss pulled on her boots and left her fancy hotel room, still half asleep. After a quick breakfast of bread and fruit, she began wandering the streets of Windfall, looking for work. She had spent most of her money on the hotel room and that was only temporary. If she didn't find a job soon, it would be over for her. Lost in thought, Seliss didn't even notice the mint dragon from last night trailing behind her like a loyal dog. She walked for a few minutes before realizing the mint was still following her. She stopped and crossed her arms, wondering what she should do with it. She told it, "Please stop following me." But then she thought, *'That might be the stupidest thing I've ever said!'* The little dragon blinked once and, to her surprise, scurried off in the direction she had come from. Seliss sighed and continued on her job search.

The Vulture Horde teleported to the Eternal Wind clan's village and went out into the desert to train. Aeolus assigned each dragon their sparring partner and said to them, "Everyone get with your partners right now." The horde split into groups and made spaces between one another so that they don't get in the other groups' spars. Then the disaster said, "Good! Now I shall take my leave to find new members. Try not to hurt each other badly during your sessions. Should anyone sustain an injury, don't hesitate to tell Hewey about it." Then he, along with Kekul and Cirrus, teleported away to find new recruits. The horde immediately began to spar against one another. Pyro was all the more happy to engage in this pretend combat. He was very competitive when it came to things like races, challenges and in this case, sparring. He was going to be sure that he would defeat his partner, Enamora, in this match. Enamora cast a fireball, which she had magically cooled to not burn scales, at Pyro. The cassare was hit and he felt his scales where he had been touched go warm as if he was sunbathing. Knowing her breed was known for using magic more than their claws & teeth, Pyro expanded his anti-magic field until it reached past her. Enamora tried to use another spell, but then she quickly realized that she had been suppressed. The magi had to resort to using her claws and teeth to combat her opponent. She charged towards the dragonet, who also ran at her in an attempt to get the first strike. They clashed and locked talons with

each other, but Enamora's size and weight gave her the advantage to push Pyro down below her.

The magi lunge her head down at him to go for the neck, but the cassare was quick to move out of the way before he gets bitten. He countered with a swift slap of his talon to her face. Enamora slams down one of her talons at him, which hits him on the collarbone. Pyro grunted his breath out from the impact. Then he retaliated with a kick to the magi's underbelly, causing Enamora to throw her head up and grunt into pain. Pyro saw this chance to attack and swipe his claws at the magi's chest, but without tearing her scales. She looked down at him and reared up away from his reach to avoid the striking claws. The cassare's trick has worked, so he took the chance to get up and move away from her. Enamora fell back down on her legs and went after him, refusing to let her opponent put some distance between them.

Pyro saw her coming and decided that he needed to get around her. He spread out his wings and took flight, not too far off the ground as he needed to be in a certain range of his opponent to keep her from using magic again. The cassare flew around the magi, who stopped and watched him to see where he was going before planning an attack. Pyro did a U-turn and flew towards Enamora as he blew out some cool-down flames at her wings. He would have gone for the face, but he didn't want to risk burning her eyes as she'll need them to contribute to the horde. The magi felt fire burn up her wings like she was touched by a hot stove. She let out a pained yelp before threw herself backwards down on her back and rolled to put out the fire. Seeing that her underside and legs were left open to be attacked, Pyro breathed down more fire on them this time. Enamora winced and started rolling away from him to avoid any more of his attacks, while using the ground to put out the flames at the same time. After she was no longer being burned, the dragoness decided to take flight as well and go after the cassare.

The combat had been taken to the air; now the two sparring partners were in a dogfight. Pyro saw the magi coming towards him and seeing her jaw open, ready to bite him. "Whoa!" he cried. He quickly moved out of the way before he would feel the sharp teeth chomp on him. He saw the magi moved past him and the tables were turned as the cassare was now the one going after her. Apparently, Enamora knew he was pursuing her as she was flying around up and down and sideways in an attempt to throw him off. Pyro was having a somewhat difficult problem of keeping up with her. They kept going for a bit until the magi fainted a turn and went the other way. This successfully threw the cassare off her path and into the opposite direction. He cursed himself for his mistake before he felt the presence of someone behind him. He looked behind and saw Enamora coming back for him and was about to swipe her claw at him.

But the attack never struck as Enamora was interrupted by an agonized screech. Pyro and the other sparring dragons nearby all stopped what they were doing and turned their attention to the screaming black ghost that was Eatorn. The black ghost was held underneath Yopple's neck and he appeared to be on fire. The huge orange cassare was grinning sadistically and repeatedly slammed his tail onto Eatorn. The horde had looks of worry, shock, and appall. Volkin was the one, who was most frantic about her mate. "Eatorn!" she screamed.

One of the other dragons shouted, "Oh my god, Yopple, get off! You're hurting him!"

Hewey stopped sparring with Baltia and pushed his way past the crowd. He told the magi cassare, "I heard Eatorn's getting burned. Yopple, stop it this instant! You're doing damage to him."

Yopple stopped his attacks and looked at the others. He said, "Well I suppose the match is over." He simply walked a few yards away and snapped, "And next time, at least pair me with someone bigger."

Both Pyro and Enamora scowled at the bigger cassare as the latter muttered, "What a jerk!" Pyro silently agreed before his thoughts were turned to his former clan. If Salvo and the clan does decide to join the horde, then he knew that they were definitely not going to be pleased to find out that the horde has this bully among their ranks.

Volkin rushed over to her wounded mate and asked, "Oh Eatorn, are you okay?"

The healer dragon reached the two black ghosts and told the female, "Step aside, Volkin. I need to heal your mate." The female backed away to let Hewey do his job. As he was using his healing magic, Pyro saw a few stones being thrown and pelted at the healer's back. One was also chucked at Yopple's face. "Ow!" Hewey shouted. Then he turned his head around to glare at the dark myst nearby, "Baltia, I am busy right now! Can you just wait?" Pyro looked to the pint-sized dragonet. There was something about her that told him that she wasn't going to be good for the horde. Was it her childish personality or was his intuition just simply lying to him? He didn't know her much since she just joined the horde today and perhaps, he shouldn't judge her just yet.

Yopple lifted up his tail and simply swatted the stone away like a fly. He looked at the little pygmy there and taunted, "So you want to be my next target?"

Hewey looked to him and said, "If you're going to pick a fight with her, do it gently; and I mean more gentle than what you did to Eatorn. We're all still sparring here and I can't be bothered to heal all the time."

The magi cassare snorted, "Like I would want to. One, I am not assigned to her. Two, I would crush her. Literally." He pawed at the sand.

Baltia swooped down towards the healer. "Sorry I missed," she said. "Stones aren't easy to aim, sometimes..." She darted to the floor and collected her stone before she flew back to Hewey. "Do you want some stones? They make a very good weapon if you can hit them right. Here, take this and throw it as high as you can." She scooped a stone from her magical bag with a paw, balanced it on her nose and then tossed it easily to Hewey. "I'll see if I can hit it with this one!" She brought the stone from her tail to her paw and bounced it on her scaly palm.

The healer dragon caught the stone and looked at it with a small bit of interest. Turning his attention back to Baltia, he said, "Thanks, I'll see if I can practice with it." With the black ghost fully healed, his

mate helped him up and led him away from the big cassare.

Pyro's attention was taken away from the scene when he heard Enamora saying his name. He looked at her and she told him, "Juna needs me and Sargoth to create a training ground for us. How about you go spar with his partner in the meantime."

"Okay," Pyro said to her. The magi teleported away as the horde went back to sparring each other. Pyro went to look for a lone dragon, who was most likely going to be Sargoth's partner. He went around combating dragons until he saw an electric ember dragon walking around by himself. Thinking that must be Sargoth's partner, the cassare went over to him and said, "Hey, my partner went over to help Juna build a training ground. Is yours doing that, too?"

The ember dragon nodded and said, "Yes, he's gone off."

Pyro asked, "I guess that means we'll have to spar with each other until then. Want to fight me?"

The ember accepted, "Sure." Then the two went and fought each other.

((**Note:** This section takes place during [chapter 33](#).)

Seliss had gone a few blocks down the street since she left the inn. The businesses she passed didn't have any hiring signs on their windows, so she ignored them and looked for those that did. Soon, she reaches a fast food restaurant with a sign hanging on the door's window pane saying that it was looking for cashiers to hire as employees. Seliss didn't have any experience as a cashier before and she's never taken a job before. She knew these two things would help to bolster her chances against many other competing applicants in getting selected for the job. But because she was green in these areas, she could see her chances would be slim-to-none. But still, she must try if she is to ever make some money for herself and survive. The woman went inside the restaurant and got in line behind two customers who waiting to place their order. After they have told the cashier what they wanted, Seliss came up next and asked the man, "Hey uh, I saw the hiring sign out there. Do you have an employment application I can fill out?"

"Yes," said the cashier. "I'll bring it to you." He looked below at his side of the counter and took up the printed sheet of paper. As he gave it to the woman, he said, "Here you go."

"Thanks!" Seliss replied. Then she realized that something important was missing and knew what it was. She made another request, "Oh and can I have a pen, too?"

"Sure," the cashier said as he took out a pen and gave it to her.

Having everything she needed, Seliss went over to one of the tables and sat there to fill out the application. She filled in her name first before she went to the address and phone number. The woman couldn't fill them as she was homeless. Her wealthy parents had abandoned her for practicing fire magic and accidentally burning their home down. Before the incident happened, they believed that magic was just as dangerous as dragons and wanted to protect their daughter from such things. But Seliss had always wanted to learn fire magic. Every night she would sneak out and take lessons, thus leading up to that event that would screw her over. The woman decided to leave the address and phone number blank and skip ahead to the email part, which she filled out. She could always go to a library to use the computer, but first she would register to get a library card in order to use the facility's computers. Seliss then filled out the date she would start, which happened to be tomorrow. She wrote down her SSN, her salary requirement, and answered questions asking for her age, reliable transport, criminal background, legality to work in this region of Rudvich and the type of employment desired. Seliss decided to do full-time as it would get her the extra money she needed from doing a lot of hours.

After writing down her skills and hobbies on the next lines, she made it down to the education history section. She wrote down the name of the high school she graduated two years ago and the name of the college she had gone to before her abandonment. She wrote one year for the college, her major in zoology and that she hadn't graduated yet. Seliss hoped her job would give her enough money to pay for the next semester and the school supplies she would need. She wanted to be a wildlife biologist someday, so that she could get to study the life and behavior of dragons, the creatures she had always been interested in. After she was through with the education section, she went to the last section that was the references for people who knew her. There were not a lot of people she could use as reliable references as she didn't know their phone numbers or addresses. And even if her parents did count, they probably won't tell the hiring manager anything good about her daughter after the trouble she's caused. Seliss decided to leave this part blank and was finally done with the application. She got out of her seat and went back to the cashier to turn it in. Holding the form up to him, she told him, "Here you go, I'm done now."

The man took it and said, "Alright, I'll put it up with the other forms. Good luck on getting the job."

Seliss smiled and replied, "Thanks!" She hoped that she would be lucky enough to get picked as the new cashier. Then the woman went out the door and went to see if any other place was hiring. She figured it would be best to apply at many businesses, just in case she didn't get the job for the restaurant.

((**Note:** This section takes place during [chapter 35](#).)

All of the cassare clan had returned from hunting and came back to camp with some fresh food for everyone to enjoy. Salvo decided to let his clan eat first before he would hold a meeting with them.

After everyone was full, the leader got everybody together to listen to what he has to say. He announced, "Everyone, today our home was visited by a horde leader who wanted us to join him in his world-wide extermination of humans."

One of the cassares rolled his eyes and said, "Oh so now the outsiders need us. Hmph! These folks didn't want us around in the first place, why should we be there for them?" The other clan members agreed as they held grudges against all non-cassares who shunned them throughout the many years.

Salvo replied, "You know, Emerald. I had the same exact thought while he was talking to me. But then he warned me that humans were going to invent new ways and weapons to compensate for everything they've lost and get around our anti-magic fields. He wanted us to work with him, so that he can prevent these things from happening to us."

The cassares were surprised to hear that the mysterious horde leader cared about this clan when no one else did. One of them asked, "An outsider who wants to save us? Who is this dragon?"

The chief answered, "His name is Aeolus and he's the leader of the Vulture Horde." Then he explained, "I told him that I would consider his offer in joining the horde, but we're going to have to make this decision democratically. We're all going to discuss and decide on whether or not we should join his horde. I want to hear your opinions to see how you all feel about this and if we're making the wise decision or not. I don't want any of us to die for just purely for someone else's gain. This is about our clan and our future, so let's start talking. Do we want in or out?"

Emerald was the first to voice his opinion on the matter. "You know what? I don't even trust this Aeolus guy. How do we know he's not tricking us or anything? What if it's a trap?" he asked. Salvo could understand his suspicion very well. After all, he himself didn't trust any outsider, not even the Vulture Horde leader, the magi cassare who was with him and their convincing arguments. But for some reason, he couldn't think of a motive as to why he would invite his clan and then harm them soon afterwards.

A dragoness seemed to share this thought as she asked, "And what do you think he has to gain from tricking us like that? I'm just asking."

Another dragon guessed for Emerald, "Well maybe he's working with some humans to ambush us and kill us."

A third dragon thought that the second dragon sounded absurd and asked, "What humans work with dragons? All they do is kill us and enslave us. Plus, the Spell put an end to slavery. Aeolus wouldn't be forced by humans to lure us into capture or death."

The dragoness asked, "So do you think he's being genuine in letting us into the horde, Bacura?"

Bacura the third dragon answered, "I believe so."

Another dragoness voiced, "I say we should join the horde. I may not like outsiders, but if we don't do anything about the humans, then we'll be in trouble later."

More cassares discussed their opinions until they had no more to say. Salvo decided that it was time to make the final decision. He told everyone what they would do, "Alright, now that we've heard both sides of this argument, I say it's time we vote. Raise your claws to answer. Who says we join the horde?" Many cassares raised up their claws for the chief to count them. After tallying them up, he asked, "And who says we don't." The rest of the clan raised their claws to vote "no" on the issue. Salvo compared the total of "yes" to the "no" to see which side won. The majority had favored to join the horde. The chief let them know about this as he said, "It is decided; our clan will join the Vulture Horde to fight the humans. I will take only with me those who want to help, while the rest of you stay here and guard our territory. I will let Aeolus know that we're in." He contacted the horde leader telepathically and said, *'Aeolus, I've made my decision. We're joining your horde.'*

The disaster dragon replied, *'I'm glad to hear that, Chief Salvo. Our horde welcomes you in and I assure that you all will be treated fairly like everyone else.'*

Salvo grumbled, *'Hmph, you better. Because if not, we're leaving.'*

'I'll take your words seriously,' Aeolus said. *'Anyway, I'll send my two magis over to warp your chosen dragons over to us.'*

After the telepathic bond broke off, Salvo got the volunteering cassares huddled to the side and waited for the magi dragons to get here. After a few minutes, the horde's magis showed up and the half-magma magi asked, "So is everyone ready?"

Salvo answered, "Yes, now take us over to the horde."

"Yes sir," the magma magi said. Then they were teleported over to the Vulture Horde.