

((**Note:** The following sections take place during [Chapter 14.](#)))

A jewelry store had been caught on fire. People started to emerge from houses to see what the commotion was. Human police were taping off the Golden Pony now, only to hear the alarm. A nearby Aquarian landed in the square, seeing the fire. He mused, "Why are there so many fires in this place?" He sent a telepathic relay to send for water dragons. The Aquarian guard moved forward, sticking his face in the shop, though his body was unable to fit through the door. "Is anyone stuck in there?" he called in, trying to see past the smoke.

The Aquarian looked up as he saw a blur come rushing out of the smoke. He stared for a moment, sniffing past the smoke; it smelt like him. An elk rushed past his face. He batted it to the side with his wing, charging for what smelt like the boy. Catching up, he only saw stone. He looked around, not seeing the real boy in sight. He grabbed the cloths of the stone up in his claws, yanking the apparition with him, and flew to the front where more guards were. "This is his scent. I'll give a description later. No one else is inside the building." The stone double tried valiantly to escape, constantly struggling against the dragon's grip. The elk just faded away after a few moments. Soon, the stone double crumbled away, leaving only the cloths and duplicate staff.

((**Note:** This section takes place during [Chapter 15.](#)))

Akuma poked his face into the kitchen to see what the mage was doing. Seeing that he was cooking, Akuma could feel himself start to salivate. Well, it had been a while since he had last eaten. He had only really had that sandwich today. To avoid making a river of drool into the kitchen, the hybrid pulled away from the door frame and went back to the couch. He plopped down lazily in his spot from before. He yawned and stretched, feeling much like a cat relaxed on the plush surface. The fire was staring to make the place toasty. He shut his eyes, feeling sleepy in his content.

((**Note:** This section takes place during [Chapter 16.](#)))

The sun rays of early morning poured in through the window of Akuma's 'claimed room' of the house. They crept up onto the bed, shining on his face. The hybrid grumbled and rolled over before blinking his eyes open and rubbing them briefly. He pushed the covers off himself and stumbled over to the window, looking outside at the people and dragons below in the streets. It seemed everything was still

in one piece. He did not really expect the treaty of dragons and humans to go over so well; behavior wise anyway. His head snapped to the side as he heard Nick call out, "Breakfast is nearly done."

Akuma thought with a snort, *'Is that his idea of a wake-up call? My hearing is still human level in this form. These creatures are damned near deaf.'* He looked down at his human body. He had heightened smell in this form and yet, that seemed to be about the only thing. In his dragon form, he was stronger, faster and had better senses. He made his way down the stairs and into the kitchen. He looked into the kitchen and saw the food, making him sit hastily at the table. His eyes shifted up to Nick and smirked, "I see why humans have to rely on their smarts. Your senses are petty. You rely on masses of technology to make up for it.... Works well enough...until a certain Spell came along."

((**Note:** This section takes place during [Chapter 18](#).)

Akuma flew in silence, steadily following behind Nick. They had been flying for most of the day. In truth, the hybrid had never left the northeast region before. He wondered what it was like on the outside of the mage's 'enchanted forest'. Would it even be even different? Probably not with it being at such a close distance, at least in comparison with the rest of the world. His thoughts were interrupted by a pang. Something tingled in his chest. A tickle? The feeling steadily became stronger like someone was squeezing his lungs. Akuma's wings fluttered irregularly for a moment as he took a deep breath to assure himself that he was not suffocating. Shaking his head, Nick called back to him, "The tower's up there." He pointed out, motioning with his head. They could see it, but it was still good ways away like a few miles to precise.

"Joy," the hybrid grumbled, aggravated by this mysterious feeling in his chest. Maybe it was just a nervous pain? They continued to fly, closing the distance between them and the impossible tower. Soon, the air smelled slightly different and the sky became a different shade of blue, but not by the means of time as it was too early for evening. They flew down, where Nick landed first near the base of the tower. Akuma followed swiftly, stumbling along as he landed. He raised his claws to his chest, wincing and rubbing where he felt pain. He had not noticed that Nick had returned to a human form, or paid much attention to his personal mumbles.

The mage mused, "It looks exactly the same as if the explosion never happened." Akuma flinched, retracting his hand back to the ground casually. He paused, holding his breath to keep from hyperventilating over the slight anxiety of a tight chest. Nick's hand glowed for a moment as he ran it through the air, creating a ball of purple mist in his hand. He astonished, "There isn't even any arcane flux here. Not even in trace amounts." Moving next to the tower, he placed a hand on it. "The stone is even old. It's been here for hundreds of years."

"Good for the tower," Akuma finally breathed, turning and trotting away from Nick. He moved around

the tower until he spotted a door. Unable to turn the knob with his claws, he shifted back down to human form and grabbed the door handle. He opened the door and strolled inside without knocking. He was not used to human customs such as knocking. He had grown up around more dragons than humans after all. The hybrid looked over his shoulder as Nick entered behind him, closing the door. He looked forward again in silence as he waited for the mage to fully enter. When Nick did not pass him up, the hybrid looked behind again, alarmed to see the door open to another location. Outside, the sounds of chatter drifted in and he could see all different assortments of carts and traders with stalls set up. It as if the tower itself had just become a major center of trade. The rest of Akuma's body immediately twisted around. His mouth hung open as a small noise of confusion left his throat.

"The doors move," Nick explained to him. "You shouldn't expect the same door to open to any one place in a row." He turned back to point at doors located on all four sides of the spacious tower. "There are no stairs here, only doors; but there are always four doors on each floor. Right now, we should be in the basement. The tower is bigger than it looks and it can be kind of disorienting, so don't go wandering off." The hybrid scuttled along after the mage before he closed the door and went to another one, which he threw open. It led to a library, a maze of books, that was much larger than the current room they were in. The transport methods seemed impossible and yet, magic had a wide range of strangeness to it. Going through the door, he motioned for Akuma to follow and explained, "The tower has many uses; it's the largest archive of magical knowledge ever put together. It serves as a school and a center of trade for the surrounding areas. It's watched over by a council of wizards and they are overseen by the archmage, that's the one we are looking for. Although any member of the council will work, too."

The hybrid chuckled, "Humans actually managing something without self-destructing. Now there's something." He looked to the side to take in his surroundings.

Nick shook his head and questioned, "Well, technically it did blow up. This entire zone should be uninhabitable, but it's not just that which bothers me. Something feels off about this whole place, can't you feel it?"

Akuma muttered quietly to himself. Noted that he had felt that pain in his chest. But it was just a small pain, what did that prove anyway? It could have just been some bad food. Then he smirked, "Great ol' archmage. What? Come to kiss the new boss's boots? Come to try and dominate him because of your entitlement issues? You have a strange fondness of this place."

The mage explained, "Neither. Though for the record, I could totally destroy him if I wanted to. I just don't want to deal with the mess it would make." He straightened his robe and headed through the library.

"Pffffftnnahaha!" The noise escaped Akuma, escalating into a short span of laughter at Nick's back. His hands found his pockets, slipping inside, "Yeah, sure," he said. Akuma knew himself to have some stubbornness issues, but this was just arrogance. He thought, *'He doesn't even know who the archmage is, much less how strong he is. For all he knows, it's a big ancient dragon. Dragons are better at magic*

anyway.'

The mage opened the door on the far side, which led straight to the tower kitchen. They stepped into the kitchen as Nick smiled slyly. An assortment of knives and utensils began floating up around him. The hybrid recoiled for a moment as he briefly thought it was retaliation to the laughter before Nick asked, "Feel like having a snack?"

Akuma knew Nick was too much of a lightweight to ever retaliate to him. "I'm good," he muttered. Nick shrugged and put down the everything. Moving through the kitchen he went to a door on the far side, snagging an apple on his way. The hybrid followed through the next couple doors as his laughter died down. He muttered, "Maybe they should just make doors that take you to where you want in the first place." He seen how many they had walked through.

The mage reached for the door, but stopped himself instead, heading right to another door. He explained, "That door doesn't like me. I'll use this one instead, so I don't end up somewhere unpleasant." Akuma's brow furrowed. What? They had personalities now? The mage pushed open the second door. It was mostly empty other than a circle of 12 basketball-sized orbs floating above the ground. There was only the one door in this room. On the far side, there was a window overlooking the area. The center seemed too dense to see in, so the hybrid opted to look out the window briefly. Well, that had been a fast trip. There seemed to be no need for stairs anymore. Walking up to the ring of orbs, Nick wove a hand over it. "The impossible tower," he muttered as Akuma glanced over his shoulder to see the door changed behind them. A larger door appeared, taking its place. As it opened, they went to it and saw a large ancient-looking dragon. His body was lanky with long wings and his pelt consisted of feathers, which were mostly orange with black stripes and a white underbelly and feet. His black horns were long and gnarled.

Akuma pointed briefly with a smirk, "So you said you could beat the archmage if you wanted. Have at it; I'll watch."

Nick turned towards the door, facing the big dragon who had just entered. He took a step back in astonishment. The mage astonished, "But you're dead. You died. Hundreds of years ago when the tower exploded."

The dragon's ancient voice rumbled through the room, "And you were in that same explosion, but look at you now." Nick's body tensed up in response. They stared at each other for a few silent moments before the ancient dragon grinned slightly rumbled, "Go ahead, ask."

The mage looked around at the tower and motioned, "How? The tower was destroyed; the land tainted."

"What do you think this spell is for?" the ancient dragon motioned with his tail at the various balls around the room. Akuma had been looking back and forth between the two as he rubbed the side of his

head. He felt fairly insignificant as he was not even acknowledged.

Nick turned to examine the balls. Touching the spheres, he looked out the window at the outside air simmering along a certain boundary. He turned back to the dragon with eyes wide. "But you can't do that! What about the originals, the people who lived here before?"

"Disposed of," was the only answer that the mage got. Akuma's eyes slit in annoyance at the conversation as he did not really know anything about this. Then he paused when the dragon explained, "This tower is the tower that you had grown up in, Nick. But at the same time, it isn't. It is from a different dimension. I stole power from the rift and I had managed to create a portal around the tower, essentially switching the destroyed land of this world with the tower of a parallel world."

"From another dimension?" the hybrid echoed. Then he asked accusingly, "So if you took it from them and that rift is still open. What's keeping them from taking it back?" He continued, "This place is infested with humans. And humans are so weak without their weapons that were disabled by the Spell. So what if some force comes trudging through the rift?"

The hybrid nodded as Nick agreed, "Exactly, this whole thing is a ticking time bomb waiting to happen. And that's assuming that they don't come and take back the tower themselves." Nothing about it sounded safe. Angry people from another dimension? That seemed like a pretty big hassle over some stupid tower. Akuma slit his eyes in annoyance. What made this tower special anyway? If Nick's "assumed" master was so set on making the tower again, why not move the location and rebuild? Why go through the painstaking risk and effort to open another dimension to get the tower back? Apparently, there were dragons that were just as stupid as humans. His thoughts recollected as Nick went silent. It seemed he had missed a middle part of the conversation by the look on the mage's face. Nick was looking over the orbs and biting his lip. Akuma's brow furrowed. What was he doing?

The ancient dragon only smirked, "Exactly, they are weak. They cannot hope to take back the tower. When we control the rift, we have the metaphorical upper-ground."

Nick inched closer to the spell circle, explaining, "The rift is more unstable than ever like this. If it collapses, it won't just bring the tower with it this time, it could bring down the whole planet and then some."

The dragon simply scoffed and turned his head to the side. "A risk well worth taking."

Biting his lip harder, Nick suddenly jumped toward the spell ring, launching a spell and shattering an orb. Akuma flinched at that. The entire ring destabilized and shattered one by one. Instantly, he raised a hand and blew out the windows. Running past Akuma and the dragon, he shouted, "RUN!" Then he jumped out the window as the hybrid froze.

Okay, Akuma had definitely missed something, or Nick was really spontaneous. Glancing behind himself

at the dragon, he muttered aloud, "But he can't get out of that little door, right?" His mouth curved downward, his fangs protruding in a nervous frown.

The mage called back in an echo, "Dragons don't need doors."

Akuma thought, *'No... I guess they would not if they were that pissed.'* In any case, the hybrid scrambled over to the window and jumped out. He took his dragon form and fluttered clumsily to the ground before switching back to a human form. He stared up at the tower, wondering if he was to expect the dragon to burst out of the side. *'Yeah, 'I could totally beat the archmage if I wanted to' my ass,'* he thought, wondering why Nick was so quick to bail. The mage brought his hands to his sides, using wind magic to break his fall as he landed in a roll on the ground. The ancient dragon burst through the wall of the tower, dive bombing at them. Akuma's face was painted over with alarm. He looked back at the mage and could not help, but smugly muse, "I guess the bonding doesn't go too deep for you and him, if he's so willing to kill you."

"It's complicated!" replied Nick before he turned and launched a huge blue bolt of energy towards the dragon. The dragon known rolled midair in response, letting the bolt fly right past him. Nick closed his hand and the bolt exploded violently just behind the dragon. The dragon tumbled forward in the air, propelled by the blast. But as he passed overhead, he let loose an inferno of white flame on the boys. Nick pulled a thick layer of earth over him, shielding him from the molten hot flames. The fire was so hot that it baked the earth solid.

"Ah-?" the hybrid uttered before using a lightning dash to flicker out of the way. The attack unnerved him and yet, he made a toothy grin. He was not able to be caught that easily. Fire and claws were among the most basic things he could avoid with his speed. He was pretty heat resistant, but white fire would definitely still be too hot. Akuma skidded a stop and channeled a few seconds of a thunderbolt attack at the dragon, who quickly stopped himself. He paused to see if it hit or did anything for that matter. Akuma was headstrong about his own magic ability and yet, he wondered if it meant anything when he was less than a fraction of the dragon's age.

Extending a leg, the dragon had caught the thunderbolt in one of his front clawed paws, having collected it to form into a ball. He slammed it to the ground, using Akuma's own attack to strike at Nick. It traveled over the dewy ground and electrocuted the mage. The hybrid's face dusted as the mage collapsed and his earth shield cracked before it crumbled, half-burying him. The dragon then turned to pursue the alarmed Akuma, aiming his long, gnarled horns and dive-bombing the boy from above. The ancient dragon cried out with a feral snarl, "Your insolence shall not go unpunished!"

"Insolence?" The hybrid muttered to himself. He thought, *'Jeez this guy really is old. Talking like that.'* Akuma briskly zipped out of the way of the horns with a lightning dash. He turned on heel and stepped forward, his face colliding with the barrier. Oh yeah, that was still there. He briefly felt guilty, knowing he had subconsciously been about to bail on Nick save for the barrier. How did one break a magic barrier? He stared blankly at the dragon, who had just batted away Nick's elephant-sized earth

ball spell with his massive tail. He doubted he could take down such a beast, even in dragon form. He had already gotten his throat ripped open once in a simple scuffle. He was not any trained killer like Albel. His hands fumbled nervously in front of him as he kept a large distance between them. The hybrid rambled mindlessly, "I'm sure we could...talk this out? I mean killing us is so annoying. I mean you have to catch us, then actually try to kill us, and then there's getting rid of the bodies... We probably don't even taste good. I'm quite sure we're both radioactive in some respect. And killing the immortal human over there is more trouble than it's worth really. And I'm just a literal dud of my species, so there's really nothing worth hunting here. So if you'd just raise the barrier, we'll be on our way and you can patch the hole in your...castle." He trailed off at the end, ending with an awkward laugh that sounded psychotic in his nervous state.

The hybrid went quiet as the dragon looked at him with a sick grin on his face. He said, "Annoying, no, it's quite entertaining actually, watching you grovel like this. Although I do have a schedule to adhere to, so why don't you two be good little worms and JUST DIE ALREADY!" He roared out the last part before releasing another torrent of white flames towards Akuma, searing the earth below. Nick looked at the ancient dragon in disbelief as the light from above flickered; the sky was changing. The hybrid's breath quickened and his eyes glazed over in a mixture of fear, anger, and resentment. He shifted up into his golden dragon form, zipping out of the way of the flames. He settled in another place on the ground. His breath was ragged with growls and his pupils thinned out to slits as his mind slipped away. It felt like he was slipping into his hunter state, but something more based on an animalistic instinct of survival. His mouth hung open as he bared fangs, green liquid dripping from them. He did not need to beat the older dragon down. He only needed to bite him once. His poison could kill a human in a minute. Dragons took a larger dose, but he did not care. Akuma suddenly jolted forward at lightning speed, trying to slam himself into the dragon's chest with horns going first. By normal strength, a target of this size was immovable, but by sheer force of the speed perhaps. His golden scales would protect against the impact. Gold dragons were known for their powerful armor.

The dragon swept Nick aside with his tail as if he was a rag doll. The mage collapsed on the side, losing consciousness. The dragon then turned to Akuma, bringing up a forcefield around himself. The hybrid recoiled as he saw the forcefield raise, knocking himself silly moments later. Akuma smashed against the side, a pause in the motion before he slid down comically. The hybrid hit the ground with a thump and took a moment to make the world stop spinning around him. He stood up and stumbled away awkwardly, his head still swimming. The dragon let out a deep guttural laugh at the two's feeble attempts to defeat him. He launched another beam at the hybrid, but it missed, hitting beside him instead. Due to his dizziness, Akuma did not even notice the fire blast or the people gathering around them now. As soon as they had the dragon chained, they teleported him away in a bright flash. Akuma looked around in a twitchy manner, not understanding what just happened. He wobbled over to where the confused Nick was laying, only to see the remaining mages stepping aside as a tall hooded figure in a blue robe approached. The hybrid dragon straightened up, baring his fangs and flaying his wings as a sort of way to make himself look bigger. The stranger pulled back his hood and Nick gasped. The man looked like an older version of him. Akuma did not lower his stance, believing it to be an illusion. It could not be Nick after all as he was sitting right behind him.

Nick waved a hand at the hybrid, motioning him to calm down. "We're not in our dimension anymore, Akuma. I told you the tower has been gone. This tower, this place, its...." The hybrid glanced back at him.

The older version of Nick finished for him, "An alternate reality."

Nick nodded, "Precisely. The explosion in our world must have fractured the lining between worlds."

The gold dragon's wings folded back down, though not for long as the older Nick nodded before turning to him. He asked, "And who is this little halfling friend of yours?" Present Nick smiled; he too turned to Akuma in amusement.

The hybrid spat, "Little?! I'm bigger than you, old man." He stood up tall, so he could crane his neck down at the older Nick.

Nick rolled his eyes at the hybrid while the older Nick simply shrugged, looking down Akuma. He retaliated calmly, "Your ego is bigger for sure."

Akuma posed himself pridefully like a show dog might, smugly saying, "I'm Akuma, a hybrid. Not a halfling." He raised his maw to the air in a still prideful manner. While Akuma had been good at behaving around Nick, it did not show around strangers. He pushed around people to find out how much he could get away with by nature. And by nature, people tended to be afraid of hybrids, mostly because of Albel, so he could use it as a bolster to his own ego around strangers. Though, this behavior quelled swiftly if a streamline hybrid was around.

The old man only chuckled and said, "Is there a difference between the two? There's no such thing as a hybrid in these lands." He looked over the gold dragon before saying, "Go ahead and tell me the difference then." He looked up at him questioningly. Meanwhile, a group of curious mages were surrounding the two Nicks and Akuma from a distance, watching.

The sides of Akuma's mouth raised slightly, flashing spots of teeth at the older Nick's comments. His brow furrowed as he spoke, "Blind old bat. Halflings don't have a dragon form for one. They walk upright like humans. They look totally human in fact, except for a few dragon parts here and there. Hybrids are living weapons. Our genes were chosen from the best traits in many dragon breeds. We are mostly dragon, not half. Except a few...useful things from humans. I guess anyway." He meant to degrade the human species.

The older Nick crossed his arms, looking unimpressed. He replied, "A weapon is anything that can be used to harm someone."

The hybrid continued smugly, "Of course the stupid humans couldn't even control their own creations. A

single hybrid massacred and entire lab of humans and dragons. That was with their precious guns, too."

The man shrugged and spoke calmly, "Anyone who creates a powerful sentient being and tries to control it through force is just asking for a dagger in the back so to speak." He never showed any signs of what he was thinking.

"Such is the stupidity of humans. You tried to control hybrids and dragons. But they both turned on you. Your species doesn't learn very fast." Akuma looked back at the younger Nick questioningly, "He's been around for hundreds of years. That's how long it took to wise up. He doesn't even call himself human anymore, so I guess the stage where he became smart was past human." He looked at older Nick again, snorting, "Doesn't look like time has done the same for you. No immortality."

The older Nick looked puzzled and waved a hand over younger Nick. "Ah, the rift in your world exploded, I almost forgot. His body was destroyed in the blast, but his brain pattered was preserved. In a way, he is a living fossil, but anyways enough about that. In a way, I am immortal as long as this rift stands, I will never die. Anyway, the dragons never turned on us and we never created any hybrids, so both points are invalid. You call humans stupid, but it seems like you're the one lacking in intelligence."

"So what if it didn't happen in your world? It happened in ours and we saw the outcome. Your intellect and inventions were pitiful when it came down to it. That point is not invalid if it happened. Whether it happened to you personally or not, idiot. Your dimension may have been smart enough not to try it, but did you see the alternate instance of when they did? Well. Humans were slaughtered easily. Your great city burned and people went screaming into the streets. Their precious intellect didn't help then. It didn't stop dragons from tearing into their flesh or burning them alive."

Older Nick simply smirked and rebutted, "There is an infinite combination of possible outcomes reflected in an equally infinite amount of realities. Simply because you happen to witness one outcome in the sea of possibilities doesn't mean that it is the only outcome by any means."

The hybrid huffed, "Frankly, I'm not impressed by your species. If you didn't have magic, you'd be helpless whelps. And dragons are better at magic at that." His face still raised slightly as he spoke. Akuma did not like dragons any better than humans in reality, but he wanted to get under this mage's skin.

The man responded, "Ah, but every creature has a weapon: the dragon, his claw; and the human, his mind. Saying humans are worthless without magic is like saying a dragon is worthless when it has neither tooth nor claw to defend itself."

Akuma snorted at the older Nick. Still with smug, he said, "Yeah but the difference is that my species is superior. It's like the difference of fighting with a sword or a butter knife. Both are 'weapons' so to speak. One is just pitiful like you humans. Your hide is so delicate; you have no armor and no claws. You have virtually nothing to protect yourself naturally from a beast. If your sword gets knocked from your

hands, you're done. We have claws, horns, spikes, poison, fangs and magic."

The older Nick said, "Your idea of superiority is based on a very narrow field of traits indeed." He explained the strengths of softness, "Our hides may be delicate and our hands soft, but you'll never see a de-clawed human. Break a man's sword and he can forge a new one, pull out a claw and you'll never see it again. Humans create to make up for what they lack at birth. We change and we adapt."

The hybrid paused to glare at the man, who had exposed a real weakness of the dragons. He hated having his bubble burst when in a state of being high and mighty. "Your kind is hateful. You hate anything you fear. You selfishly destroy the world around you without a care. You level forests and pollute the air with your technology. And then you stuff the remaining survivors in a cage. You create slaves out of animals and dragons. Make them dance and perform in the circus for your own pleasure as you whip them into obeying. Your kind killed us, experimented on us and ripped us away from our parents so young, we cannot recall their faces! Used us as tools and threw us away as garbage when you saw we were no longer personal fit for your sick use! Your sick lust for blood was so strong you started to make US do the killing for you because you couldn't kill enough with your own hands and inventions!" Akuma grew louder as his argument split off into a tangent. His breaths rattled with snarls as he spoke. A glazed-over look came across his eyes.

The older Nick simply shook his head. "The only one here filled with hatred is you. You seem to forget that you too are part human. Chastising every human for the flaws of their predecessors doesn't make you any less human. In fact, this false sense of superiority you have built up for yourself it makes you just like the humans who give the entire race a bad name. If anything, you are hateful, you hate anything you don't understand. You selfishly put yourself above others without a care. You would have left your friend here." He motioned at younger Nick, "All alone to die against Arcaon if there wasn't a forcefield holding you in. You think yourself on the moral high ground as if you are above everyone else. I want you to tell me, have you ever taken a second to step back and look at yourself and what you're becoming?"

The snarling expression on Akuma's face grew as he spat, "I understand plenty about you rats! And that's why I hate you!" His claws grind at the ground as his cheeks heated under his scales. That was not entirely fair. He was in all, still a child and acted in fear for his life. Albel flickered through his mind. He did not care; he was seeing red as he focused on the older Nick, his limbs quivering in anger. In an instant, the hybrid lunged forward at the man, his claws grabbing for blood. The alternate version made no attempt to move. The hybrid plowed through him, although when he came into contact with the old man, all he got was empty robes. He had simply vanished, whether by magic of his own means or otherwise. He did not care if they were empty. His claws angrily ripped through the garments until they were nothing but tiny shreds as his loud and angry grunts filled the air. Large gashes were left in the ground where his claws dug in to scratch the robes. He finished it by disintegrating the shreds by smoldering with lightning into a crater.

A hand was raised in front of him as he heard the younger Nick talking to him in a soothing tone,

"Akuma, calm down! All you're doing here is proving him right. It's exactly what he wants you to do." The hybrid turned on the mage as he continued to reason, "Whatever all this was, he's gone now. This whole little adventure went a little haywire. Let's just go back home and we can roast marshmallows or something." Akuma rushed forward, pushing his big dragon face into Nick's chest as the boy stumbled back. Hot angry tears spilled down his scaly, golden cheeks, looking like molten gold in the reflection. The mage threw his arms around the gold dragon's head and neck, trying to pull the big lug in even closer with a tight embrace in futile. "It's going to be okay," Nick cooed soothingly as the hybrid quieted down. He slid his hand over the still Akuma's face, wiping away the hot tears with his sleeves, getting the soaked in the process. Reaching behind Akuma's horns, he gently scratched the hot spot, which emitted a quiet thrum from the hybrid. He murmured softly, "He's gone now; whatever he said, doesn't mean anything. I know that you're not a monster." He pulled the hybrid into an even tighter embrace still and bringing his forehead down, pressing it against Akuma's scaly face.

The hybrid's tongue poked out, dragging up the middle of Nick's face as the boy laughed. His wings folded in calmly as he felt himself settle down. He paused again, perhaps that was not normal behavior to humans. How did humans show affection anyway? Akuma looked away, feeling awkward over it. "What now?" he murmured, looking where the tower was before. Were they supposed to just go back home like nothing had happened? Everything seemed normal enough now.

Nick futilely tried to wipe away the dragon slobber on his face with his tear-soaked robes. A sly grin tugged at the corners of the dragon's mouth at the scene. The mage gave up and said, "I think we've had enough excitement for the day. Let's go home and rest up. I have some marshmallows stashed away for just the occasion." The mention of marshmallows made Akuma's stomach flutter and his mouth water. He turned away, looking towards where Windfall was. Nick took a step forward as the hybrid backed away, but the mage's leg suddenly gave out, causing him to lurch forward and collapse to the ground. There was a nasty-looking gash going across his right leg, oozing dark red blood. The hybrid craned his neck; he had forgotten about that. He almost was not used to the scent of blood. Every time he had whiffed it in the past, his mind had melted away as he went into a savage rampage. He dipped his head slightly, sniffing. It reeked heavily with Nick's scent with a mix of an unpleasant metallic tinge. The mage looked away and quickly tore off a piece of his robe. He wrapped it as tightly as he could. He looked over at Akuma helplessly. "I'm not going to be able to shift like this. Think you could play the role of taxi this one time?" Akuma muttered quietly, but walked around behind Nick and lifted the human by his robes. He craned his neck around, setting the mage on his back. His legs buckled for the first moment. He was not used to such a weight on his back. The dragon took a moment to himself before flying off. It was hard for the first while as he had focused on speed training over strength, but he gradually grew accustomed to it. Akuma landed at the city gates to Windfall and walked inside.