

Fahdonmul: No Rest for the Wicked

Once, Lost Valley Redoubt had teemed with Forsworn. Now, they had been driven away, or worse - devoured, by the fell monster which had settled there.

One menace has replaced another, Ulfric Dragonsbane thought as he made his way towards the ancient site. He froze as a mournful roar echoed across the craggy peaks. A brown dragon circled in the distance, before soaring out of sight. Three of these beasts had stood between them and their destination, circling overhead watchfully, and it was a miracle that they hadn't been spotted. Ulfric's ancestors had fought dragons long ages past, and he intended to prove himself worthy of that name. But taking on three dragons at once was nothing short of suicide.

"They let us go," Edwyg Fireblade told him, as if sensing his thoughts.

"Nonsense. They are dragons, and revel in violence. This is why they are carved in ancient ruins so much... Because men admired their prowess and love of the glory of battle, like any true Nord."

Edwyg sighed. "We are approaching the summit," he reminded his companion. "If you insist in carrying out this scheme of yours, we must do so quietly."

Ulfric nodded, and crouched low, his companion doing the same, and stealthily, they crept out from cover to see the top of the redoubt. Where grassland once stood, a palace, newly-constructed of magically-shaped rock crowned the ancient ruin. Gigantic double-doors of dwarven metal stood before them, and at length, they pushed open the massive portal, just wide enough to admit the two men.

Ulfric gasped at the sight. In the centre of the room, on a bed of enchanted wool, the dragon lay, illumined by a number of open fires. Around his neck, a gold necklace clung tightly to his scaled throat, and his ankles held colossal bracers that glowed faintly with magical energies. The creature's neck craned to take in the two intruders.

"*Niid*," the dragon moaned. "No, no, no. I am *not* in the mood for this, *volaanne*. If I hear the words 'Die, dragon!', I shall destroy you where you stand, I swear it."

"Fall to me, dr-" Ulfric managed before his companion clapped a hand over the burly warrior's mouth.

The dragon's eyes narrowed. "I'll pretend I didn't hear that. I am the mighty dragon, Fahdonmul. If you are here to sing my praises, that's all very flattering, but it's really not a very good time. Come back next week."

"We are here to sing the victory song of your death, worm!" Ulfric sneered. A jet of flame roared just over his head.

"In the past, I have killed for that insult," Fahdonmul said. "But... I am weary. Please... just go."

"You would let us leave...?" Edwyg asked, eyes wide with hope. "Without a fight?"

"It's a trap," Ulfric said, eyes narrowing.

"No," the dragon said. "I am sick of it all. Others of my kind have slept the long sleep of death for thousands of years, until the power of Alduin restored them. I have not. I lived through all of your eras, through multiple massacres of my kind... The Akaviri Crusades, the Dragon War, the Blades... Thousands of years of hiding, and hunting.

"Human, your kind has chafed for immortality since the Dawn Era. But you cannot imagine what it is like to spend that eternity constantly facing a violent death, to struggle against foes old and new for hundreds of your generations...

"I am tired of fighting, mortal. So tired. I just want... peace."

"Peace?!" Ulfric laughed crazily, drawing closer and closer to the dragon on his bed. "Peace, indeed... The same peace you showed *us* when your kind seared our farms and houses? When Helgen was razed to rubble?! You shall get the peace of Akatosh, monster! The peace of the *grave*!"

Fahdonmul did not reply. His head lolled on the ground, and he was already snoring gently.

Ulfric snarled, and brought his axe down hard upon the sleeping dragon's neck. The enchanted blade twisted in his hands, slithering over the dragon's scaly hide like a bar of wet soap against a bathtub. The creature's eyes flicked open and his expression became irate.

"What is it now...?" he snapped. "I told you I was tired of this game, and it is not wise to disturb a sleeping *dovah*."

The nord swung again, and once more, his axe was deflected by an unseen force, like two powerful magnets repelling each other.

Fahdonmul's wing lashed out and knocked him to the floor. "You test my patience, *joor*," he snarled. "You *know* we have a treaty with mortals now, so kindly abide by its terms."

"The people of Helgen will be avenged, beast!" Ulfric yelled, picking himself up. "You will pay for your foul deeds!"

Fahdonmul rolled his eyes. "So *that* is how you mean to honour the dead of Helgen...? By making more dead? You know, rebuilding the place makes a longer-lasting monument than committing a murder," he said. "A memorial plaque can

remind future generations of the tragedy, and preserves the names of the slain in stone for centuries to come. You cannot attach such a plaque to my death, human."

"No, but I can carve one from your skull, beast!" the Nord sneered. "And I shall make a set of mail from your bones!"

If Fahdonmul had not been a wyvern, he would have facepalmed.

"What is this Nordic obsession with defiling corpses?!" he exploded. "Are you one of those Forsworn psychos or something? Seriously, if *you* can make dragonbone armour, desecrating the remains of a murdered *dovah*, then *I* should be allowed to make banditbone armour to go with my protection enchantments. You see if I don't!"

"Only a monster would make armour from *people*!" the Nord protested, appalled.

"Yet you made dragonbone armour *from people*," the dragon snarled. "And let us not speak of bonemold armour, which it took the twisted minds of *mortals* to invent.

"So," the dragon continued, calming himself with a visible effort. "You seek reparations for Helgen? Well, you are in luck, for it is not quite so badly damaged as you may think, and repairs have already begun. The fort itself is mostly sound, the surrounding walls unbreached.

"The other buildings will, of course, need work, but the *biggest* obstacle to reconstruction was the outlaws who sought to use the ruins as their base.

"My loyal servant Mirmulnir has taken care of *them* for me. Apparently, they were delicious."

The Nord blanched.

"*You* are an outlaw too, right...?" the dragon asked, grinning evilly. "You're certainly acting like one..."

"I am here to do justice to you, foul beast!" Ulfric protested.

"Ah, so you're an *idiot*!" Fahdonmul decided. "I have been gentle with you so far, *volaan*, but I could easily bite your head off if you continue to provoke me. For under the terms of the treaty, I am allowed to defend myself."

"I told you this was a bad idea," the other Nord said. "Not just a dragon, but a *law expert* as well! We should leave, while we still can!"

"But it must pay for Helgen!"

"No! If there's a treaty..." Edwyg protested. "He's right! If there really *is* a truce, that must be why the other dragons ignored us! And if we break it... If the dragons start

attacking people because of *us*, the Jarls will behead us both... If we're *lucky*!"

"Wait," Fahdonmul interrupted, looking at them strangely. "You didn't *know* about the truce...? Then I was just to have spared you."

"We have been escorting refugees from the war," Edwyg explained. "We have only just returned to the province."

"I see," Fahdonmul looked thoughtful. "I too have been away some time. During the Third Era, in the Imperial City - even in Mournhold - they had printing presses back then that let them make news-papers. Skyrim does not seem to have such, so there may still be people who do not know what has happened... I had not considered this. I had also assumed you can all read, which may have been a mistake. I will have to ensure that the news is spread to all."

"This changes *nothing*!" Ulfric yelled, his companion edging away quickly in case the dragon finally lost patience. "I had *family* in Helgen! Their deaths demand blood, and if I have to pay for it with my head, then I will die knowing they are avenged!"

"I had nothing to do with that," Fahdonmul said tiredly. "Alduin, the World-Eater attacked the place. And yet, I have paid for it nonetheless."

"What...?"

"I told you, the town is being rebuilt as we speak. Why do you think I know so much about its present condition?" the dragon sighed. "Where do you think the money to do this is coming from? You think the Empire, bled dry by the Thalmor and your namesake's ill-fated vanity project, have the time or resources to attend to a dead town? No. *I* have commissioned the work, to prove that Alduin cannot conquer forever. And to show that the *dov* can build as well as destroy."

Edwyg looked startled. "We may not have heard of your... treaty, but the demise of the World-Eater *is* known to us. It is said that he was slain by one of his fellow dragons," he said. "*You*...?"

"Now we are getting somewhere," Fahdonmul looked pleased with himself. "You're welcome, by the way."

"That settles it!" Edwyg said loudly and firmly. "You cannot kill the hero who saved the world, dragon or not!"

"No! This is some trick!" Ulfric snapped. "Dragons sought to enslave Skyrim, and Alduin to conquer the world - or destroy it! Why would you thwart that ambition...?"
"*Because* of that ambition!" Fahdonmul said. "Because he was a fool and he was going to get us all killed. Also, God told me to."

"Oh, indeed! Which one...? The god of madness?"

"*No!* Bormahu, Father Akatosh, whom you sometimes call 'The One'," Fahdonmul said, sounding awed.

"He came to me in a vision," the dragon continued, reverently. "I prayed for guidance - something you Nords made most difficult, by placing the shrines where the *dov* - his own children - could not easily reach them. Why would you *do* that?! But I managed to, despite your best efforts. I prayed to Him, and His form appeared before me, commanding me to slay Alduin for his blasphemous acts, and for the protection of all, *dov* and mortal alike."

"Huh," the Nord sniffed.

"But to answer your question, I must first describe the Old Times," Fahdonmul said. "What you call the Merethic Era, in old Atmora. Many of the *dov* settled there, seeking sanctuary from the *bruniikke*, the Akaviri murderers who sought to destroy us all. Even I still do not understand that obsession... But we flew indeed to Atmora and there, men saw our majesty and power.

"The men of Atmora already worshipped the wolf, the fox, the eagle, the snake and the whale," Fahdonmul explained. "When we came, creatures of great power in the form of Mighty Akatosh, certain of these men abased themselves before our glory and did us worship."

"The wolf, the eagle and the fox, they are simple beasts who could not understand that they were revered. But the *dov* are people and we saw the benefits of this arrangement. And so the dragon cults came about."

"Untold centuries of cruel slavery!" Ulfric snarled, reaching for his axe again.

"Shut up," Fahdonmul and Edwyg retorted in unison.

"You do not know what you say," Fahdonmul continued, sounding insulted. "In old Atmora, the system worked very well. We basked in the praise and love of our worshippers. They gave us tribute, food and precious things. We were fawned over and given scratches. And in return, we gave them protection. Wisdom. Leadership.

"We chose mortals to represent us, and for a long time, life was good for mortals and *dov* alike. *Orin brit ro*. The Dragon Priests kept a fine peace between our kinds. But as the climate worsened in Atmora, the men sought to move to Skyrim, and the *dov* followed them.

"After *that*, yes. Things started to go earthwards. Some among the *dov* saw the expanses of Tamriel and felt that they should conquer these lands. And Alduin led that faction. The Dragon Priests became cruel and harsh, and the people suffered under them."

"And did you lift a finger to stop it, dragon?" Ulfric asked.

Fahdonmul eyed him venomously. "Do you see any fingers here, Nord...?"

"To answer your question... it was harder than you think. Alduin was Akatosh's finest creation, charismatic and brilliant. A natural leader, and we prospered under his guidance. But over time, his behaviour became... erratic. Some did not notice, others, such as I, pretended not to notice but secretly began to worry.

"Alduin's ego grew bloated, even for a *dovah*. He planned to conquer the world and began to say that *he* was Father Akatosh. This... blasphemy... together with the suffering of the people under his yoke, was too much for some of us to bear. This, and a holy vision from Kynareth, forced us to act against him. But by then, it was too late."

Fahdonmul sighed, his voice sounding pained. "As I have said, the dragon cults slowly changed, from mortals being our admirers to being our slaves. But you were not the only victims. For we, the *dov* of Tamriel, had slowly gone from being Alduin's peers, to *his* slaves. We had no choice but to obey his bidding, and any who refused would feel his teeth to their neck.

"For your information, I did what I could, even before things got to that point. I never felt comfortable with mortals thinking me a god, and I did my best to dispel this notion. A powerful sky-lord, yes. A mighty *dovah*, yes. But I could not insult great Bormahu by claiming *divinity*, like some of my *zeymah*, my brothers, did. This troubled me.

"I practiced mighty spells of Alteration and began to disguise myself as a mortal. With such power, I could go incognito among the people under my rule, and see what they were *really* saying. I was never quite sure whether to trust my priests, and seeing what was truly happening to my people seemed a necessary precaution. Others became over-reliant on their priests, detached from their people, and this troubled me also. Given what would soon happen, I was right to be concerned.

"Other *dov* felt that I was too soft on the mortals, that I was going native and becoming eccentric like Klovkogramme," Fahdonmul said. "But I had not forgotten the Akaviri, and if things went bad, I wanted my people to be on my side."

"Clove-ko-what...?"

"Klovkogramme," Fahdonmul said. "In your tongue it means 'head in the clouds'. He remained in Atmora after it became uninhabitable to men, and lives there still, meditating and hunting horkers, I believe.

"As you know, most of the *dov* seek to conquer, though we do not all feel it to the

same degree. He seeks to conquer *reality itself*, and has become otherworldly as a result. He has become so focused on seeking enlightenment that he did not even know of the dragon wars, let alone Alduin's demise.

"But I digress," Fahdonmul sighed. "I feared that the dragon cults would fall, and they did. The people rebelled, and worse, the dragonborn priest Miraak turned against us. His powers were terrifying, for he sought to eat our very *ziil*, our precious dragon-souls, to gain power. He attempted to take over Solstheim, you know. He knew *rotmulaagge* - words of power - that could force men and dragons alike to obey him. As his power spread, Tamriel would surely have followed."

"What happened?"

"I know forgotten spells of reflection," Fahdonmul said. "With the power turned back on him, Miraak enslaved himself. Then I ate him. It was... unfortunate. *So se krongrah*. Such a waste, but he was too dangerous to live. Relonikiv and the other survivors of Solstheim swore me eternal service for saving their *ziille*."

"I am digressing again," Fahdonmul said. "Many of the *dov* do love *tinvaak*. "Back to the dragon cults," he said. "I could not openly challenge Alduin, but I tried to protect my people and keep them safe, even as other *dov* lost control. But in the end, the poison of rebellion spread, even among those who had benefited from my aid, and praised my name. It was a bitter betrayal, after all I had done for mortals.

"But the *dov* did not take this revolt perching. Many, many men were slain by angered *dovahhe* and for a while it looked like the mortals were doomed. Certain of us, such as Paarthurnax, aided the people against Alduin, teaching them to Shout as we do, to preserve the balance. And this may have been a mistake, for once they had the power to slay dragons, they used it indiscriminately like a child with a new toy - turning it against us all, without mercy.

"Even those of us who loved our worshippers in return, they too were called monsters and murdered along with the tyrants, just because of what we are! You call us monsters, but your betrayals and back-stabbing make you no better."

"And yet *you* escaped," Ulfric sneered.

"I had a hoard," Fahdonmul said. "Tributes of gold and precious things from my worshippers as proof of their love. Not my idea," he added quickly. "But it did look pretty. During the great famine, I spent some of it to buy grain and meat from other lands. But that hoard also saved my life when the assassins came to 'liberate' my subjects from my so-called 'wicked reign'. The huge pile of treasure distracted them long enough for me to escape before they could murder me. *I* had not forgotten what mortals can do with the right poisons, or a dragon-horn, even if my *zeymah* had."

"That may be, but it does not answer the question of why you would want to kill Alduin," Ulfric said.

"Does it not? I had hoped that would be obvious," Fahdonmul said irritably.

"So you could take his place as overlord?"

"That was not the plan... though it has had advantages," Fahdonmul admitted, glancing around the luxurious palace that was his lair. "Having the other *dovah* suddenly falling out of the sky to pledge their eternal servitude to the one mighty enough to topple Alduin, that has helped stabilise things, yes. Helped us obtain the truce with mortals.

"But you forget - at the time, Alduin was unchallenged. He had slain many fellow *dov* who opposed him, ended the lives of hunters far better than I - and I... I was *scared* of him. For I am only a dragon, and Alduin was the World-Eater, the pinnacle of Father Akatosh's creation, entrusted with powers that no other could match.

"But later I learned that I was chosen to slay him if the Dragonborn Prophecy failed. Which it did. Only then did I dare challenge Alduin in open battle. So no, taking his place was never my motivation.

"And now that I *have* taken his place as *thuri*, I try to use that power sparingly. Indeed, some have refused to serve, believing once again, that I am too soft on mortals. And as I told you, I am tired. I need a break. Mastery of all Tamriel, and the complications that come with *that* do not interest me. Imagine - I would have to sort out all the petty squabbles between mortals! No, thank you."

"But you are a *dragon*! It is in your very nature to conquer and dominate!"

"So it is with mortals too," the dragon pointed out. "But there are many ways to satisfy that urge. Back in the old times, I wondered whether having the dragon priests meant that we no longer ruled the people, that they did. That we *dov* only *believed* we had conquered, while in reality you mortals had conquered each other. Yet as long as our instincts to conquer were satiated, our sides were at peace and the truth did not matter.

"One of the enchantments I wear now, it dulls my urges to slay and dominate. And you should be glad of this, for it is why you still have a head after invading my sanctum, weapon drawn. I forged it long ago in mortal guise, and it helped me remain hidden from the Blades and their kind. Given me clarity of thought that a blood-crazed *dovah* lacks."

"Why, then? If not to take his place, why did you want to kill Alduin?"

"*Because he ruined the dragon cults!*" the dragon snarled. "What originally benefited both *dov* and mortals alike, turned into brutality and slavery. Once, I was given scratches and affection from groups of adoring snow-khajiiti. Thanks to *him*, my last scratches were given by trembling servants who feared being devoured, and I only narrowly avoided the scratches of a poisoned blade!

"*Alduin ruined everything!*" the dragon roared. "His greed and insanity saw my *race massacred*, good and evil alike! And now, you mortals just remember the horrific end of the cults, not the good parts! And you've hunted us down for thousands of years ever since - all because of what Alduin and his toadies did!"

"Yes, Alduin also raised some of us from the grave," Fahdonmul continued, more calmly. "But only the ones he thought would serve him in his plan to conquer all. The ones who actively helped his evil, the ones too cowardly to refuse to serve him, knowing that he would devour their *ziil* if they refused. *They* were resurrected.

"But the ones who *fought* him, *they* didn't get another chance! Though, if I can figure out how he did this, perhaps their time will come also, Bormahu willing. And he *did* accidentally resurrect Sweet-Roll-Devour," he added. "So that's something."

"What...?"

"Nevermind. You asked why I would want to slay Alduin, and I have told you. His lust for power screwed everything up so badly that *his own creator sentenced him to death*. Appointed *me* as his executioner. But I had my own reasons too - that we had a good thing going and *he ruined it*. I was loved and given scratches and big piles of gold. He took all that away, and I can never forgive him for it.

"Of course, I also wanted to see my race survive his foolishness, and the world itself continue to survive. And I have done that. I have saved you from an evil dragon, an evil dragonborn, and brought peace to Skyrim. I need a rest before I take on the Thalmor Dominion."

"We should let him sleep," Edwyg said.

"Can you do it, dragon?" Ulfric asked, looking at Fahdonmul with hopeful eyes. "Can you restore the Empire and bring back the worship of Talos...?"

Fahdonmul snored.

"We should let him sleep," Ulfric agreed, and they left the palace, closing the double-doors as quietly as they could.