Future Atonement

The jungles of the southern peninsula had drawn many an adventurer to it ever since it was revealed that an ancient ruin was discovered that legends state was filled to the brim with untold riches and powerful artifacts. It was called the Vault of the Ancients, and those who were foolish enough to attempt to get them often never came back to the small city that bordered that jungle on the opposite side. Those who did often spoke of terrifying dangers that lurked within; a werewolf tribe that would terrorize anyone it happened to come across while invading its territory to a dread dragon that guarded such riches. It was the latter of this that had prompted a dragon-shaped shadow to fly over the tops of the trees, taking a short cut to the partially hidden stone buildings that lay on the coast.

The bronze-scaled dragon landed in a small clearing that was surrounded by decaying pillars, his wings just able to stretch out enough to hover down into the overgrown clearing. Once his large paws touched the ground the elf that had been riding on top of him slid off and looked around wearily, summoning his blade to his hands as he did so. “You sure this is where we are supposed to go?” the bronze dragon said as he also scanned the area.

“Considering the body count that’s amassed here I’m pretty sure this is where we’re going to find him,” the elf replied, patting the dragon on the flanks as they both turned their attention towards the dark entrance of the sunken ruins that was before them. “Let’s get going… no doubt they already know that we’re here.”

The bronze dragon nodded and the two of them walked inside of the large doorway, the dragon commenting that at least he wouldn’t have to shapeshift into his human form as they walked in. Once they were sufficiently inside the elf lit a torch with his magic, allowing him to see in the darkness. The walls were painted with all manner of warnings and runes, some of them in blood as they passed by, and as they saw one warning in particular about how anyone that crosses the threshold would be cursed for all eternity the two just rolled their eyes. It might be enough to instill fear in adventurers who didn’t know any better but for the dragon knight and his draconic companion they knew better as they pressed on.

Eventually the two of them reached a large cavern filled with gold coins, gemstones, and other valuables that practically towered over them as they walked on the path between them. It was certainly a tempting sight for anyone that was looking for riches, but that wasn’t the reason they were there as they just continued on with little more than a cursory glance. Their real target they found a few meters in sitting on the largest pile of good, the golden dragon almost looking like one of the treasures that were strewn about. The two of them continued to walk forward and as they came into view the dragon merely opened an eye to look at the ones approaching him.

“Greetings, Jalru the Golden, protector of the Mirror of the Ancients,” the elf announced, causing the golden scaled creature to scoff slightly. “I am Cessillian of the Dragon Knights and this is my dragon guardian Dyson. We would like to have an audience.”

“You need to update your archives,” Jalru scoffed as he slowly got up, stretching his body before looking down at the two. “I’m going to guess that I’m not the only reason that you’ve come to this place despite the rumor.”

The elf and bronze dragon looked at one another, then back at the one sitting on the pile of gold. “That is correct,” Cessillian stated. “We would also like to talk to your mate, the one known as Xralix the dread dragon, scourge of the Frostward Vale.”

“As my lovely counterpart said…” a low voice said behind them, the two turning to see a larger, black-scaled dragon padding behind them as wisps of blue fire danced across his body. “You have to update your archives. Now the only reason that we haven’t ripped you apart when you first landed in my territory is respect for the order that took me in when I was… confused, so state your purpose quickly and then leave me to my fun, I have a group of particularly dim-witted explorers that are still trying to find their way here.”

“It is because of that bond with the Dragon Knights that we come here in the first place,” Dyson spoke up, the bronze dragon stepping forward. “Legend of what happened that day on the mountains of the Frostward Vale have spread back to Gildeon, and the elder would like to bring you back for a mission of the direst importance.”

 The black dragon responded with a laugh that caused several of the coin piles to cascade downwards, Xralix moving over to an area with pillows strewn about that he sat down on. “You really are a bold one,” he stated in a mocking tone. “Just because I no longer fly out and destroy towns doesn’t mean that I’m going to stick my neck out to save them. I’m not good, I have merely relocated my evil tendencies.”

“The fact that you have relegated yourself to destroying the greedy and wicked that come here has shown that we have not come here to make this offer in vain,” the elf replied stalwartly, causing Xralix to frown slightly at his defiance. “Plus the reason that we’re here is because there is another that made the old you look like a saint in comparison. We will not force you to do anything, we likely couldn’t even if we tried, but we beseech you that you at least hear us out.”

The gold and black dragon looked at one another, Jalru merely shrugging his shoulders and motioning with his head as though to say that they should at least hear them out. Though Xralix bared his teeth slightly at the notion he seemed to swallow whatever resentment he had towards the idea and looked back down at the Dragon Knight. “You are lucky that I have such a beauty as my better half,” Xralix said through gritted teeth. “Very well, let’s hear what you have to say, I’ll have Zefrit come in with something to eat.”

A few hours later Jalru and Xralix had moved to their own private room after their meeting with the Dragon Knight, who had stayed with their silver dragon companion Zefrit to talk more about what was happening in the Dragon Knight headquarters of Gildeon while they had their own conversation. They also had brought in the werewolf Samiel to hear out what Cessillian and Dyson had to say, since Xralix was technically the alpha werewolf of their pack back in the days when he ran around as the Dragon Knight elf known as Ryonir. It was that point that had caused the black dragon to be in a bad mood as the gold dragon watched him pace about. For a few minutes neither of them said anything, Jalru waiting for the fuming creature to speak as he continued to sip the tea he had brought in with him.

“I can’t believe they would really ask me for such a thing,” Xralix growled as he made his fourth trip back to the wall he had started at. “Do they realize how much pain and suffering I went through when I was stuck in the body of that stupid elf?!”

“Honey, as I’ve said multiple times you were that elf,” Jalru said softly, his head continuing to go back and forth as the other dragon continued to walk back and forth. “Ryonir was a part of you unrestricted by the lot in life set upon you by the color of your scales, with him you were able to grow and become the dragon that is wearing a hole in the stone beneath his paws. Plus, I would like to remind you that if you had never had that happen to you then we would probably not be together and the Dragon Knights would be trying to kill you instead of coming you for help.”

The dragon huffed and finally stopped, flopping down and flicking a stray gold coin into the next room. “I hate the fact that you use logic,” the black dragon grumbled, though his mood was lightening as he looked at the gold dragon. “Let’s say I do take them up on their offer, what about this place? We still have those guys that are trying to get past the trapped lagoon and I hear there is a rather large convoy coming in that always has a few idiots willing to get killed for this place.”

“I’m sure that your werewolf pack can hold down the fort while we’re gone, and Zefrit can join them after he’s done negotiating with that drow settlement in the southern hills,” Jalru stated.

“So Zefrit won’t join us either?” Xralix growled as he dug a claw into the stone. “Why is he still messing with those dark elves at the southern jungle border? I thought we already had an agreement with them that we would help spread rumors of treasure and glory in those abandoned mines in exchange for them not luring people that come here from the North.”

“I guess they just want to talk about mutual defense pacts or something in case something comes along that overwhelms either side, but that’s not the point of all this and you know you’re just trying to sidetrack the conversation,” Jalru accused as he walked over to the moody dragon and put his paws on his muzzle. “I don’t ask you for much, but this is something that we could do for the land and it would really help you continue your path of bettering yourself.” As the gold dragon looked down he saw that Xralix was continuing to stare up at him with a look of displeasure on his face, which prompted Jalru to sigh. “Plus I’m sure that we can take the treasure that comes with it and add it to your hoard.”

The black dragon promptly perked up and after a little more discussion they decided to follow the Dragon Knight and his companion back to Gildeon. After instructing Samiel and Zefrit to make sure that no one gets to their ruins before they get back, telling the silver dragon to start spreading rumors that would prevent others from coming while informing Samiel to tell the werewolves to dispatch anyone that didn’t listen to said rumors. Once they were done getting their affairs settled they flew with the bronze dragon and the elf back towards the north, heading to a place that neither Xralix or Jalru had went to ever since their fateful encounter on the Frostward Vale. The two dragons had decided when they moved down to the southern jungles that they wouldn’t go back due to the reputation Xralix still had in that area as well as avoiding a place where the black dragon may relapse and return to his destructive ways.

The journey back to Gildeon took a few days even with flying, but eventually the shining city appeared in the horizon nestled in its mountain valley. As they started to approach Xralix suddenly felt his stomach twist into a knot, the sight bringing up memories that he had attempted to bury when he started his new life in the ruins. It had only been a few years since he had left that city as an elf with no recollection of the dragon he had been, his body transformed and his mind erased by a powerful magical artifact that Jalru had in his possession. Fifty years… fifty years thinking that he was something he was not, and before that he had been one of the greatest scourges in a nearby kingdom off to the North that had contained his home in the Frostward Vale.

As he looked over at Jalru the black dragon could see the note of concern on his face, Xralix imagining his mate was having the same kind of flashbacks. Back then when he had been Ryonir he knew the gold dragon as Flynn, an elf archivist that had gone on the journey with him to try and defeat the dragon that turned out to be him. He could only imagine the heartache that the gold dragon had to endure watching the love of his life go about as an elf, wanting to tell him the truth about who he was only to worry that he would go back to his destructive ways. While there were good memories as well, Xralix remembering that he and Zefrit had trained as a dragon knight and companion and the times they spent with Flynn, but it was still something he had not intended on ever wanting to revisit as they made their descent towards Gildeon.

As Xralix landed on the platform specifically for dragons those that were nearby instinctively flinched upon his presence, some even manifesting their swords and other weapons before standing down. It was a reaction that he was used too; most chromatic-scaled dragons were evil forces, his own self notwithstanding, and thus were regarded as such even when not posing an active threat. As the Dragon Knights and the dragons that accompanied them quickly dispersed after his arrival it was clear that they had been told of his arrival ahead of time as Jalru and Dyson landed behind him. When Cessillian slid off the bronze dragon’s back he told the two that he could lead them to the elder’s chamber before Xralix brushed him off and stated he knew where to go.

Though the perspective had changed for Xralix, his draconic body far taller than the elf he used to be when he roamed these streets, it appeared little else had. It was the first time he had come back to Gildeon in his draconic form and as he looked at others they quickly either averted their gaze or gave him a look of disapproval. It was a far cry from the smiles and greetings he got as Ryonir, but the last thing that the dragon wanted to do was change back into that cursed elf form as he padded his way towards the main temple. Thankfully since the city catered to dragons as well as elves he had no problems navigating through the city towards his destination.

Eventually the two dragons made it to the front steps of the temple, easily pushing open the stone doors and stepping into the great hall. As Xralix stepped past the statues of dragons and elves that were considered heroes to the Dragon Knights. The black-scaled creature remembered when he had looked at them in awe, specifically before he had gotten his mission to the Frostward Vale, and now as a dragon they looked rather… small in comparison. He found himself scoffing at the ones he used to admire before walking into the council chamber where the elder of the Dragon Knights and the rest of the elves in charge were waiting for him.

“Xralix,” the old elf said as the two dragons entered the council chamber. “Never had I thought when I allowed Ryonir to touch your claw that it would lead to having a dread dragon standing before me, one that was invited nonetheless. My how fate twists its knots.”

“Yes, of course,” Xralix stated as he tried not to roll his eyes. “I’ll admit that I was not too keen on coming back myself, but from what your envoy told me it was a job that has piqued my interest. They were a little vague on the details however so I’m really hoping that this entire trip wasn’t just a chance to watch my gold dragon flapping in front of me enticingly for a few days.”

There was a loud whap as Jalru smacked the flanks of the black dragon with his tail, shooting him a look as Xralix stuck his tongue out back before turning back to the elder as he cleared his throat. “Yes… the reason that we had asked for you to come is because as you were no doubt told we have a far bigger threat then you had ever posed lurking on the other end of the continent. A dragon with untold power and maliciousness is starting to ravage the lands surrounding it and shows no signs of stopping his reign of terror.”

“Are you trying to make me jealous of this dragon or something?” Xralix said with a smirk, which fell away when he saw the old elf continuing to look at him with a stoic face. “Yeah, some sort of red dragon that found an artifact or something that is augmenting his power. I still don’t quite understand why you need Jalru and more specifically me to take care of this threat when you have a legion of Dragon Knights at your disposal in order to take this creature down.”

“I certainly can see why you would think that we have the capability of doing this ourselves,” the elder stated. “And there were a great many nights of debate on bringing in a… formidable creature such as yourself for something like this. I think you know by now that there are trust issues between us and dread dragons such as yourself.”

“Considering that you sent someone to kill me I would have to say you are right,” Xralix said with a slight growl, tiny licks of fire dancing briefly between his paws before extinguishing.

“But given the stories that we heard about what happened on the Frostward Vale and the fact we have little other choice we decided that the need to stop this was far more important than any bad blood between us,” the elder continued to explain. “The red dragon has completely enslaved the region to the north and is hell-bent on spreading to the neighboring kingdoms. Unlike your thirst for destruction this one seems to have a completely different need, savoring power and dominance instead of pure chaos.”

“You don’t need to tell me about my own kind,” Xralix noted with increasing irritation. “Just get to the point why you need Jalru and I or I’m going to assume you don’t and will walk out of here.”

There was a moment of pause between the elder and the others, the black dragon looking between them as he could tell even at this moment they were hesitating to say what they had been planning too. “Recently we’ve received word that this dragon is… actively recruiting other chromatics like himself in order to join him in his conquest,” the elder explained. “But unfortunately for the red the same geographical features that is keeping him from spreading out is also hindering any other dragon from answering the call. The Order of the Burning Lily has set up several blockades that prevents the red from leaving or any other dragon from entering into the taken over territory. Since Xralix possesses a rather unique trait we believe he’s our best shot of passing through the blockades of the Burning Lily and get to the red dragon in order to destroy him.”

“What unique trait?” Xralix asked, tilting his head to the side in slight curiosity. “What could I possibly have that could be used in order to take care of this red dragon and his hordes of enthralled followers?”

“Well… it’s not exactly you that has this trait,” the elder stated while the other elves looked at one another in noticeable discomfort. “It’s Ryonir.”

The name caused Jalru’s mouth to open slightly in shock and for Xralix’s to curl up in slight anger. Ryonir… the name brought an anger with it to the dread dragon despite it being responsible for bringing about his mate Jalru and his current life. It was not the fault of the Dragon Knights that he came from the Frostward Vale as an elf with that name, in fact it had been his when he and Jalru got into a fight in front of a powerful magical artifact after trying not to indulge in his more destructive tendencies. In anger he had essentially wished that he could not be the evil dragon that he was and the artifact, a large mirror, had not only made him into an elf but also erased his memories of being the dread dragon as well.

That was what had kicked off his new life, running naked down a snowy hill while a number of kobolds that turned out to be his own minions chased him. Had the silver dragon Zefrit, who later became his own dragon companion, not been flying around in the area when he threw himself off the cliff that might have been the end to escape the kobolds that might have been the end of it right there. Instead he was caught in mid-air and eventually made his way to Gildeon and became a Dragon Knight while completely unaware of his previous life. Eventually Jalru joined up with his own elven disguise as Flynn the Archivist in order to make sure that Xralix didn’t reassert himself and to get closer to the elf known as Ryonir, though he never got romantically close for fear of stirring the dread dragon up once more.

And that might have been the way Ryonir would have spent the rest of his days had the elders in the chamber he now stood in as his draconic self not sent him off with a specific target in mind. Xralix’s disappearance in the mountains had not gone unnoticed and as such the Dragon Knights decided to send Ryonir to investigate and eliminate the dread dragon before his reign of terror once more. The irony of the fact that he had been essentially sent to kill himself was not lost on the black dragon and eventually it became a journey of self-discovery, which lead to the reassertion of his old body but with the ability to renounce his former life of pure chaos and destruction and start a new one with Jalru and the others that he had met along the way. The fact that the elders were bringing up Ryonir once more in a fashion separate to Xralix despite being the same creature made him uneasy, which he could tell he was displaying as he felt a supportive tail squeeze come from the gold dragon next to him.

“So you, what, want me to become an elf of the Dragon Knights once more?” Xralix asked, baring his teeth slightly. “Don the armor again and fight for the good of the kingdom against evil dragons everywhere? Aside from being completely pointless I don’t understand how becoming a weaker creature is going to help you defeat this powerful red dragon that can apparently turn the minds of others to his side.”

“It won’t just be physically that we want you to become Ryonir,” the head elder stated as he motioned to Jalru. “We have reason to believe that with the help of your… mate Jalru, you could slip into Ryonir completely and hide the fact that you are Xralix the dread dragon of the Frostward Vale.” The plan caused both dragons to be shocked, but before they could respond the elder put his hand up before continuing.

“There are several reasons why we believe this is the smartest plan of attack,” the elder explained.
“Despite being under the thrall of the red dragon the Burning Lily will attack any other dragon on sight and we’re sure that this creature will be watching for potential challengers, and since your story has never been documented no one knows that Ryonir the Dragon Knight is actually Xralix the dread dragon. We’re hoping that with you completely back in your elven persona you can slide through the Burning Lily legions undetected, making them think you’re just there to investigate the rumors coming out of that kingdom, and when the dragon attempts to enthrall you as well he gets a rather nasty surprise and you’re close enough to take care of the threat once and for all.”

“I see, you’re using Ryonir as a cloak to get Xralix close enough to the red dragon since this dragon’s abilities appear to be mental in nature,” Jalru said as he rubbed his chin with his forepaw. “But what happens if the other dragon decides that he just wants to kill the Dragon Knight in his midst instead of converting him?”

“Or, more importantly,” Xralix said as he bared his teeth in a wicked grin. “What if he gives me an offer that I find myself enticed to take?” The veiled threat brought a look of disapproval from the gold dragon, but he attempted to ignore it as he saw the faces of the elves become uneased with his proposition. He had hoped that perhaps it would dissuade them from sending him on this task in the first place, but the leader of the Dragon Knights merely shook his head.

“Those are all risks that we believe are necessary in the neutralization of this threat,” the elder stated. “We can not force you to do anything Xralix, but we’re hoping there’s enough of Ryonir left in you to recognize the threat that we’re asking you to address… or perhaps enough greed in the dread dragon to see that a red dragon taking over the kingdom would mean less for him in his new life.”

The last statement got through to Xralix as he flinched slightly at the thought of having his domain be contested by another after he had just got himself settled in. He looked at Jalru and gave him a small gesture with his head which caused the gold dragon to nod and start to leave the chamber while he trailed behind. “You know,” Xralix stated just as they were leaving. “The last time you sent me on a mission to stop a dread dragon you created one instead.”

“This is true,” the elder replied, a small smile on his face. “But the last time we sent you on a mission it also stopped the terror and destruction of that dread dragon as well.”

The smirk on Xralix’s face fell into a slight frown and he huffed as he left the hall of elders, following Jalru into the main square of Gildeon. Though they would need to head back to their lair no matter what choice they made the two dragons decided to stick around for the night and fly back in the morning. The city was made to accommodate dragons and though the sight of a dread dragon among them continued to bring about weary looks it was something that Xralix was quickly becoming used to. None of these creatures knew that just a few short years ago the dragon they innately feared was a Dragon Knight like them that had lived among their presence for decades.

While they walked about looking for some place to eat and rest for the night Jalru slipped back into his Archivist role in order to figure out what the story was concerning Ryonir since the elders had stated no one knew what really happened. After several hours the gold dragon filled Xralix in while the two of them ate while tucked away in a private booth at the inn. The black dragon found himself smirking slightly when he heard that according to the elves Ryonir had managed to critically wound his target and exile him where he wouldn’t bother the kingdom again, and had been spending the last few years away on assignment looking for the mirror that the two knew was already shattered. Those wily elder elves, Xralix thought to himself as he listened to the rumors that had been weaved, he wondered if they had kept Ryonir alive for expressly this purpose when they could have just as easily said that both the Dragon Knight and dread dragon were killed in fierce battle like what normally happened.

Once he had been filled in completely the conversation turned to whether or not they were going to take up the offer for Xralix to one more don the mantle of the Dragon Knight. Neither dragon actually knew if what the elders wanted were possible, though it was an educated guess since the scar of such powerful magic placed on him would make it easier for him to once more lose his memories of Xralix and become Ryonir completely. The problem for him however was not if it worked, but if it worked too well; he hadn’t assumed his elven form ever since he had gained his dragon form back, and though he would never tell Jalru the reason was the fear that if he did he would lose his memories once more and be stuck again despite the mirror’s spell being broken on him. Even though it was rather irrational in nature, especially with a creature as powerful as the gold dragon sitting across from him being his mate, the idea of being lost like that had caused him more than his fair share of sleepless nights.

It was clear Jalru could see that their conversation was having a toll on the other dragon and told him that perhaps it would be best if they made their decision in the morning after a good night’s sleep. Though Xralix nodded he knew that the gold dragon was leaning towards helping the elves, it was in their nature to do so just like all of his metallic-scaled kin. The fact that he wasn’t pressuring him to do the same showed just how devoted he was to their relationship he was, and it made him want to be a better dragon for his sake as well. He agreed however that it would be best to get some sleep first and together the two went up to the room they had gotten and slept the night curled up together as they usually did, though the bright blue eyes of the black dragon continued to remain open for quite some time before the running thoughts in his brain finally allowed them to close completely.

Chapter 2:

Smoke… that was the first thing that Xralix’s mind registered when his eyes opened again, followed by the sounds of multiple screams echoing through the air. When his head bolted up he found that not only was Jalru gone but the room he was in was covered completely in flames. Though the heat didn’t bother him at all the fact his mate was missing drew enough concern to grip his claws into the wood beneath him before running forward and slamming his body against the wall. The force of the impact made the fire-weakened wall crumble against his scales and when he tumbled into the streets of Gildeon he found himself in the middle of a scene of absolute chaos.

Dead bodies were strewn everywhere, some charred, others mangled as most of the city was completely up in flames. At the very least this was not his blue fire engulfing everything, he reasoned, but the only thing that could cause this level of devastation was a massive dragon attack. It was impossible though, no chromatic dragon would be crazy enough to attack the stronghold of the Dragon Knights, but as he ran through the streets looking for Jalru he could hear the sounds of fighting of in the valley below. He quickly flew over to the edges of the city he saw the Dragon Knights and their draconic companions fighting against a horde of creatures below, all of them baring the same symbol on their banners…

…the Burning Lily.

“This is what will happen,” a familiar voice next to Xralix said, the dragon turning down and seeing his elven self Ryonir standing there looking out into the destruction as well. “You know as well as I that a dread dragon with that much power will set their sights on this place once they have mustered their army, and if they take down Gildeon then there is nothing stopping him from enslaving the rest of the world to his whims.”

“The Dragon Knights and neighboring kingdoms will never allow it to happen,” Xralix scoffed as he turned away from the carnage that was happening beneath their perch. “If this is my conscience trying to tell me to take care of this I’m still not convinced they need me.”

“Clearly you are if you’re having this nightmare,” Ryonir replied. “You may be Xralix now but remember that there is still a part of you that’s the elf who believed in such things as well, a piece of you that you had the chance to excise but chose not to. But even without me you know that a creature with that sort of power will not merely be contained with his current holdings, eventually this dragon will want to spread and if no one can stop him then this may be a very possible future for this city.”

Xralix frowned deeply but knew that Rynoir, which was essentially himself, was right on that. Unlike the destructive tendencies he had in his previous life that were eventually satiated this other dragon appeared to have much more ambition in mind if he took over an entire vassal state. Up until this point he didn’t admit it but the idea of a dread dragon with such power meant that he would be a formidable opponent, especially since he had no idea what artifact he had. Jalru was there he could probably figure out what it was, but would the plan of the elders to sneak into the lands claimed by this creature actually work?

The next thing Xralix knew he snorted and woke up with a jolt, which caused the gold dragon next to him to do the same since they were laying next to one another. Despite everything being back to normal in his inn room he could still smell the smoke feel the heat from the fire as Jalru turned him and asked if anything was wrong. “Hrm, it’s been a while since you’ve had a dream as vivid as that,” Jalru commented after Xralix filled him in on what he saw in his mind. “It appears that you’ve already started to prepare yourself to become Ryonir since that was the last time you had created a dreamspace like that. Does this mean that you have made up your mind when it comes to helping the elders with this plan of theirs?”

Though Xralix didn’t respond he knew he didn’t have to, Jalru already knew what his answer was as the two walked out of the inn and made their way back to the hall of the elders to tell them their decision. Once they informed the elves they immediately made their way back to their own homestead, eventually flying over the jungles that surrounded the ruins they had made into their layer while also calling out for the others to meet them there. By the time they landed on the stone dais that overlooked the ocean they saw the silver dragon and werewolf already standing there waiting for them. When the two asked what was going on Jalru and Xralix had them follow until they were inside the main treasure chamber they used to lure in greedy adventurers for Xralix to play with.

“Alright, so now that we’re here can you tell us what your meeting with the Dragon Knights in Gildeon were all about?” Zefrit asked, the silver dragon practically bouncing on his paws as he waited to hear the news.

“The short version is that there is a dragon threat in the kingdom that the elders believe Xralix is uniquely equipped to deal with,” Jalru explained. “They want him to become Rynoir in mind and body in order to slip past the defenses the dragon has shored up and disguise his true form, but that means that Xralix will be suppressed once more. After a bit of discussion we decided that we would take them up on their offer… after Xralix did some intense negotiations for what we would get as our reward.”

Jalru narrowed his eyes as he glanced over at the black dragon, who grinned sheepishly as he remembered the look on the elder’s faces after coming in with what he expected to get in return for his services before adopting a far more serious demeanor. “Since I’m not going to remember anything that happened before the spell was broken in the Frostward Vale it means that we need to set everything up the way it was before,” Xralix explained. “That means that Zefrit will once more be my dragon companion, Jalru will resume his role as Flynn, and Samiel will have to travel without his pack, though that would probably happen anyway since we need someone to guard this place while we’re gone.”

“Sounds like a complete reset,” Zefrit stated as the werewolf next to him merely nodded his head when he heard his name. “Do we have to go back to the Frostward Vale to do this?”

“We don’t have time for that,” Jalru answered. “I’ll fill in the blanks to Ryonir on what happened, you just have to remember to try and keep Xralix out of your conversation with him when he’s an elf. As far as he will be concerned he managed to defeat the dread dragon and push him into exile, and has been on assignment looking for the mirror since then.”

“Seems like quite the rouse,” Samiel finally stated with a deep chuckle as he scratched the fur on his chest. “I am ready to follow my alpha no matter what form he takes.”

“I’m ready too!” Zefrit also responded enthusiastically. “It’s going to be weird being with Ryonir again after all this time but I think it’ll be fun too. Just like the old times.”

“Indeed,” Jalru said, the smile on his muzzle faltering slightly before he shooed the two off with his forepaws. “You two get ready to travel and inform whom you need to take over the care of this place, Xralix and I need to get… prepared ourselves.”

The two nodded and made their way out of the treasure room, leaving Jalru and Xralix alone with one another. They waited until they could no longer hear the others talking before sighing and retreating deeper into their layer where they had set up a makeshift bed. “I can tell what you’re thinking,” Jalru stated. “As long as you’re Ryonir we can’t be together as mates; if you see me as my draconic self it’ll snap you out of it and we can’t have that when we get into the Burning Lily. When I cast the spell the elders made for us I’ll transform with you so that no matter what time you wake up you’ll be staring at Flynn instead to keep the illusion real.”

“Yeah, yeah…” Xralix said with a loud sigh, watching Jalru get their gear ready before getting an idea and moving over to press up against him. “You know… since we’re going to be apart for so long we could have one last roll in the gold, so to speak.”

Jalru snorted at that and shook his head. “I should have known that was going to come up,” the gold dragon replied. “Do you really think that we have time for that when we have a trip to prepare for? Not to mention this is a rather in-depth spell that will consume quite a bit of my energy.”

“Well, perhaps we could make it so that you can cast while we’re having some fun,” Xralix exclaimed, causing Jalru to look at him in curiosity. “C’mon, you said yourself you can feel your arcane energy building up when we start rutting, and think of how fun it will be to ride me all the way down until we’re elves again. Don’t lie, when I told you about my experience with Zefrit on the boat when I started transforming into my draconic self you weren’t the least bit intrigued with what that would feel like.”

Though Xralix could tell that his mate was attempting to give him a stern look at the idea that he his broken idea had intrigued him, and after a bit more nudging and a few quick gropes with his forepaws Jalru finally rolled his eyes and tossed the clothes aside he had been preparing. “Fine, we’ll do it your way,” Jalru said as he suddenly turned and met the other dragon eye to eye, the growl of the golden dragon tinged with lust as a smirk formed on his muzzle. “But I’m definitely the one in charge, you got that?”

Xralix felt a shudder of pleasure go through his body as he quickly nodded, his tail wagging as their muzzles met in a passionate embrace. Aside from once being an elven Dragon Knight there was another secret that the black dragon had hidden from the world, one that not even Zefrit and Samiel really knew about. He loved it that despite being the bigger dragon Jalru was the dominant one in their relationship, giving him the experience that other chromatics might consider a sign of weakness. Though the two played at the roles for a bit nothing got him going faster than when he was taken as he felt himself get pushed onto his back into bed that the two had made for themselves.

“Been a while since we were in this position,” Xralix said once the two had broken their kiss as he felt his wings get spread out as the other dragon pressed on top of him. “Normally I just raise my tail and let you mount me.”

“This is not a normal time,” Jalru replied with a seductive purr in his voice. “And I want to watch you while it happens, as you guessed this is something that I’ve been interested and I would rather not be staring at the back of your head while it happens. Now just relax, dread dragon Xralix, while your mate takes control.”

As their scaly bodies began to rub together Xralix couldn’t help but smile at the more dominant attitude Jalru adopted when they were together like this. Back in their previous lives he remembered the coaxing he had to do to get the gold dragon to be so assertive against him, but now Jalru was more than eager to get inside of him as their limbs wrapped around one another. One thing the black dragon hadn’t been lying about was the amplification of their powers when they did it, already feeling the tingling of arcane energy between the two of them. Though Jalru hadn’t even began to cast the spell yet Xralix could swear his body was starting to shrink slightly, but part of that was the fact that he would be aiding in the spell himself by using his own energy to turn into a humanoid form like most older dragons were able to do.

Before Xralix could make a joke for Jalru to hurry before it no longer fit the black dragon let out a loud moan as the tip of the ridged cock started to press into his tailhole. Wisps of blue fire licked along the sides of his lips as he attempted to contain himself, not wanting to set the place alight when they had flammable items all around them. The gold dragon has also started to cast his section of the spell and as Xralix looked up at the face mired with concentration and pleasure he could already see his features starting to soften and retract. The muzzle that he had been kissing only moments ago started to get sucked back into his head as the horns on top of his head also were pulled in by the magic transforming him. For him the biggest sensations were in his tail and rear where the magic was subconsciously pooling, feeling the thick limb being pulled into his body while his legs began to quiver.

Just as Jalru sank several inches of his maleness deep into the other dragon Xralix heard several pops and saw his thickly-muscled legs shift in their orientation. His limbs tingled as he saw his heavy foot paws that had been the subject of many rubs from his mate quickly shrink, his talons being absorbed into his toes as two of them split so he had five. This was it, he thought to himself though the haze of lust coming from their coupling, he was really turning back into Rynoir. He was glad that they had decided to have sex while the transformation was happening, given how they needed to make sure they hid as much of his draconic nature as possible it was much slower then if he just willed himself into a new form, and if he didn’t have several inches of ridged dragon dick inside of him he might have tried to leave before the spell was complete.

At this point Xralix had become the smaller male and was completely pinned underneath the other transforming creature so he couldn’t escape even if he wanted too, especially with his tailhole being stretched as it was. As he looked down he saw that he couldn’t really call it that anymore either; his rear end was merely scaled at this point with the appendage disappearing rapidly. Both he and Jalru were also starting to lose their scales where the transformation was happening the fastest, watching his cock start to shrink while feeling the one inside of him doing the same. It allowed the gold dragon to slide into him more easily though and soon the two found their passions taking precedent over their changing bodies as they pressed their proto-muzzles together for another kiss.

As Jalru plunged his tongue fervently into his lover he could feel Xralix’s sharp fangs shrinking and the fire that had been sparking at his lips died out. The arcane energy that coursed through his body, aided by the pleasure coming from his thrusting hips as he adjusted his changing legs for better positioning, had begun to seep into the other dragon’s mind. Unlike when they had incurred the wrath of the artifact he had been protecting the mental changes were not immediate and as he stared into the glowing blue eyes of the dragon he watched the color slowly drain from the sclera. Xralix was disappearing, everything about him being tucked away into a mental jar he was creating to hold in the dread dragon for the preparation of their mission. Even though it was only temporary and he could still feel the lust coming from the other creature he couldn’t help but feel a pang of guilt at what he was doing, especially as he started to see Xralix’s changing eyes glaze over while hair sprouted from his hornless head.

At this point Jalru knew he needed to finish up as both their forelimbs snapped into a new configuration, turning into a pair of arms as their scales disappeared under the elven flesh that was cascading over their bodies. This would be the last thing that Xralix would remember before Ryonir took over completely and he wanted to make sure it was a good memory. With his tail still attached to his otherwise elven butt he grabbed onto the hips of the other male and begun to thrust in hard, watching his chest expand rapidly from the sudden sensation while the hardened muscle shifted into a pair of humanoid pectorals and washboard abs. With the last of his draconic dick Jalru pumped hard and fast while reaching forward with one of his hands and stroking the mostly elven member on the other male before they both orgasmed hard.

Jalru, or Flynn as he reminded himself he needed to be now, felt his long hair fall into his face as he climaxed, filling the other elf with the last of his draconic seed before that too changed. Both were panting heavily and as Flynn continued to remain hovering over the naked body of his transformed lover he could see that despite his eyes being open, which no longer had slits for pupils, it was clear that he was completely unconscious. Though he wanted to stay and remain inside his mate Flynn knew that would bring up more questions when Ryonir finally reasserted himself and started the task of covering everything up. He had suspected that the dread dragon would make a request to rut before or during their spell and even though he was exhausted both from their passions and the spell he had just cast he grabbed a cloth and cleaned both their bodies up.

As Flynn washed the naked chest of the other elf he saw the dragon tooth that was still around Ryonir’s neck, the enchanted chain shrinking when he turned humanoid. He found himself biting his lip as he contemplated what to do; part of the reason Xralix reasserted himself in the first place was because he was wearing the tooth that had been the result of Jalru’s first draconic encounter with the dread dragon, but would he notice it if he took it from him? After a brief back and forth in his own mind he decided to keep it for now, not wanting their cover spoiled because of a trinket he had given him. After undoing the clasp and slipping the dragon tooth necklace with the rest of his things he went over and began to get the unconscious elf dressed…

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When Ryonir opened his eyes again he awoke to find himself in a strange place, the elf putting his hand to his head as he quickly got up to assess his surroundings. His first thought was that he had been captured but when he looked down at himself he found that he was not bound and all of his gear was still on him. As he put his hands down to prop himself up he felt cool metal under his hands and heard the sound of clinking, his eyes widening slightly as he glanced beneath him and saw that he was sitting on a pile of coins. Had he found himself in the midst of some sort of dragon’s hoard, and if so did the holder of it mean him well or ill?

“It’s about time you woke up,” a voice at Ryonir’s side said, the Dragon Knight turning to see the familiar form of Flynn standing there with his arms on his hips and a grin on his face. “I know that last fight wore you out but I didn’t expect you to take the entire day to sleep. Now come on, Zefrit and Samiel are waiting for us outside the ruins.”

“Wait, what ruins?” Ryonir asked as he was helped to his feet by the elf, seeing his armor sitting in a pile next to him. “What happened? Last thing I remember we were heading up to the Frostward Vale…”

“Ohhh, that poison must have affected you more than I realized,” Flynn interrupted with a nod. “After exiling the dread dragon we came to the jungles here in order to try and find that artifact that was being held up there after discovering it was missing. When we came in here we found a green dragon that you managed to get to take off, but during the scuffle you inhaled some of his poisonous breath and passed out. After I made sure you were fine I looked around to see if the artifact was here but it looks like another dead end, fortunately we have another lead to look after once we’re done with this place.”

Even though Ryonir found himself nodding at the explanation being given to him something felt… off about the entire situation, though he couldn’t quite put his finger on it. But he was definitely in a dragon’s lair and the absence of the body meant that he likely had driven it away from its horde for the time being. When he tried to remember the events that led him up to this place everything was extremely hazy, like everything before this moment was surrounded by an impenetrable fog. Strangely however if he continued to think back he could then easily remember hiking up the Frostward Vale and all the events that preceded that right until he lost his memory the first time when Zefrit found him…

Flynn turned his back on the other elf, feigning getting his already packed bag ready in order to hide the look on his face. He could see that despite Ryonir accepting the situation the fact he was forgetting something was already weighing heavy on his mind, just like when he had first met back up with him after he had become the elf before. Even though he was a powerful dragon he didn’t have close to the same power as the mirror that had cast the spell on him in the first place, and the disguised gold dragon feared that it wouldn’t be enough to hold it and Xralix would reassert himself once more. The only thing that was keeping the dragon from bursting out at the moment was likely that the dread dragon was complicit in the plan, he thought to himself as he patted Ryonir on the shoulder and told him they should get moving.

As the two elves made their way out of the ruins Ryonir did feel a sense of familiarity with them, like he had traveled them before in order to get to the dragon’s lair, and the anxiety he was feeling quickly dissipated even more when he saw the silver dragon and werewolf standing there on a stone dais waiting for them. When Ryonir called out to them Zefrit immediately turned and rushed the elf, practically pouncing on him and giving him a hug. “You’re back!” Zefrit said, though a quick glare from Flynn quickly made the dragon shift gears as he chuckled slightly. “I mean, I knew you would, no dragon can withstand you.”

“Well, maybe one can,” Ryonir said with a grin as he leaned in and kissed the dragon on the snout before going over to Samiel. Zefrit and Flynn looked at each other in slight shock before the former gold dragon remembered… Ryonir and Zefrit had started to get into a relationship before they went up into the mountains of the Frostward Vale, and it was only when Xralix had started to reassert himself did he admit his unrequited love for him. That thought also caused Flynn to remember that at that point Ryonir had figured out he was actually Jalru… but did the spell cover that up as well, or had the Dragon Knight just not remembered that aspect of his former life yet?

It would be a dangerous game to try and plumb information out of the freshly transformed elf at the moment, Flynn thought to himself as he watched the other two reacquaint themselves with someone they had technically seen less than an hour ago. It was going to take several days of Zefrit flying the three of them in order to get out of the jungles themselves much less start to enter into the kingdom occupied by the dragon, and after that they would probably have to resign themselves to walking. They didn’t know how far this red dragon’s power had spread yet and they would have to gather information as they went, especially if they were going to be going in blind like they were. As he looked over Ryonir while he and Samiel hopped onto the dragon that would be ferrying the three of them the first part of the way, the werewolf once more in his human form to make it easier for them to fit, it seemed like there was no spite or malice being held there by the elf.

“You getting on or what?” Ryonir asked with a smile, leaning down to help Flynn up. “We’re burning daylight and I don’t want to be stuck in the middle of a jungle during the night if we can help it.”

“Sorry, just lost in my thoughts,” Flynn quickly replied, getting up into the spot in front of the Dragon Knight just behind Zefrit’s wings.

Once everyone was secured the silver dragon nodded to the others behind him and he took off, running to the edge of the stone dais to use the winds coming off the ocean to his advantage. In no time they were back up in the air and it felt just like it had been when they were traveling towards the Frostward Vale in the first place. As Flynn leaned back against Ryonir however he did suddenly find a pair of arms wrapped around him and holding against his chest. It was an extremely comforting feeling and it made him wonder if despite his mind being reset the other elf still could feel their bond of mateship.

“Hey… Flynn, can I ask you a weird question?” Ryonir suddenly asked, causing the other elf to feel his heart drop in his chest as he quickly straightened himself back up before looking at him in question. “Is it just me, or does Zefrit seem… bigger to you? Like the three of us fit way more comfortably on him than before.”

There was a snort from behind Ryonir and Flynn looked back to see Samiel holding back a laugh, keeping his clawed hand in front of his grinning face. “Must be going through a growth spurt,” Flynn quickly replied, feeling the dragon underneath them also trying to stifle himself from chuckling before he discreetly dug his heal into the scaled flanks to stop him. “Don’t worry, everything is going to come back to you fairly quickly, let’s just settle on the task at hand so we can get back to Gildeon, alright?”

Chapter 3:

 The first week of their travels had been uneventful; much to the relief of Flynn and the others the magic that kept Xralix at bay had seemed to take root and the elven Dragon Knight acted much the way he did before their fateful trip up to the Frostward Vale. Since the dread dragon was no longer their target either the three could instead focus his attention on the artifact they were hunting, which was technically true since there was one rumored to be in the dragon’s possession. Fortunately one thing that Flynn had kept with him when he had settled into his life as Jalru with Xralix was the books that he had taken from the library of the Dragon Knights. Not only would they potentially have a means to figure out what magical item was giving the red dragon such power but also potentially the identity of the dragon himself.

Unfortunately as jungle turned to field and they bedded down for the night once more Flynn found himself staring frustratingly at the same page he had read about twelve times already. He heard the sounds of the others laughing and joking as they got the fire going and started to cook, but the longer they traveled the more the pretending elf archivist had withdrawn himself. It was getting harder every day to stare at the face of the one he loved and know that he can’t say anything and was starting to get déjà vu when it came to their travels. The other problem was that Ryonir had clearly not forgotten his time with Zefrit and more than once caught the Dragon Knight making eyes with his companion that caused him to become embarrassed.

“Hey, Flynn,” Rynoir’s voice suddenly said, prompting the elf to look up from his page and preventing him from reading it for the fourteen time as he saw the smiling face of his friend looking at him. “I know that you’re burning the midnight oil but you’re going to make yourself sick if you keep pouring all your attention into those books. Plus I’m going to start thinking that you like them more than me and I’ll have to start taking it personally.”

Gods… his sense of humor is even the same as before he knew he was a dragon, Flynn thought to himself as he mustered up enough willpower to give him a smile. “No rest for the wicked I suppose,” Flynn replied, trying not to dwell on the irony of that statement as he closed the book in front of him. “Plus what sort of archivist would I be if I can’t even figure out the name and type of artifact we’re chasing?”

“Well… it’s some sort of mirror, right?” Rynoir asked, which quickly caused Flynn to shake his head.

“We thought so initially, but that turns out not to be true,” Flynn responded, keeping Ryonir from thinking about the artifact that turned him into an elf in the first place. “What we did find out was that this item is able to convey some sort of mass hypnosis or illusion, make people think they’re doing something when it’s actually something else. It has to be something powerful too… in all my life I’ve never heard of an artifact this powerful before.”

“Maybe it’s the person whose wielding it and not the artifact itself,” Ryonir conjectured, shrugging his shoulders slightly. “I don’t know, you’ve mentioned that certain items that channel power can be amplified if in the hands of a particularly potent magic user, or if they’re in the hands of a dragon-“

“Let’s not draw ourselves to conclusions quite yet,” Flynn interrupted curtly as the other elf looked at him in slight shock. “I’ll be over in a second, just let me finish up what I’m doing here and I will join you guys.”

Though it looked like Ryonir wanted to say more the elf just nodded his head and went back over towards the camp with the others. Once he was sure that the dragon knight was out of earshot Flynn sighed and rubbed his face as he closed the book in front of him. He knew his frustrations weren’t on his companion but rather the situation, one that he had pushed Xralix to do in the first place. Despite telling himself that it was for the good of the world he could help but let his feelings leak out to the point where he wished he could have gotten his memories erased too, but being the keeper of the spell that was containing Xralix there was no way he could risk losing control by indulging in ignorance.

Suddenly Flynn once more felt the presence of someone standing next to him and just as he was about to tell Rynoir that he was coming he turned his head up and was surprised to see Samiel standing there. “Your behavior towards the alpha is starting to become unacceptable,” Samiel stated, growling slightly despite not being in his beast form. “If we’re going to continue this mission you had better find a way to satisfy yourself without bothering Ryonir, or you could do as my pack does and have an orgy.”

Flynn’s eyes widened before he quickly shushed the other man, then looked over at Zefrit and Ryonir that were glancing over in their direction. After telling the two that they were going to go out and see if there was a water source nearby the elf grabbed the werewolf by the arm and tugged him out of the camp and into the darkness of the woods. “Are you insane?” Flynn said once he was sure he was out of earshot from both the dragon and elf that continued to talk to one another. “Not only were you eavesdropping in on our conversation but do you really want to talk about that when Ryonir or Zefrit can hear you?”

“I just fail to understand why you are getting increasingly upset about this,” Samiel replied as he brushed back his ponytail. “Even after we got done with the Frostward Vale and settled in our new home Xralix and I continued to mate, something that you approved of. I just fail to see why now you are suddenly getting angry at him for what comes naturally to all of us.”

“The only reason I don’t mind you and Xralix is because he is your alpha and I know that is how werewolves work in this region,” Flynn replied with a huff. “Plus I know being the mate of a dread dragon means that I have to deal with things like this, but Xralix never got involved with Zefrit again and he made an effort to just be with me. I know that the dynamic between Ryonir and Flynn is different than Jalru and Xralix and that Zefrit is making sure that he doesn’t get back together with him, but I just think… I don’t know…”

Flynn looked down at the forest floor they had been walking on during their conversation and when he glanced up at Samiel he saw the werewolf with a wry grin on his face. “I think I know what’s going on here,” Samiel stated as he suddenly turned and moved towards the elf, backing Flynn up quickly until he suddenly had his back to a tree. “Maybe it’s not the fact that you are angry at Ryonir for rekindling his flame for Zefrit, instead maybe you are just jealous at seeing him getting something that you feel you can’t. If that’s the case then I can help, but since you’re not my alpha I’m going to be the one on top.”

The sudden offer came as a surprise to Flynn; though he knew that werewolves were inherently sexual beasts the fact that Samiel was coming on to him strong was something he hadn’t seen coming. Even in the darkness he could see that the otherwise human face of the other man was starting to have pointed fangs grow past his lips, which he licked with his tongue as he leaned in. The elf found his breath starting to quicken as the werewolf pressed up against him. It had never entered his mind to lay with the werewolf, and unlike Xralix it would be for a completely carnal reason that they would lay together.

“I… don’t think that I can,” Flynn said, trying not to move as he felt the maleness of the werewolf pressing against him through their clothing. “I certainly appreciate the offer Samiel… but it wouldn’t be right of me.”

“Huh, looks like you’re still a gold dragon after all,” Samiel said with a chuckle as he took a step back, still grinning as he adjusted himself. “Shame, since you don’t need to stay an elf for Ryonir’s sake I would have enjoyed mounting those scaly flanks of yours. If you ever want to take me up on my offer let me know, perhaps we could bring Ryonir into the mix as well…”

With that the werewolf walked away, leaving the elf with a tent in his pants as Flynn remained against the tree with the last words of Samiel still echoing in his head. Still a gold dragon after all… his kind were considered the righteous sort, even in such matters as laying with another. On the other hand, he reasoned, as he had previously brought up in his own mind werewolves completely separated the terms of mateship and sex as the one in their party had brought up. As he took a second to cool off before walking back to the camp himself he began to wonder if it would be more fortuitous to start thinking like a werewolf himself…

Back at the camp Zefrit and Ryonir ate their food while waiting for the other two to come back. “So when did Flynn say the next town was?” Zefrit asked after licking his plate clean.

“Probably another half a day of flying if the weather permits,” Ryonir replied. “I don’t like the way those clouds looked on the horizon as we were landing for the night and I think we’re in for a storm. If we’re lucky we can get to the town and bed down for the duration, although unfortunately we’re far enough away from Gildeon that I don’t think you’ll be able to join us.”

“I really do need to learn how to change into a humanoid form to join you guys,” Zefrit said with a chuckle. “Ah well, it’s probably for the best anyways.”

As the dragon eyed up the pot of food for potentially getting seconds he began to feel a stare on him and when he turned his head he was slightly taken back by the frown on the elf’s face. “Zefrit…” Ryonir said as he put down his own plate and crossed his arms. “What is going on here?”

“Uh… what do you mean?” Zefrit replied, grinning sheepishly before it fell away from his snout when he saw the serious demeanor remain for the elf.

“You know what I’m talking about Zefrit,” Ryonir said with a hint of anger in his voice. “Not only has Flynn been acting weird and not talking with me but you’ve done the same as well.” The silver dragon looked away slightly and gave him a look that feigned ignorance that prompted the dragon knight to move forward. “You know what I mean… why are you suddenly spurring my advances? Did something happen between the Frostward Vale and now that you’re not telling me, some memory I lost after the fight with the green dragon in the jungle ruins?”

Ryonir could see his draconic companion getting more uncomfortable by the second, and despite wanting to press for more answers he let out a heavy sigh and just sat down next to the silver dragon. “Listen… if you just want to remain friends then that’s fine,” Ryonir stated. “Just… could you tell me what I did to cool you off so quickly?”

Zefrit felt the gears turning in his head as he attempted to figure out what he could say that would satisfy the Dragon Knight and also leave their relationship intact. The truth had been that even when Ryonir had become Xralix and was mated with Jalru he had continued to hold a flame of desire of him, but in respect to both elder dragons he made sure not to pursue it. But it was easy when the dread dragon held no interest to him and Jalru was around, with Ryonir back and actively making passes at him it had taken all of his willpower not to rekindle the romance they had started before the Frostward Vale. As he finally turned back and looked into the eyes of the elf he found his mouth opening and closing without any sound coming out.

Fortunately as Zefrit struggled to come with an answer there was a rustle in the nearby bushes before Samiel popped out of them and announced that they should probably get to bed since he could smell the storm coming. The silver dragon was more than keen to agree and left the question unanswered as both he and Ryonir began to make preparations to bed down for the night. As he made a makeshift bed in the tall grasses he saw Flynn come from the same direction Samiel had, and as he gave him a smile the other elf just gave him a quick good night and headed towards his own bed. The dragon watched Flynn grab food with Samiel and eat quickly so they could pack up everything and put out the fire, but what caught Zefrit’s attention was the odor he picked up when the elf walked by…

…he smelled a bit like Samiel.

With everything else going on Zefrit decided not to press the matter, and soon everyone had cleared away what was needed and got ready to move as soon as their was light in the sky. When it did come it was muted by the thick clouds that had gathered overhead and as the werewolf had predicted by the time they had broken down their tents they could start to feel the raindrops against their bodies. They flew on Zefrit for as long as they could until the main storm hit, forcing them to talk the rest of the way on the path until they got to the town. Fortunately they had gotten most of the way on the air and were able to get in past the gates as everyone else scurried around trying to prepare for the coming weather as well.

As usual Zefrit broke off and left the rest of the group, opting to hide in the nearby fields and loop around to meet them on the other side. That left Ryonir, Flynn, and Samiel standing there in the inn they found with their clothes dripping wet as they looked around the semi-full tavern room. “If anyone makes a comment about smelling wet dog…” Samiel stated as he shook himself in a very canine fashion, though with his human form it just served to shake his clothes around while doing little.

“I’ll go see if they have rooms available,” Flynn said to the other two. “Why don’t you two see what’s on the menu. Just be careful… we’re not in the lands of the Burning Lily yet but that doesn’t mean their influence might not have reached this area yet. Despite the blockade they’re still trading so if news of our plan gets overheard by the wrong ears they might figure out what we’re… looking for.”

Both Ryonir and Samiel nodded before walking into the tavern, finding a place by the fire to attempt to dry off while waiting for someone to serve them. “What a miserable day to wear armor,” the dragon knight grumbled as he shifted around. “I hope there’s at least one room where I can get out of this and dry off the metal.”

“At least we found this place,” Samiel replied with a shrug as a rumble of thunder rattled the wooden walls slightly. “I feel bad for Zefrit having to stay out in this.”

“Yeah, not like when we started our journey to the Frostward Vale and we managed to find an inn that catered to dragons so he could bunk with us,” Ryonir said, looking over at the werewolf to find him with a blank stare on his face. “Oh yeah, that was before we met you, first few days of our journey we got caught in a storm and had to hunker down in an inn for almost two days. But we were still close to Gildeon and they had rooms for dragons, which I ended up sleeping in with Zefrit since our bed had gotten soaked because… because I…”

Ryonir frowned slightly as he tried to remember why his dragon companion had decided to wake him up with a bucket of water to the face, but just like his time between the Frostward Vale and the jungle ruins it was a complete blank. There was no faint tendrils of thought that made it on the tip of his tongue, it was like someone had come in and completely excised the memory from his mind. Had something happened at the mountain range that was causing this, he wondered as Samiel’s attention suddenly was turned to the bar maid that came up and asked them what they wanted. As he continued to wonder what was happening he felt a pit forming in his stomach, a knot that was slowly twisting tighter the longer he attempted to figure out why he couldn’t remember a piece of information that had happened quite recently…

His thoughts were only broken by both the bar maid and Samiel getting his attention, and when he was asked what he wanted he just opted for the stew and water. Even as he ordered everything felt like it was happening in the background; the dull roar of conversations happening in the tavern, the rain and thunder happening outside, even Samiel and the bar maid talking only a few feet in front of him felt like it was occurring somewhere else. When he closed his eyes he continued to see the memory of him, Flynn, and Zefrit in the tavern, but the more he focused on it the more it felt like it had been corroded like with acid. It was a disturbing feeling, especially as he caught glimpses of a mysterious and shadowy figure that flashed briefly in and out of his consciousness while he attempted to remember.

Eventually Flynn came back and said that they only had one room available, to which Ryonir stood up and quickly took the key and announced he was leaving to get his armor off. When Samiel reminded him of his food the elf stated that it would only be for a few minutes before he hurried off, leaving Flynn to sit down on the side of the table alone as they watched him practically leap up the stairs before disappearing out of sight. “I don’t like this,” Flynn said with a frown. “The spell we cast on him is definitely turning out to not be as powerful as the one from the mirror, at this rate it’s going to decay long before we reach the kingdom of the Burning Lily much less the dragon.”

“I think there’s too much going against his current memories,” Samiel mused. “Before we cast the spell he was my alpha, your friend that he had a falling out with, and was courting to be Zefrit’s lover. At this point only one of us has been faithful to those memories.”

“Are you saying that this is my fault?” Flynn asked angrily, his eyes flashing golden for the briefest of seconds.

“I’m saying that you and Zefrit need to get your acts together,” Samiel explained. “I know you can’t tell him the truth so you need to get as close to it as possible, which means you’re going to have to try and mate with him. Since you’re still playing the elf it would mean that you can keep him from being Xralix, it would stop him from lusting after Zefrit, and you can finally feel better about yourself.”

“But Ryonir isn’t interested in me when I’m Flynn,” Flynn replied, his voice becoming a quiet whisper as he remembered where they were talking. “And it’s not as simple as going up to him and just biting him on the neck to show interest; we’re dragons, not werewolves. Yes, he would probably lust after Jalru, but I can’t become that version of myself without other major issues.”

Samiel just snorted and leaned back in his chair. “I don’t know why you other species make things like this so complicated,” he said simply. “Whatever, just don’t be surprised if he continues to be confused and ends up finding someone else because you don’t want to make any move towards him.”

Flynn continued to frown as they ended their conversation there with the two just looking down at the table, which had they continued to keep watch over the room itself they would have noticed a cloaked figure going up the stairs shortly after Ryonir had…

In the upstairs of the inn Ryonir had completely changed out of his armor and wet clothing, using a cloth to dry himself as best he could as he sat naked on the straw bed. His hair was still dripping but at he sat there he let the beads of water cascade down his body, feeling it tickle his skin until it finally dripped down to the small puddle that was forming on the floor. Being alone gave his mind a chance to reset and he found himself breathing slowly as he calmed himself using the techniques he learned during his training. A Dragon Knight would never let himself get this riled up, he chastised himself, and he was sure that he had caused the others to worry.

As he continued to stare down at the reflection of his face in the water beneath his feet though something still felt off. It felt like he was looking at someone else even though it was clearly his visage that was being reflected at him. Perhaps the stresses of travel were getting to him, Ryonir thought as he shook his head slightly and watched the one in the puddle do the same. As he made a few small faces just to watch himself he paused when he thought he saw something hovering above him, only to look up and see that it was just the ceiling of the inn room illuminated by the oil lantern he had lit.

Ryonir shook his head and was about to lay back into the bed when he heard a knock at the door. He had taken the key that Flynn had acquired and figured they were trying to get in and get out of their still-wet clothes as well, and perhaps maybe check on him to see how he was doing. When he opened the door however what greeted him was a figure that was completely obscured by a dark maroon cloak, and as soon as he saw it wasn’t one of his friends the elf jumped back and activated his Weapon of the Dragon Knight. Almost immediately the silvery metal gauntlets and claws materialized around his forearms and fingers as he demanded the identity of the one standing at his threshold.

“Relax, I mean you no harm,” the cloaked figure said as he raised his gloved hands up, then undid the clasp to show that he had no weapons on him. “All of my gear is in my room, and as you can see I’m not even wearing my armor right now.”

Though the presence of the stranger put him on guard he could see that there were no visible weapons on him and just had on a traveler’s tunic… which suddenly made him aware of his lack of clothing as he reached over and grabbed the thin blanket to cover himself. “Sorry, but one can’t be too careful,” Ryonir said, leaving his clawed gauntlets out but no longer pointing them at the other man. “Also I apologize for my appearance, I had been caught out in the storm and just got a room of my own… but can I ask why you’re knocking on my door in the first place?”

“I saw you in the tavern and noticed the sigil you wore,” the other man explained, pulling back his hood to reveal that he was also an elf as his steel-grey eyes looked over at the armor sitting in the corner. “The armaments you have confirm it, you’re a Dragon Knight from Gildeon.”

“I am…” Ryonir replied cautiously, looking over the other elf as he continued to stare at his armor to try and get any information from his appearance. When the cloak rippled slightly as he turned he noticed there was a pattern on the back, a symbol that he recognized as well. “Wait, I know that sigil, you’re from the Burning Lily kingdom, aren’t you?”

“Very astute,” the elf said with a small grin. “I’m Kaladar, a scout from the kingdom of the Burning Lily, though you can call me Kal.”

“Alright Kal, I’m Ryonir of the Dragon Knights,” Ryonir responded. “You still haven’t told me why you have come to my room…”

“I was just curious on why you were around these parts,” Kal said. “Chasing down some sort of evil dragon?”

Ryonir felt his awareness tingling as something felt off about the scout, though he wasn’t quite sure what it was as he continued remain near the bed with the sheet wrapped around him. “Chasing down an artifact held by a dragon actually,” the Dragon Knight responded. “We think that it’s in your kingdom and as a Dragon Knight I’m not held by the same providential restrictions that others are bound too. Why… is there an evil dragon that I need to be concerned about?”

“Oh no, nothing like that,” Kal said, turning away from Ryonir and looking out the window. “Just can’t be too careful nowadays…” As Ryonir was about to respond he suddenly saw the elf shift his way and quickly turn back towards him, his own reflexes kicking in and ducking to the side just in time to avoid the throwing blade hurled at his face. He heard the weapon stick into the opposite wall with a loud thud and before the elf could throw another one he rushed him.

The second throwing blade Kal had managed to grab clattered to the ground as Ryonir took the sheet he had and wrapped it around him, tightening it to tangle up the would-be assassin before delivering a series of blows to the head. Though he could have dug in with his claws he wanted the elf alive to interrogate, plus if he caught the sheets instead it might have freed him. The metal that lined his knuckles should have been enough to knock the assailant out cold but after hitting the head of the elf several times he suddenly found himself getting thrown off with surprising strength. Ryonir hit the ground and quickly bounced back up to his feet just in time to dodge another throwing knife aimed for his face.

“You’re quick,” Kal commented as he reached into his tunic where Ryonir could see a number of the thin projectiles had been sheathed on the inside of the ripped clothing.

“Thanks,” Ryonir replied before reaching back, grabbing the knife stuck into the wall, and throwing it back at the elf. He also missed as Kal shunted himself to the left, causing him to pause slightly as Ryonir smirked at him. “Not so slow yourself.”

Kal’s face just turned to a frown as he threw two more, this time aiming for Ryonir’s bare chest and stomach. The Dragon Knight had managed to maneuver himself to where his armor sat and kicked up the light metal breastplate before grabbing the straps, using it as a shield to deflect both of them. The sound of glass breaking filled the room as one of the knifes ricocheted of the metal and hit the window while the other bounced back towards Kal. As the other elf had to shift to avoid the reflected projectile Ryonir took advantage of his being knocked off balance and rushed him again, this time using the breastplate he was held as a makeshift shield bash to ram the combatant into the wall.

The two elves stumbled forward before Ryonir pinned Kal against the corner of his room, though it was immediately countered from the scout with a glancing blow of his fist into his stomach. Ryonir responded by pressing his hand against the face of Kal to push him against the wall and try to get to his neck where he could attempt to knock him out with a jab to it, but as he made contact the scout let out a cry and the dragon knight’s eyes widened in confusion as he felt the flesh under his palm warp and shift. At first he thought he was burning him somehow as he noticed the skin was turning bright red, but as Ryonir continued to retain his grip on the face of the elf he could see it was actually thickening… becoming almost scalelike in nature as Kal’s muscles twitched and rippled. The shock of seeing the sudden transformation of sharpening teeth and lengthening jaw bones was enough that the scout was able to knock Ryonir off of him, though instead of attacking Kal clutched onto the area of his face where he had been holding onto and darted towards the window before crashing through the already broken glass.

Ryonir got to his feet and made his way to the open frame just in time to watch Kal rush off, disappearing between buildings as the rain continued to pour from the heavens. Any thought of pursuit was unlikely at this point and he just ended up sitting on the bed. With the battle over and the adrenaline that came with it fading his mind was able to process what had just happened. Even as he went over the altercation in his mind there were a lot of things that didn’t seem to make any sense, especially why an elf would care about his affairs in a kingdom… though that was quickly replaced with the thought of what was happening to his face.

About half a minute later both Samiel and Flynn appeared at the door as well, looking in to see Ryonir still sitting there naked with a number of throwing knifes embedded in the wooden walls and rain coming in from the broken window. “What in all the hells happened here?” Flynn asked as he stepped into the room, immediately sitting next to the still shocked elf. “Ryonir… are you okay?”

“Yeah… some assassin tried to ambush me but I managed to fight him off,” Ryonir said before looking up at Flynn. “He was from the Burning Lily and was curious on why I was heading there in the first place, and after going through all that I’m starting to wonder myself. I think it’s time I finally get clued in to what’s going on around here, it appears my life depends on it.”

Chapter 4:

After Ryonir got dressed and the innkeeper came in and boarded up the broken window the Dragon Knight asked if they could see the room that Kal said he had rented to store his weapons, only after getting a description the human said he had never met him. It was yet another lie and he was starting to get sick of constantly feeling like he was in the dark. After making sure that there were no other surprises waiting for them in the tavern and the inn the three regrouped in their room and locked the door behind them. Though Ryonir still felt uneasy he dismissed his weapons and sat down on the bed that had the ripped sheet still on top of it.

“We’re going to have to set up a watch,” Samiel said as he sniffed the blades that he pulled out from the wall. “I don’t need much in the way of sleep and I doubt this one will be dumb enough to come back after revealing his true nature, though I wish he would.”

“I still want to know what he was doing trying to kill a Dragon Knight,” Ryonir spoke up, looking at the other two. “There has been something wrong this entire trip and it definitely no longer feels like a simple artifact retrieval mission, not when we have assassins trying to stop us from doing it. Now give it to me straight, why are we really heading to the Kingdom of the Burning Lily?”

There was a moment of pause between the other elf and the werewolf, the silence filling the air for a few seconds before Flynn finally spoke up. “The artifact we’re looking for may be in the hands of a powerful red dragon that had made his homestead up in that kingdom.” Flynn explained. “Somehow he’s amassing a great deal of power and has managed to control the minds of the royalty and knights, or at least that’s what was reported to the elders in Gildeon. We’ve been sent there to neutralize the dragon threat and grab whatever artifact he’s using to enslave the kingdom before his power grows beyond the point anyone can stop it.”

“I… really can’t believe I’m hearing this for the first time,” Ryonir said as he stood up while shaking his head. “Does Zefrit know too or did you leave us both in the dark?”

“Zefrit knows,” Flynn said. “I know it seems really odd that we would hold back that information for you but with the blow you took in the jungle ruins we weren’t sure that you actually remembered or not. We should have made sure and for that I’m really sorry…”

Ryonir looked like he was about to say something else but stopped, instead just laying down on the bed and covering his face. “Look, I need some time to process this, just… go down and eat your meal, I’ll rest up and take the last shift,” Ryonir stated simply. As Flynn opened his mouth to say something else he was quickly silenced by the werewolf, who gave him a stern look to warn him before saying that they would do exactly that and ushered the elf out of the room before closing the door.

With the intense rains outside and a werewolf at the front entrance Ryonir had little to worry about concerning the assassin sneaking up on him, but it was the storm brewing on the inside that he was more worried about. Even if what Flynn said was true they had to have known that he wasn’t aware of all the aspects of this mission, and that had put him in the crosshairs without even knowing. He felt exhausted; not only from his mind being riddled with memory gaps and inconsistencies but also from the fight itself that had nearly taken his life. As he felt himself passing out the last thing that crossed his mind was the face of that elf twisting and reforming, something that caused him to shudder before he ended up closing his eyes completely.

When Ryonir opened them again it was because of a loud bang, and at first he thought he was under attack again and quickly reformed his gauntlets. As he looked around however he saw there was no threat that could be seen and the entire room was completely dark. He cursed under his breath when he realized he had let the oil lamp burn out, but as he carefully got up and began to move to light it he noticed his window was no longer boarded up and that it had stopped raining outside. As he looked out of it in curiosity his eyes widened when he saw that instead of the town that the inn was situated in he stared out at a lake illuminated by moonlight and surrounded by forest.

A dream… though he had never had one this vivid before as he carefully jumped out of the window and landed on the grass below. Everything felt real as he took a few steps towards the water, and when he turned back the inn had disappeared and was replaced with more trees. With his origin gone the only thing he could think of doing as continue to move forward and try to figure out what was going on. Perhaps it was just a place of respite that he could use in order to collect himself, he thought as he went to the water and dipped his feet into, but as he looked down at his reflection he saw a glowing pair of huge blue dragon eyes that caused him to spin around.

Ryonir spun around and fell backwards into the water as he saw the massive black dragon that was standing behind him suddenly, sputtering and splashing until the creature rolled his eyes and fished him out with his forepaw. “Would you calm down?” the dragon growled once he had deposited the wet elf on the shore. “You’re going to wake yourself up, you idiot.”

“What are you doing in my dreams you monster?” Ryonir retorted as he got to his feet.

“Gods, I forgot how annoying this is…” the dragon said with a heavy sigh. “Listen, Ryonir, I know that I’m a dread dragon and you’re a dragon knight or whatever but we really don’t have time for the song and dance at this point. As much as I would like to make fun of you for a while it’s going to be counterproductive at this point and there’s a reason that I brought you here in the first place.”

“So this was your doing,” Ryonir said as he continued to maintain his guard. “Are you the one that’s enslaving those in the Kingdom of the Burning Lily?”

“Do I LOOK like a red dragon to you?!” Xralix said as blue fire erupted from his mouth as he leaned forward, only to quickly pull back and put his forepaws on his head. “Remember, this is isn’t for you, this is for him, just relax, he can’t help being stupid.” Though the frown on the dragon knight’s face deepened as he was ridiculed once more, but his curiosity outweighed his anger still and he waited for the creature to continue. “Alright, look, we’re not even supposed to be speaking right now, but I had to pull you in because I found someone wondering around here and knew that you had to talk to him.”

Talk to him… Ryonir was surprised to hear that there was another involved in this plane, though he knew that some dragons had that ability to share mental spaces with others they were connected with. The elf didn’t know who this dragon was however or who would be affiliated with both of them… though as he watched the black-scaled creature motion with his forepaw for someone to come forward there was something familiar about him. That was quickly set aside however as another humanoid figure walked between the dragon and him, the moonlight illuminating a face that was elf on one side and draconic on the other complete with a budding horn sticking out of their hair.

“You…” Ryonir said as he flexed his fingers. “Back for round two? Because I won’t go easy on you this time.”

“Ryonir, shut up,” the dragon said with a deep rumble in his chest to emphasize his points. “You said you wanted answers, now here you go.”

Ryonir remained intrigued enough to not attack the assassin, and since this was a dream he unsummoned his weapon while still staring at the mutated man. “Alright then Kal,” Ryonir said. “Talk.”

“You wanted to know what was going on in my kingdom,” Kal said as he took a step forward. “A dragon has taken control of the lands, a red-scaled creature that the locals know as Saracchi. He was like any other chromatic creature, greedily taking treasures that weren’t his and lining his lair with them, as well as terrorizing local settlements that dared to get too close to where he lived.”

Ryonir glanced up at the black dragon and saw him frown slightly at that before prompting the elf to continue on. “But about a year ago Saracchi relocated his home to the forests just outside of the capital, and at first we thought that he was about to make a big attack,” the elf continued to explain to Ryonir. “But nothing happened… except that a few weeks later a number of nobles began to act strangely. They began to sing the praises of the dragon and said that he wasn’t a bad creature after all, and that we should give him the love and respect he deserves. The knights of the kingdom didn’t take kindly to that and began to mobilize to take out Saracchi, but before they could nearly everyone in the armies had a change of heart as well.”

“So this dragon is corrupting the minds of others,” Ryonir said in astonishment. “Is the entire capital filled with his thralls, or is it only those of importance?”

“The townspeople are not as brainwashed as those in power,” Kal answered. “But it’s clear that he has influence over them that grows by the day. He’s also been stretching out tendrils into nearby communities and affecting the nobles that reside there, so while the capital is completely his lands the kingdom is not far from completely falling and swearing allegiance to him.”

As Ryonir soaked in all the information Kal was giving him, sitting down on one of the larger rocks of the shore to steady himself. It was true, a dragon had somehow gained the power to enthrall the minds of those around him on a mass scale. There were a number of their kind that could dominate one and maybe influence a small village, but to acquire control over so many had to have the help of some sort of artifact. When he asked Kal if he knew what the dragon was using in order to do this he just shook his head and sat down on another rock opposite of him.

“Your story is quite fantastical, but there is one thing that I don’t quite understand,” Ryonir said, prompting the disfigured elf to look at him. “Why are you telling me this? Less than a few hours ago you had attempted to kill me to make sure that I couldn’t kill your master, now you are completely giving him up to me.”

“I admit… one of the reasons that I am out here is to make sure that the Dragon Knights to not get to investigate what’s happening,” Kal said as he held the scaly side of his head with his hand. “When we fought and you grabbed my face though, it was like my thoughts got all scrambled up like an egg in a frying pan. That’s why I ran like I did, everything started to spin and by the time I was able to collect myself I no longer found myself in allegiance with Saracchi… and with a strange need to warn you of what was happening.”

“Ahem, if I may offer an explanation,” the black dragon spoke up, prompting the two elves to look at him. “Since Kal here is so far away from his former master’s influence the enthrallment was likely starting to grow thin, and it appears that… something in Ryonir had hijacked the essence of the enchantment and turned it in his favor. It would also explain the… reaction that you had and why you started to transform.”

The two elves just glanced at one another as the dragon flashed them a toothy grin. “That… makes a bit of sense actually,” Kal said. “Must be something about you being a Dragon Knight that broke me from the hold of the dragon.”

There was an audible sigh that came from the dragon that brought their attention back to him. “Yes… that…” he said as the grin on his face fell and he put his forepaw against his chin. “I’m already sensing that there is a problem brewing in your little head Kal that you might want to share.”

“It’s true… I can feel Saracchi’s power creeping into my mind again,” Kal said, causing Ryonir to gasp slightly. “If I fall under his sway I’ll tell him that you know what’s going on and you’ll lose the element of surprise. I’m not sure how… but you’re going to have to kill me to stop this from happening and save my kingdom, whether it’s here or in the real world you have to make sure I don’t report back.”

Once more the dragon let out a groan that interrupted their conversation. “I’m starting to wonder if all elves are just this dramatic… or stupid…” the black-scaled creature said as he shook his head as his statement caused both elves to frown. “You already know that a brief moment of contact was able to knock Kal loose from the control of the dragon enough to get him to betray him, sooooo…”

“…if we maintain contact, then I can get completely free from him!” Kal said excitedly. “I’ll still be enthralled, but it’ll be to you instead of Saracchi… and all things considered I will be fine with that. But… we’re just communicating to one another through a dream, will this even work?”

“Only one way to find out I guess…” Ryonir replied, reaching out and touching the elf’s hand with his own. Both were surprised as red scales began to spread over the area where Ryonir made contact, red at first but as they continued to spread over the back of the other elf’s hand they began to darken while claws formed from his fingertips before the dragon knight pulled his hand back. “Looks like it does work after all, though the process is a bit slow… and why are the scales turning black?”

“Um… probably because you just happen to be in the head space of a black dragon facilitating this meeting,” the black dragon quickly replied before a coy grin formed on his muzzle. “Now, you two could hug it out until he’s completely free of Saracchi’s influence, or if you want to make sure that Ryonir here is the one in charge you can have him be the one on top and have a little more fun with this.”

Ryonir and Kal both had their jaws drop and their mouths open at the lewd suggestion made by the other dragon, but as they both turned to one another to indicate that wasn’t necessary they found themselves unable to get the words out. Though the Dragon Knight had never really found any of his elven peers truly desirable in that fashion there was something about the one standing in front of him that was enticing to his senses. As shock and denial turned to awkward pauses and both elves no longer making eye contact Ryonir could see that the other elf was definitely handsome and with a toned body that came from either being a scout or an assassin. Even the part of his head that had gained draconic features was alluring to him as they found themselves taking a step towards one another.

As the got within a few inches of another they noticed the black dragon that had been hanging around had suddenly disappeared… along with their clothes. As Ryonir moved to cover himself Kal chuckled and mentioned that he had already seen him completely naked, making the dragon knight blush slightly when he remembered scrambling around the hotel room without any clothes on. That also reiterated that up until this moment they had been enemies, but as his potential assassin touched Ryonir’s chest with his clawed hand he found hit harder to retain any of that anger. Both elves were breathing heavy as they faced one another, Ryonir noting that one of the grey eyes of the elf had turned blue on the dragon side of his face, until finally Kal closed the distance between the two of them and their lips met.

The sensation took Ryonir’s breath away as their bodies made contact and he felt the elf immediately start to change against him. Unlike their combat where it appeared that Kal was in pain when he changed this was invoking a completely different reaction, reaching around with his hand and pressing their bodies together as Ryonir felt the tongue in his mouth thicken as he sucked on it. As he felt himself grow hard he could feel the other elf’s cock start to lengthen far beyond normal, feeling the fleshy rod throb as the smooth length began to grow bumps and ridges just like a dragon. When they broke the kiss it was because he was feeling his head getting pushed back by the stretching of the other creature and opened his eyes to see a fanged grin on the scaly lips of Kal’s mid-transformed muzzle. The fact his impromptu lover was transforming was put to the backburner for the Dragon Knight though as he broke the kiss and lowered himself on the sandy shore while the transforming creature buried his growing snout into his groin.

Ryonir found himself putting his hands against the back of Kal’s head and feeling a second horn quickly grow to catch up with the first one as that thick tongue slid across his hard cock. It reminded him of when Zefrit pleasured him in such a way and though he felt a pang of guilt about sleeping with another the silver dragon had broken it off with him anyway. That allowed him to focus on the increasingly draconic muzzle that had been wrapped around his cock, feeling the nostrils that merged with the scaly upper jaw of the transforming elf bumping against his groin as the rest of his skull warped into a more draconic shape to fit the new muzzle. As Ryonir’s breaths came out in ragged gasps he looked down to see the neck and shoulders that his thighs were pressing against become bulkier and filled out with muscle, but not to the extent that he had expected.

It appeared Kal was about to become a half-dragon, though he was growing bigger by the second on his upper body it appeared that he would remain humanoid in nature. As Ryonir thrusted his hips up in the air to slide his maleness into the warm, wet maw that was stimulating it he started to have the desire for more than just a simple blow job. He looked beyond the scales slowly creeping down the other elf’s back and watched his pert rear waving back and forth like he had a tail even though the transformation hadn’t reached there yet. With lust clouding over Ryonir’s mind he knew that he could change that and told Kal to stop sucking and to get on his hands and knees.

Kal quickly did what he was told and after a long, slow draw of his muzzle off the elf’s shaft he turned around to do what Ryonir asked him. At this point the black scales, muscle growth, and draconic features had dominated the former elf’s upper body, but except for a few places where they legs had bumped up against one another his backside and legs were elf. He wondered how long it would take for that to change once he was inside of him, Ryonir thought as he found himself getting into the act more and more. What had become a necessary act to ensure that their ally would remain as such turned into a carnal one of pure pleasure that the Dragon Knight was thoroughly enjoying as he got up onto his knees as well right behind the bigger creature with his saliva-slickened cock in his hand.

As soon as the head of his member began to slide between the cheeks of the other male they began to inflate with more muscle and Ryonir gasped as the sudden growth seemed to suck him right into the hole he was about to penetrate. He could see the spine stretching of the other male and when he ran his hands down it the muscles near the shoulder blades bunched up before pushing out the scaly skin. Wings… it was a pair of wings that caused Kal to moan loudly as they emerged while Ryonir felt the growing tail nearly push him back. Despite being nearly two feet taller than him he was able to keep his cock inside and gripped the growing thighs of the other man before starting to push in even deeper.

It wasn’t long before Ryonir had pushed Kal down onto his growing muscular chest and as he angled himself to slide himself in easier he began to hear the assassin mutter something about breeding him and making him his pet. It was similar to when he had taken the alpha position for Samiel and realized that he was doing somewhat the same thing, except he was taking the devotion that came from an artifact and corrupting it to his own needs. Something about that caused him to pause, but only for a moment as the idea of having yet another guy under his command made his dick throb inside of the one that he was taking control of. The two continued to rut like that and by the time Ryonir was ready to climax he was rutting a nine foot tall half-dragon whose clawed toes merged together and became heavy draconic foot-paws just as Kal’s cock erupted with freshly changed dragon seed.

As Ryonir came as well he looked down to watch as he did so inside the scaled tailhole of someone he had transformed, finding something oddly satisfying as the Kal’s thick tail wrapped around his chest and seemed to pull him closer while he orgasmed. “So…” Ryonir said after catching his breath, reaching as far forward as he could and stroking the half-dragon’s side. “Feel any loyalty to Saracchi anymore?”

“Can’t… say that I am…” Kal replied, pausing as he felt his new deeper voice come out of his muzzle as one of his clawed hands rubbed his scaly throat. “This is going to take some getting used to…”

The two continued to fawn over Kal’s new form until finally Ryonir untangled himself from the tail of the other creature and pulled his softening cock out. With nothing inside of him anymore Kal was able to stand up once more and as Ryonir did the same he could see just how different the former elf looked. From what he had seen before their transformation had started Kal had quite the toned body, and though he retained quite a bit of his lithe stature his bigger frame was packed with hardened muscle that gave him a sculpted physique under those black scales. Everything about him was bigger, including his maleness that dangled between his legs before they saw it slip into a slit like a feral dragon might have.

“So if you didn’t wander too far…” Ryonir said as he still felt a bit lustful, pressing a hand against the cheek of the half-dragon that caused him to jump slightly. “If you come back to the inn I still have the room to myself for a while.”

“As tempting as that offer is now that I’m completely free from Saracchi’s hold I need to make sure that my tracks are covered,” Kal said with a nod. “Even in this new form my crest should help me dissuade anyone from thinking that I might have switched sides, and that way I can also make sure that no one knows that the Dragon Knight marching on the capital is doing so to defeat the red dragon. In fact I might plant the seed that you could be manipulated and that corrupting you would be a way to infiltrate your organization.”

“That’s very clever,” Ryonir replied.

“Actually that big dragon suggested it when I was alone with him,” Kal stated. “Anyway I should go back and see what the damage was to my clothes, I had passed out in a small cave north of the town so hopefully I wasn’t disturbed as I changed.”

Ryonir nodded and watched the transformed man disappear from the shore, though it didn’t take long before he was joined by the huge black feral dragon that had been there before. “Good work,” the dragon said. “I am very impressed.”

“Why should I not be surprised you were watching,” Ryonir responded with a frown. “Kal is merely an asset to help us destroy the red dragon before he has a chance to gain any more power.”

“Ah, yes, I’m sure that your tryst in your inn room will have cemented your victory,” the dragon said, causing the Dragon Knight to blush slightly. “Anyway it’s time for you to tell the others what you found out, they’re going to want to know what they’re up against.” Just as the black-scaled creature looked like he was about to disappear he suddenly looked away, then back at Ryonir. “Also give Flynn a break, he’s only trying to help and this entire situation is just as strange for him as it is for you.”

“Flynn? That’s the connection between us?” Ryonir asked as the elf found himself frowning once more. “I guess it should figure that he would know a dread dragon… I may not remember much about our time at the Frostward Vale but I do know for a fact that he bailed on us right before we went up there. Just because he decided to come back doesn’t mean I can forgive him for just leaving us high and dry there.”

To his surprise he seemed to have caught the creature off-guard with that, looking him up and down in contemplation. “Hrm, makes sense that you wouldn’t remember that specific part I suppose,” the dragon commented. “Listen, Jal-… just think about talking to Flynn and maybe try looking at him in another light, he really does like you after all. In fact… I believe he’s holding a gift on him that might help you see him in that light, just ask him about the powerful dragon tooth necklace he holds.”

“Dragon tooth necklace?” Ryonir repeated, but after a brief grin the dragon suddenly disappeared and left him alone on the side of the lake. “Trusting a dread dragon… I must be out of my mind…”

Meanwhile down in the tavern most of the patrons that were from the town had left, braving the rains so they could sleep in their own beds while Samiel and Flynn continued to drink. The food they had ordered had long since been eaten as Flynn looked at the amber liquid in his glass. “Do you think he’s no longer mad enough that we can go back up to our room?” the elf asked before taking a drink.

“I would probably give it a while yet,” Samiel replied as he glanced over at the fire. “The log the innkeeper put on when we got back down here hasn’t even been burned through yet, once that’s been reduced to ash I figure it’s safe enough to go back up. Tough break on him finding out all that though…”

“He’s right though,” Flynn said with a sigh. “Even though we have to leave him in the dark on some things we should have at least trusted Xralix enough that he wouldn’t put any pressure on Ryonir to come out. In a way I sort of doubted them both, and before you said anything I know that he’s hard to trust but I should have as his mate.”

Before Samiel could answer they both heard a loud set of thumps coming from behind them and looked back just in time to see Ryonir jump the last few stairs and walk briskly towards them. “Hey, is the kitchen still open?” Ryonir asked, the two nodding their heads and prompting the elf to grin as he sat down. “You’re not going to believe this, but I think I know who our target is.”

Chapter 5:

Armed with the new information they had gotten from their surprising contact Ryonir and the others did the best they could to prepare for the journey at hand. The storm that had hit them seemed to let up by the middle of the next day and rather than being a standing target for any others that might try and get at the Dragon Knight and to keep his presence in the area as low as possible. When they left the tavern it was still drizzling but they decided to risk the wetness and go out of the village while they still had the light. About a mile out of the town Zefrit dropped out of the sky and landed next to him where the other three filled the dragon in on what they discovered, watching his eyes widen when Ryonir told him of his encounter with the would-be assassin and the strange dream that he had about him.

As they traveled on foot, the skies no longer safe for them to fly in case of other scouts or assassins in the area, the rain ceased to let up all the way until the clouds broke just as the sun was going down. The entire time Ryonir kept a look out to see if Kal would return to join up with them but he didn’t see him the entire journey. He began to wonder if perhaps his perception on things was wrong, or if he had been fooled by the dread dragon that had set up the meeting in the first place. For some reason though that just didn’t feel right and that the more likely scenario for the former assassin to not meet with them in the real world was that he had been possibly captured by his own men after trying to throw them off the trail.

Since they had gotten out of the jungles and had started to move towards the kingdom proper there were more towns that they could stop at, and while normally that would be a boon for them the encounter they had with Kal made them weary of staying at inns or walking through markets where they could be ambushed. As the days passed they often found themselves camping just outside the walls or in forested areas out of sight and sending Samiel or Flynn in to gather any extra supplies they would need. Eventually however they found themselves in a particularly rocky mountain pass with a town right in the middle of the valley they would need to pass through to get into the kingdom proper. Even before they approached they could see the banner of the Burning Lily that hung from the wall.

“This is going to be a problem,” Flynn said as they stood on a small cliff at the entrance of the valley. “Zefrit is going to be exposed no matter how he flies over the mountain pass, and it’s going to take to many days to find another way over the sheer rocks. This doesn’t leave a lot of options.”

“There’s no way that I’m going to be left behind if that’s what you’re thinking,” Zefrit replied with a slight growl.

“Then we’re going to have to go straight through,” Samiel stated. “The dragon is going to have to just keep his head down.”

Ryonir frowned as the other three continued to discuss what they were going to do about their silver dragon friend. Until this point they had been successful in keeping him hidden from the eyes of the general public, but Flynn was right that if they tried to go through this town there would be no way for him to sneak through. Aside from the exposed terrain there was also the watch towers that were built on the top sides of the mountain pass that could probably see for miles. This geography was the reason why the Kingdom of the Burning Lily usually didn’t worry about things like invading armies or creatures that would be funneled to a location like this.

There was also the problem that Ryonir was having with this entire mission as well as their archivist. Even though the big dragon that had shared in his mindscape when he converted Kal told him to give Flynn a break he still couldn’t help but feel the other elf was hiding something from him. The fact that Samiel backed him up perplexed him even more since the werewolf saw him as his alpha and wouldn’t lie to him. There was also the matter of the necklace that he hadn’t been able to bring up the nerve to ask Flynn about either, though as he thought about the artifact it suddenly gave him an idea.

“Flynn, perhaps you have something that could give our draconic companion that might boost his abilities?” Ryonir said, which had caused the argument that had been prompted while he was deep in thought to stop completely and the three involved to look at him. “Maybe some sort of claw or tooth?”

Though Ryonir had attempted to be subtle about it there was a look of surprise on Flynn’s face that he knew exactly what the Dragon Knight was talking about. “I… may have something that will work,” Flynn said as he looked over at Zefrit, who gave him a worried look back. “Let me talk to our draconic companion and see if we can’t make something work. Samiel, could I have the spare set of clothes that you have with you?”

“As long as you don’t mind me being naked the next time I transform,” Samiel joked back, though a sharp look from Flynn showed the werewolf that the elf was in no mood to joke around as he hastily pulled the set of clothes from his bag and handed it to him. Flynn and Zefrit told the two they would be right back and moved further into the woods that they had just traveled through to arrive to the mountain pass. Once they had walked a few minutes in they found a small clearing next to a river that was big enough for the dragon to stretch out comfortably.

“How did he know about the necklace?!” Zefrit hissed in a low tone, though Flynn told him it was unnecessary to keep their voices down this far away from the other two. “I don’t like this Jalru, if he knows about the necklace than that means that either his dragon side told him or his memories are coming back. What if we’re in the middle of this kingdom and Ryonir suddenly becomes Xralix again?”

“One disaster at a time,” Flynn replied with a heavy sigh, frowning slightly when he heard Zefrit speak his dragon name. “While Ryonir had made a roundabout attempt to try and ask me about this necklace he’s right that it will help boost your abilities to the point where it can unlock your polymorphing ability. The thing is that this won’t be using your power to do it and I’m wondering what will happen if we mix my power with your own.”

“If it helps us get over this stupid charade with Xralix I’m willing to do anything,” Zefrit replied. Despite the steadfast resolve of the dragon in front of him Flynn still felt a bit of hesitation as his fingers curled around the dragon tooth necklace. The disguised dragon was apprehensive on giving something so personal that belonged to his mate, even it was to someone he trusted like the silver dragon. It felt like he was about to take another step in the wrong direction as he slowly took the tooth out of his cloak pocket and allow it to dangle in the air.

Zefrit commented that the gold-encased tooth was very pretty, but the compliment didn’t rest easily on Flynn as he unclasped the enchanted string that was attached to it and put it around the dragon’s neck. The silver dragon’s entire body shuddered slightly as the artifact was placed on him and Flynn could feel the pulse of power that came with its attenuation to him. As the archivist stepped away he continued to watch the dragon wearily; while it had reacted strongly to Ryonir the first time he had given it to the Dragon Knight and started to turn him into a dragon he wasn’t sure how it would effect Zefrit, not to mention they were using it to transform him in the opposite direction. Zefrit was also aware of the effects of the necklace as he took a forepaw and lifted the tooth off of his chest.

When nothing happened immediately Flynn guessed that even with the additional power being added Zefrit would need to activate his own polymorphing ability. Flynn would have to quickly teach him, but doing so while polymorphed himself would be difficult. The elf looked around nervously and though he could still sense Ryonir was far away he knew that what he was about to do would be very risky. His form wasn’t linked to the other elf like it had been before, but if Ryonir saw him in his true form it would immediately break the spell that they had so meticulously put on him and make all the suffering they had gone through so far with the ruse pointless.

As Flynn took off his clothes and began to channel his own power he could see the eyes of the dragon widen slightly and he knew similar thoughts probably ran through his head as well on the danger of what he was about to do, but remained silent. The silver dragon backed up slightly as he watched golden scales quickly cascade over the growing body of the other creature. With practiced ease Flynn once more became Jalru, though the gold dragon reminded himself that this would be only temporary and would change back once he had properly taught Zefrit how to do the same. In less than a minute the former elf soon practically towered over the silver dragon as the last of his bones and muscles popped and molded into place to finish off his draconic body.

When Jalru looked around again through the golden orbs of his eyes he was thankful this was an old growth forest that could still hide his huge form, though he could feel his tail snake through the trees as the clearing had been less accommodating than he had thought. “Right, let’s make this quick,” Jalru said with a low, rumbling voice that he kept as quiet as possible. “I’m sure Xralix has sensed my transformation and is keeping it from his other self, but Ryonir is still a Dragon Knight and if he senses two dragons in the area instead of one than he’s going to be suspicious.”

It looked like Zefrit had something that he wanted to say, but continued to keep his mouth shut as he nodded and began to take Jalru’s direction on how to channel the newfound power into his own body. With the gold dragon back in his original form the amulet had even more energy than before, which would help the silver dragon push over the hurdle of his first change. As Jalru warped his forepaw to make it smaller and bigger he remembered his first polymorph had been a pain in the tail to the point he had sworn it off for a couple of years before he tried again. He knew he was asking a lot of Zerfrit in order to get them through the city, but this was for Xralix and he could tell that his impromptu protégé was trying his best as well.

As the sun went from over their heads towards the horizon though Zefrit had still not changed and Jalru started to get nervous. Not only did he have Ryonir out there with only Samiel for company but they were using probably causing quite the arcane disturbance as they tried. Most of the time that wouldn’t matter but if the Burning Lily had mages in the outpost that were using scouting magic they may pick up on the disturbance to go to investigate. Plus there was the fact that if they couldn’t get Zefrit to change they would either have to leave him behind or try to find another border city that the silver dragon could attempt to sneak past undetected that would cost them far too much time.

“Alright, relax for a second,” Jalru said after yet another failed attempt, the strain on Zefrit’s face leaving him before he began to pant loudly and tremble slightly. “I was afraid of this; most dragons watch others transform back and forth all their lives so they have the technique practically imprinted on them. Between your time being mostly spent with an elf to the fact that even after Xralix regained his true form he didn’t shapeshift much you have nothing to reference with.”

“No… we can’t just give up like this,” Zefrit replied defiantly. “Can’t you just transform back and forth a few times?”

“Not without arousing a lot of suspicion,” Jalru explained as he slowly shook his head. “Reverting back to my true form this time has probably caused far more ripples than I cared to make during our mission, and not only would doing it multiple times drain me of my energy but would also be a beacon to anyone with any sort of arcane sense about them. Once I turn back to an elf I don’t intend to go back to my dragon form again until this Saracchi is defeated and we’re on our way back to the ruins.”

Once again Zefrit looked like he was about to say something, and this time the gold dragon prompted him to speak what was on his mind. Despite the silver-scaled creature looking increasingly nervous after he pawed the ground a few times and looked away his lips began to move once more. “Well… let’s say I did have a frame of reference for two dragons that turned back to elves before my eyes fairly recently,” Zefrit admitted. “Do you think that might help in the process?”

“You saw two dragons turn to elves recently?” Jalru asked as his eyeridges furrowed in slight confusion. “But how would you have seen that, the only ones you hang around have… been… us…” A mixture of embarrassment and fear was expressed on Zefrit’s face as the other dragon’s jaw dropped in shock. “You mean you watched Xralix and I when we… when I turned him back into Ryonir?”

“It wasn’t on purpose!” Zefrit quickly replied as he took another step back when he heard a growl come from the dragon’s throat. “I had started to walk back with Samiel when he made a comment that it would be interesting to see how you worked such a powerful spell and I got curious myself. When I had come back you two had already started and I just, I couldn’t find myself looking away.”

The sudden revelation that his romp with his mate while he casted the spell on him caused Jalru to dig furrows in the ground with his claws as he stared daggers at the other dragon. Zefrit continued to back away from the bigger dragon and Jalru could tell that the silver dragon regretted the admission, especially since he knew that the gold dragon wasn’t fond of sharing Xralix with anyone and especially not another dragon who had been in a prior relationship with him. When they had arrived in the ruins the first time after their adventure in the Frostward Vale both Xralix and Jalru made sure that Zefrit understood that the relationship that had been kindled wasn’t to continue, something that the gold dragon thought had been clearly received. All the anger and frustration that had been building in Jalru came bubbling to the surface and he soon found himself bearing his teeth at the smaller dragon.

But as Zefrit continued to plead that it had not been his intention and he would never do it again the fires inside of Jalru’s heart were staunched. As his body relaxed he realized that the trip had been hard on everyone involved and that he his rage was really directed towards the situation he was in. While it had been wrong for the silver dragon to watch when he was engaged in an extremely intimate act with his mate he was reminded that he had interjected himself between Zefrit and Ryonir when their relationship had started to bud. If Xralix hadn’t regained his memories then the two would have likely become a mated pair, and as the words of the werewolf he had spoken too earlier echoed in his mind he realized that part of his frustrations were probably coming from the fact that he couldn’t be with his love in any sort of fashion.

Zefrit could see the tension melt away on the other dragon’s face and asked Jalru if he was alright, to which the bigger dragon just shook his head. “I was just reminded of what Samiel had said to me a while ago and how the werewolf is far more observant than just his physical senses,” Jalru admitted. “I also realize that I’ve not been fair to you Zefrit, not only during this trip but also ever since I reentered Xralix’s life. As soon as I got my dragon back I immediately put my paw down and made it so that he would be only have feelings for me, and while I had been fine with Samiel’s relationship with Xralix I had pushed you away from him because I believed that if he was able to foster anything with you than… well…”

“Wait, you were worried that Xralix would leave me for you?” Zefrit replied in surprise.

“Not quite that,” Jalru said to clarify. “I feared that if Xralix indulged his relationship with you while he was with me that he would get a taste for it, which might prompt him to try and find others to do the same. There is no chance that I’m willing to be a part of some dread dragon harem, and though I though initially it was to protect him from reverting back to that old life of his it’s dawning on me that perhaps I was the one that was being selfish and trying to hoard his love for myself.”

It was a shockingly honest statement that had taken both dragons by surprise, but as Jalru brought his feelings into the open air he felt as though a weight had been lifted off of his chest. He hadn’t even seen it before this moment but he had been jealous of Zefrit’s previous relationship with his mate, and since Xralix had been Ryonir at the time he couldn’t get mad at him for engaging in it. He realized his treatment of the silver dragon had been a form of punishment for a crime that neither party was guilty of, and since he had done that he had not only hurt the silver dragon that protected his mate when he was at his most vulnerable but potentially stifled his mate’s growth as well. It was than he felt something drip down his muzzle and when he brought a paw to his face it occurred to him in that moment he had started to cry.

Just as he was bout to turn away Jalru let out a huff as Zefrit came up to him and wrapped his forepaws around him. He had to brace himself with his hind legs in order to not get knocked completely backwards as he was pounced by the other dragon, and as he steadied himself he felt the smaller silver-scaled forearms squeeze around him. “I’m sorry that I made you feel that way,” Zefrit stated as he continued the hug. “The last thing that I wanted you to do is feel sad because of me, to be honest I’ve just been happy that you and Xralix kept me around after he had regained his true identity. I thought that when you two got back together you wouldn’t want me in your lives at all since I was a reminder of Xarlix’s life as Ryonir.”

“I appreciate you saying that,” Jalru said, a smile forming on his muzzle before it fell away. “That’s why this is next part is going to be extremely difficult…” The silver dragon just tilted his head to the side in question as they broke the hug and Jalru sat back down while motioning for Zefrit to do the same. “The fact that you saw us like that may actually be the one thing that helps you get into this kingdom, but the idea I have makes me feel like such a hypocrite after everything we talked about.”

“Oh?” Zefrit said simply as he tiled his head to the side in confusion until a look of realization dawned on his face. “Oh… oh!” The dragon suddenly went from confused to anxious as he rubbed his forepaws together and looked in the direction of where they had left Ryonir and Samiel. “Are you sure about that?”

“If I transform with you while in the act it’ll trigger the memory you have of Xralix and I and will guide you along in your own polymorph,” Jalru explained between sighs. “Plus I can channel even more power into you and use an effect similar to the one that I did for him and that can aid you further, it really is the best chance that we have of you gaining your humanoid form so we The last thing I’m going to do is allow my selfishness to prevent us from moving forward, so as long as you’re fine with it than we should just bite the branch and do it and not waste any more time.”

Despite the assured nature that Jalru attempted to project the gold dragon felt his stomach get tied into knots from the proposition he had just made. Mere minutes ago he had gotten upset because Zefrit had merely watched him and Xralix, now as he watched the silver dragon slowly nod his head he was about to do the one thing that he had forbid both Zefrit and Xralix from doing. It made him wonder what he had done for fate to treat him so cruelly with its irony that the only way for them to move forward was the one thing he feared Zefrit and Ryonir would do behind his back. While he was sure the dread dragon would merely laugh at the situation and then reassure him that it was for the sake of the mission it didn’t make him any less comfortable about the idea as he used a bit of arcane energy to shrink his size to something more manageable while getting the smaller creature into position.

Even with his powers Jalru was still sizably bigger than Zefrit, but he could continue to shrink himself more dramatically once they began their lesson on polymorphing. Even though the gold dragon tried to reassure himself that this was only for the mission he still found himself getting aroused and instinctively licking his lips as the silver dragon presented himself to him. While it wasn’t the same as when he was with Xralix, the other dragon usually so big he had to practically crawl on top of him, the sight of the smaller dragon seemed to drive his dominant instincts just as high. As he got into position and slowly slid on top of the smaller male he could feel him tremble slightly and when he craned his neck around he could see that Zefrit’s erection throbbed hard between his legs.

“Now I know you’re going to want to focus on other things but I need you to concentrate on polymorphing,” Jalru said as he rested his body on top of Zefrit, giving the other dragon a chance to acclimate to his weight as well as the position they were in. “Just remember what you saw with me and Xralix and I will try to guide you along as best I can. This means of casting magic can be quite potent and it might be tempting to indulge in the more pleasurable aspects I need you to keep focus on the task at hand, alright?”

Once more Zefrit merely nodded, though for Jalru the pep talk was more for himself. He didn’t want to mention it to the silver dragon but with the time that they had been traveling had left him quite sexually flustered, and with no means of release until the mission was over it was part of the reason why he had been so ornery. Even though he rationalized that this was for the sake of the mission he couldn’t help but enjoy it as he slowly moved forward with his hind legs and began to press his own throbbing, ridged member against the exposed tailhole of the other male. While Jalru knew that Zefrit was no stranger to this type of penetration, both from when he had been with Ryonir just before the Frostward Vale and also from Samiel on occasion, it would be the first time that he had something a large as his draconic member inside of him.

After he slowly began to push the head of his cock inside of the dragon though he heard a hiss of displeasure from Zefrit and quickly pulled back while asking if he had gone too fast. “No, it’s not that,” Zefrit quickly responded as he saw the look of concern in Jalru’s eyes. “There’s actually something that Samiel told me about when he had sex with normal humans and elves while transformed into a werewolf, I think if I do that it’ll be easier to push in.”

Jalru found himself curious on what the technique could possibly be that the werewolf taught him and nodded his head, then moved back when Zefrit prompted and told him to get on his back. Was this some sort of new position, the gold dragon thought to himself as he carefully laid back on his folded wings. As Zefrit moved over there was a grin on his face and the earlier anxiety he had felt about the act seemed to have evaporated from the smaller dragon as he carefully slid up on Jalru’s stomach. The gold dragon’s cock was still hard as a rock and as Jalru watched his eyes widened slightly when Zefrit opened his mouth and began to lick the sensitive flesh.

It was something that Jalru had never done before with Xralix and as the thick, saliva-coated tongue continued lick up and down his quivering member. His hind legs kicked in the air and he found himself huffing loudly as the silver dragon continued his stimulation, even taking his muzzle and sliding his lips against the head of it. Though he tried to keep still he found himself squirming on the ground as the dragon’s maw stretched open and fully engulfed the head of his cock while that tongue continued to lick all around it. Jalru found his hips practically thrusting into the air and the pretense of their coupling being for purely altruistic reasons was almost completely forgotten.

Just when Jalru thought that he was going to orgasm Zefrit quickly pulled off until a single strand of saliva connected him to the shiny, wet cock that throbbed between his gold-scaled legs. It took a few seconds for him to recover and as he slowly got to his feet he heard the other dragon say that should be more than enough and went back over to resume the position. As Jalru got back onto his feet, careful to not let his hard maleness rub against the ground, the lust that was growing inside him was tinged with lust. He wasn’t supposed to be enjoying this, he thought to himself, and though the silver dragon had seemed to have gotten over the awkwardness of what they were doing the fact the act started to feel like two mates about to make love had caused him to frown slightly at his own arousal.

But time was wasting, Jalru told himself, and he quickly steeled himself and went over to where the other dragon waited for him. The gold dragon got back into position and once more pushed the head of his draconic dick into the tailhole of the male beneath him. Though he kept it slow and his pressure remained constant he worried he would hurt Zefrit once more, but when the saliva-slicked head popped past the ring of muscle the silver dragon let out a loud moan of pleasure and commented that it was much better. Jalru found himself chuckling despite everything before he once more adopted a stern look on his face and told Zefrit to focus once more.

Zefrit nodded and once more focused, closing his eyes to imagine the scene of Xralix and Jalru in the same situation as he felt the gold dragon continue to slowly slide inch after inch of the girthy member inside of him. It was much bigger than Ryonir had been even when he started to transform and even Samiel in his werewolf form couldn’t fill him like this did, and it only caused his own arousal to spike as both dragons tried to put the lust to the side to perform the arcane task. As Jalru tried to stay as slow as possible with his eventual thrusts he could see that Zefrit’s body began to subtly shift and his body start to shrink down. That caused Zefrit’s tailhole to clamp down even tighter on the draconic dick inside of him and Jalru manifested his own polymorphing to compensate, trying to keep the transformation as slow as possible to help the silver dragon continue to manifest his power.

For Zefrit the feeling of his organs shifting and his bones popping into new configurations had taken his attention away from the cock spreading him open, especially when his shoulders rolled back and he suddenly found his forepaws had turned to arms. It almost caused him to fall forward but Jalru was quick to catch him with his own limb, which had also start to lose the gold scales as the two turned back to humanoid forms. The sensation of Jalru’s shrinking cock was met with an equally bizarre sensation of feeling his tail get sucked into his own body, the flesh rippling as his wings did the same while on his back. Claws turned to fingernails and Zefrit found himself closing his eyes again as he felt the changes reach his shrinking head as his horns seemed to melt into his skull and he felt the hair on his head brush against skin instead of scales.

“It’s working,” Zefrit gasped as he was pulled up onto his new feet, wobbling a bit as his huge draconic paws were replaced with a normal pair of feet. Jalru’s hands had pressed against his barrel chest as it warped and morphed into a pair of pectorals, and even with his eyes closed he could tell that his body type was that of a lithe creature rather than overly muscular or large. The transforming gold dragon guessed that his default polymorph was going to be an elf or a human since he was mostly exposed to those types of creatures, his own body matching pace as he slid a hand down and stroked the shrinking cock of the other dragon and felt the shape shift between his fingers. “Jalru, we did it!”

Even though it was clear Zefrit got the hang of his polymorph ability Jalru continued to thrust inside of him, his hips pushing forward into the other elf as the finned ears of the silver dragon reformed into pointed ones and his scales began to disappear. As large patches of flesh appeared and they both stood there as naked humanoids Jalru arched back before slamming hard into the other elf, climaxing so hard it threatened to knock both of them over as he pushed his shrinking muzzle into Zefrit’s soft shoulder while his stomach pressed against he last nub of tail that disappeared. They had done it, Jalru thought to himself as they both panted heavily after Zefrit came as well from his new elf cock, though as he once more adopted the guise of Flynn he opened his eyes again and found them widening in surprise.

As Zefrit’s body settled down he also opened his eyes again to look down at himself, though as he saw the last of his own snout reform into the nose and lips of an elf what he found also shocked him slightly. He brought up his ebon hands and flexed the lean muscle that made up his forearms and biceps that bulged up the black skin. When he brought his hands to his fingers to his ears he knew he was an elf, just not one that typically dwelled on the surface. That fact was quickly dwarfed by his new humanoid body however and as Jalru pulled the softening cock out of him Zefrit had slid his hands down his new flat stomach and fondled his balls while giving his own member a squeeze.

“I’m beginning to understand the reason that the negotiations were taking so long with the drow,” Jalru said with a smirk as he used the cloth he had brought to wipe himself off before tossing it to Zefrit. “Is it one in particular that you’ve been having sex with?”

“Uh… how do you know that I’ve been having sex with one?” Zefrit replied with a sheepish grin on his face.

“Because the form that you most strongly associate with the act would have been the one you turned into while we rutted ourselves,” Jalru replied with a grin. “I had expected elf or human given Ryonir or Samiel, so the fact that you defaulted to a drow usually means that you have even stronger feelings for one of them than you do for those two.”

Zefrit just chuckled in slight embarrassment of being caught and slowly nodded his head, which caused his new long silvery white hair to cascade in front of his face. “His name is Dranthyis,” Zefrit admitted. “It’s not love or anything like that, but he said that he had never had sex with a dragon before and asked if I wished to oblige him so he could find out how it felt. When negotiations stalled we had a lot of free time together while we waited and he, uh, had a lot of things he wished to learn.”

“Nothing wrong with that,” Jalru replied as he tossed Zefrit some clothes before putting on his own. “In fact this may help us since there is a significant drow population that resides in the Burning Lily kingdom. You also inherit their physical abilities when you change into their form so having a drow in the team will be very handy indeed.”

Though Zefrit didn’t have a tail Flynn imagined it would be wagging as those new silver eyes of his practically glimmered as he told him they needed to get going. Even with Zefrit tripping a few times as he experienced walking on two legs they had to hurry in order to get back to the others so they could tell them they could go down into the city. As the former silver dragon got used to his new form Flynn watched him go from stumbling to jumping from rocks to logs, but while he smiled at the drow to reassure him inside his mind was in turmoil. Solved one problem but created another, Flynn thought to himself as he wondered what he would do with Ryonir now…

Chapter 6:

Samiel and Ryonir had sat on the side of the cliff and watched various caravans make their way into the city while the sun sank down towards the horizon nearby. While the Dragon Knight began to get nervous and asked Samiel if they should go back and check on them the werewolf merely shook his head and told him to wait. While the elf didn’t feel like Zefrit was being attacked or anything there was still a strange feeling that he got deep inside that something was going on. A look from his companion told him to not worry without saying anything and the two continued to sit there and formulate a plan for when they got into the city.

When the two heard the rustling of bushes behind them they saw Flynn emerge once more, but instead of a silver dragon crashing through as well they were surprised to find him alone. “It appears that we’re ready to go in undetected,” Flynn stated as the two got up from their resting spots and moved toward shim. “It took some coaxing but we managed to get Zefrit into a humanoid form so we don’t have a dragon waltzing though the city.”

“That’s great,” Ryonir said as he looked past the elf only to see no one there. “Where is he?”

“Right behind you,” a voice unfamiliar to the dragon knight whispered in his ear as he suddenly felt the presence of someone behind him, both he and Samiel spun around to find the drow elf standing there with a grin on his face and dressed in a simple tunic, pants, and shirt. “What do you think?”

“I think I’m really proud of you for being able to polymorph even when you hadn’t tried it before,” Ryonir praised as he went over with a smile and patted Zefrit on the shoulder. “I have to ask though what prompted you to choose a drow as your default? I know we’ve met some over our travels but Gildeon is too far away from their main capital and we’ve never gone there ourselves.”

“Oh, well, I happened to know a small settlement where I lived and really got to know them,” Zefrit quickly replied, Flynn trying not to sigh as the dragon wrapped up the lie of omission in the truth. “Plus the Burning Lily kingdom is surrounded by mountains and when I polymorphed for the first time my mind must have been thinking on that when it chose this form.”

“Well I’m just glad that you’ll be able to accompany us after all,” Ryonir stated. “When we get to the city we can buy you some new clothes that fit you a bit better and possibly a pair of goggles so you don’t get sun sickness like normal drow do when on the surface.” Everyone looked down at Zefrit and saw that the clothes originally belonged to the bigger Samiel hung on him loosely in most areas.

“I think my clothes fit him just fine,” Samiel replied with a slightly lustful tint to his voice, though a quick look from his alpha brought him back under control. “Anyway, we need to get down to the gates before they close them for the night? And will Zefrit be choosing a different name just like everyone-“

The werewolf suddenly coughed as Flynn moved over to him and elbowed him in the ribs hard enough to interrupt him before speaking up. “I think that won’t be necessary,” Flynn stated as he gave a sharp look to Samiel, who just gave him a wry smirk before he straightened back up. “But the werewolf is right that we need to get down to the town before the gates close if we want to stay the night somewhere that isn’t the wilderness, not to mention bandits tend to make runs of this area for unfortunate stragglers. We can all congratulate Zefrit on a job well done once we get inside and bed down for the night.”

The others gave nods of agreement and Ryonir continued to talk with Zefrit on how good he looked in his polymorph form, but as Samiel was about to trail behind him the elf held him by the arm to keep him further back while glaring at him. “What was that all about?” Flynn demanded. “We finally manage to get some progress on this mission and you say something like that? He’s already questioning our motives.”

“Oh, I just figured that after what you did in the woods with Zefrit that we didn’t concern ourselves with such things anymore,” Samiel snapped back, which caused Flynn to look at him in shock as the werewolf motioned for the two of them to move forward and catch up with the others. “Even if I couldn’t hear what you two were doing, which I did, I can smell it on the both of you as soon as you came back. So you wouldn’t take me up on my offer but you go decide to go with the one that aggravated you because Ryonir was making passes at him?”

The grin on Samiel’s face turned to a full smirk and though Flynn scowled back he found it hard to think of something to say back that didn’t try to justify the accusation that had just been levied at him. “It’s a long story but it ends with Zefrit needing to transform and us finding a solution to make it happen,” Flynn replied simply. “Once we get done with this mission I’ll tell the entire thing to Xralix and let him pass judgment as he sees fit.”

“I still don’t get what it is with you humans and elves,” Samiel stated with a slight laugh, Flynn looking forward to see that Ryonir and Zefrit were too engaged in their own conversation to notice. “Do you happen to notice anything about the group dynamic since the two of you got back? Not just the fact that we finally managed to get our silver dragon friend to be able to join us in cities, but something else that seems to be missing?”

Flynn looked between Samiel and the two in front and at first didn’t seem to catch what the werewolf is throwing at him, but as he watched the two continue to talk he did notice that there seemed to be something different about the atmosphere. It was as if a dark cloud that had been hovering over them had dissipated and everything felt lighter, including himself as they made their way down towards the main road that led into the city. As he noticed it he glanced over and saw Samiel merely walking alongside him with that smug look still on his face, not saying anything to the elf. He didn’t have to, Flyn realized as he heard Ryonir and Zefrit laugh, he knew exactly what had changed in the group that caused such a dynamic turn of mood.

It was him.

His anger and jealousy had been so oppressive that it had been demoralizing the group this entire time, Flynn thought to himself as he remained quiet. With the air cleared between him and Zefrit the drow elf, something that would take a few days to get his mind around, it had improved both their moods. Whether or not Ryonir picked up on that Flynn wasn’t sure, but as the Dragon Knight talked he saw him truly smile for the first time since they had started this trip. How strange that their entrance into hostile territory would come with the group being brought together, the elf archivist thought to himself as the four eventually got to the gate.

Flynn remained quite and the group instead focused on making their way through the guard checkpoint that sat at the front of the large iron doors that kept the city safe from attackers. Even though the sun had nearly set there was still a short line that had formed of stragglers that formed in front of the guard post and as the four made their way into it they worried that they wouldn’t get there in time. Fortunately it appeared that their late arrival meant the guards were a bit hurried with their checks and Ryonir hoped that they wouldn’t take a good look at his Dragon Knight armor that he had bundled in with the rest of the things in his bag. They didn’t want to take a chance on someone recognizing him like Kal had done when they arrived at one of the other towns and if they knew what happened it was possible the attempts to find him would only increase. A few more came into line after they did and when it got to their turn the guards merely asked who they were and what purpose they had for entering into the city, and after giving them the lie of being scouts for a new merchant trading caravan they were given little fuss and allowed inside.

With their arrival being so late in the night the group was met with people that were just packing up their wares to keep them safe from any potential thieves. As they walked down the main street and looked for the inn they could rest at they heard the loud sound of metal scrape against stone and turned back just in time to see the heavy gate doors close behind him. “Looks like we’re here for better or worse,” Flynn commented as they saw the guards mill about to secure the entrance further. “Welcome to the kingdom of the Burning Lily.”

“Not much we can do right now anyway but look for a place to sleep,” Ryonir said while they began to walk down the street once more. “One of the bigger inns, hopefully with a small communal sleeping room that we can all sleep together in while we try and find more information on this Saracchi dragon and a tavern attached to glean information. Not sure if we’re going to find one of those on a border town though.”

“With the landscape being as impassible as it is elsewhere everything funnels into these places so they have more inns to try and house the caravans that stop here for the night,” Samiel spoke up, pointing over to a larger building with a large wooden sign that had a wagon wheel on it. “There, the signage means that they cater to convoys and will probably have what you’re looking for alpha.”

“No alpha talk in the cities,” Ryonir quickly retorted in a hushed tone. “Remember that we’re a long way from home here and not sure on how the locals will respond to things like werewolves, Dragon Knights, and their disguised dragons. We’re just four scouts from the north that are looking for the fastest route to the capital, which means we have to act like it.”

It was a lie that they could easily get away with; most of the residence in the northern kingdoms were elves and very often they were used as scouts and caravanners for trade and supplies. In fact the only one that seemed to get looks every so often was the one that looked human in their group, which prompted him to draw up the hood of the cloak he wore. That only happened at the edge of the town and by the time they had gotten to the inn itself they were mostly surrounded by humans as well with a few elves and drow that mingled about and even a few orcs that mingled about. The green-skinned men and women were something that none of the group had really seen in the city before and that was definitely an indicator that they were closer to the areas where their clans and cities were.

That made for a very rowdy tavern as the four opened the door to the inn that Samiel had pointed out and the four stood there as they saw everything from gambling to fighting that was going on between the convoy crews. With all the kingdoms being in relative peace for so long there wasn’t any need to worry about banner brawls or someone drawing ire for being from the wrong place, instead the groups bonded over their mutual love of travel and coin as they saw people other than those in their own caravan for the first time in probably weeks. It made their group blend in a bit more with their surroundings but came with the drawback that if all these people were fresh in the city it meant they probably didn’t know anything about the situation that was happening within the Burning Lily kingdom. Since the night was still young it didn’t hurt to try though and after getting their room and reminding Samiel not to wolf out on anyone they set him loose as well as separated to gather information.

For the next few hours Ryonir had participated in games of chance as well as ate and drank with others but as he had thought anytime he mentioned anything about a dragon or an ancient artifact they either only knew the existence of the dragon or nothing at all. He didn’t want to press the matter with it being the first day in the kingdom and also didn’t want the information to spread that someone was looking, so he had to be very careful on how and when he asked. Most of those he inquired too didn’t seem to notice however and eventually moved on to just making small talk with the others to keep suspicions down. As he talked to a group of orc and elves that had brought in a shipment of copper ingots though his eye caught Flynn and Zefrit talking to one another in a corner by themselves.

At least it was good that they seemed to be getting along a little better, Ryonir thought to himself as he took another drink of the ale that had been purchased for him by the group. He didn’t know why the two had sparked such friction with one another during their travels from the jungle ruins but it appeared that they had buried the hatchet. It wasn’t his place to get involved between their personal affairs but he was thankful that there was some resolution, even if he didn’t know what the problem was between the archivist and his disguised draconic companion. As he continued to talk to the other convoy about the mine they worked from he had lost track of the two until he felt a poke on his shoulder and looked up to see Zefrit looking down at him with those silver eyes of his.

“Hey, did you want to head back to the room?” Zefrit asked after he gave a small nod of his head to those that Ryonir had been talking too.

“If you want to go up you can,” Ryonir replied as he swirled around the half-emptied contents of his mug. “Once I’m done here I can join you guys up in the room.”

“Actually it would probably be better if you had someone accompany you up there,” Zefrit said hastily, leaning in to speak to obfuscate his words from the others. “Wouldn’t want what happened last time to repeat itself, right?”

Ryonir frowned slightly as he remembered the encounter with Kal in the empty room and knew that with their proximity to the Burning Lily it was only more possible that there would be others like him around. He agreed and took a few more swallows before he set the mug down and thanked the others for the drink, then went up towards the stairs that led to all the rooms. Once the two had gotten upstairs Zefrit opened the door and stepped inside, looking around before he motioned for Ryonir to follow. The elf just chuckled slightly at watching his companion checking for threats to the life of a Dragon Knight as he walked in and had the door shut behind him.

The room was a little larger than most inns and they were fortunate to snag one of the last ones that had four beds in it, which allowed for them all to stick together until they moved on to their next location. Until they figured out where the dragon was located and whether or not he had this artifact they couldn’t really move forward unless they wanted to try and go to the capital for more information. He also noticed that Samiel and Flynn weren’t there either as Zefrit went over and checked the window as well. Ryonir smiled and asked if the drow wasn’t being a little too paranoid about things, which only prompted Zefrit to look back at him with a blank expression before he moved back over towards the corner of the room the Dragon Knight had claimed for himself.

“One can’t be too careful when you get into the belly of the beast,” Zefrit stated simply as he sat down next to him. “Plus someone already tried once, what’s to stop them from doing it again? They clearly don’t want Dragon Knights to be in their business and if that Kal failed in his attempt to persuade the others and identified you to them than you aren’t safe at all.”

“Well I certainly appreciate the concern,” Ryonir said as he patted Zefrit on the back. “Also now that we have some down time I wanted to ask if you are enjoying your time here in the city with us. First time you polymorphed and everything, I can imagine its strange walking around on two legs without your tail and wings bumping into things.”

“It certainly does take some getting used to,” Zefrit replied, giving Ryonir a small smile before it faded as he looked down. “Listen, Ryonir, I know that things have been a little weird between us lately and I wanted to try and clear the air around us before we get too far into this mission we’re on. I know that we started something after the Frostward Vale and since then you’ve been looking at seeing if it went further, and I sort of been freezing you out on that sort of thing.”

Ryonir couldn’t help but open his mouth slightly in shock as Zefrit seemed to be opening up to him for the first time in a while, which was strange when he looked into the face of his draconic companion and saw that of a dark elf instead to try and read his emotions. “You have been quite a bit cold to me since I tried to rekindle things,” Ryonir replied. “It’s a strange time to bring this up though… wait, is that what you were talking to Flynn about? Is our potential relationship what had been causing you two to not get along?”

“Something like that, though it’s really hard to explain…” Zefrit said as he looked away slightly, then turned back and looked straight into Ryonir’s eyes. “In any case I want to let you know that if you want to try again I’m ready now, or if you think that the moment has passed and you just want to be friends I’m fine with that too.”

As Ryonir felt the slender hands of the drow wrap around his own the Dragon Knight felt his heart skip a beat and wondered what could have possibly gone on that turned his companion around like that. Somewhere in the back of the mind the idea sprung to life that there was something with Flynn that had been preventing him until that moment, but he found it hard to think of why his friend would want him to not be involved with Zefrit. There were plenty of Dragon Knights that had relationships with their draconic companions, while it wasn’t common it did happen whether it was for love or lust. He was also surprised that the silver dragon had taken so much stock in what his friend thought about them being together and especially enough that he didn’t reveal it to him.

Even though Zefrit wasn’t a dragon when they continued to hold each other’s hand the feelings that came up was as if they had picked up right where they left off at the Frostward Vale. Ryonir had practically given up that they could explore this further and had planned to avoid even talking about it until after the mission was completely, but it appeared he wouldn’t have to wait as they leaned in and kissed one another. While he enjoyed the scaly lips of his dragon form the mouth that he pressed against was much easier to maneuver around and soon the two had started to feel their lusts for one another rise again. That wasn’t the only thing though as the thin fabric of the pants of the drow began to tent along with the dragon knight, though Ryonir already knew that Zefrit was definitely into him by the tongue that was being practically jammed down his throat.

Ryonir slid his hands up the dark chest of Zefrit he felt something brush against his finger, something that caused him to lean back and take off the shirt of the drow. When he looked down he saw a shiny gold tooth that hung from his neck and realized that Zefrit had taken his advice and used it to get him to polymorph. There was something strange about seeing it around his neck, but before he could say or ask anything about it he was pushed down against the bed and felt the lithe body slide on top of him. Zefrit quickly made a move to take off Ryonir’s shirt and feel their bare chests pressed against one another with only the cool metal of the artifact between them while they once more began to kiss each other.

Just then a loud bang at he door caused them both to bolt upright, only to find that it had been Samiel bursting through with a drunken grin on his face. “Don’t you two stop on my account,” Samiel said with a slur on his voice. “Surprised to see you on bottom Alpha, maybe after he gets done with you we can have a round.”

The two just watched while still in one another’s arms the werewolf stumbled towards his own bed and flopped down onto it, and as he laid there he could see that his ears had become slightly pointed and a thin tail had started to grow. “Well that sort of killed the mood,” Zefrit said with a sigh as he leaned back up and brushed the hair from his face. “Flynn was supposed to keep him down in the tavern but it appears the werewolf had eluded him. But it’s good to know how you feel, if we can find somewhere private maybe we can go dragon as some point.”

“Yeah, I suppose you’re right,” Even though Ryonir was still hard as a rock the snoring creature on one of the other beds did make it hard for him to keep enthused even though the werewolf was passed out and he had slept with him before. “We’ll talk about this later, and… I’m happy that you finally managed to get over whatever was happening. It actually makes me feel better to hear that things are getting back to normal.”

Zefrit leaned down and gave Rynoir one last kiss before he moved over to the bed on the other side of the room. As Ryonir watched the half-naked drow move around he couldn’t help but bite his lip, appreciating the polymorphing skill of his companion and hoping they would have some time soon to inspect it more closely. Before the disguised dragon turned back to see him gawking he turned and laid on his back, feeling the smile on his face grow wider as he thought about how lucky he was actually going to have a chance with the other guy. As he fell asleep though he still found himself wondering why Flynn was getting involved with his love life in the first place…

Chapter 7:

The next morning the four in the group awoke in their separate beds, Samiel half-draped over his bed as he let out a very lupine whine despite being in his human form. The werewolf had somehow managed to shift partially back though as his ears and tail were present on his otherwise human body as Flynn and Zefrit looked over him while they shook their heads. The two elven men turned to see that Ryonir had already been up when they awoke as well, but unlike their hungover companion he had put on a set of leathers that would act as his armor for the time being and placed a small sword against his hip. It appeared to the other two that the Dragon Knight had been reinvigorated as he greeted them both with a small smile on his face before telling them that they should get ready to scout.

The border town was bustling with activity as most of the merchants that the four had talked with the previous night were ready to make their way further into the kingdom, most of them heading towards the capital itself that was nestled in a crevice where the two mountain ranges of the kingdom intersected. There was speculation that one of the ancient volcanos that created the valley, as well as the fertile land that lay within it, was built next to the capital itself. While that would have prompted the four to go in that direction to try and find the red-scaled fire dragon Samiel knew that there were a number of volcanic vents and hot spots that littered the area that such a creature could call home. Before they went traveling all over the countryside they needed to get more information, and as they left their werewolf companion to sleep off his drinking the remaining three went out to see if they could find caravans coming in from the Burning Lily kingdom to get any rumors.

“I think we should look to the merchant’s guild first,” Flynn stated as they walked down the busy street while trying not to bump into anyone. “All those that are going out of the kingdom have to stop there first to pay their dues and taxes, so we won’t have to weed through those that are coming in.”

“That’s a sound plan…” Zefrit said as he continued to cover his eyes with his hands, hissing in displeasure every time they came out of a shadow and the sun hit him. “How do drow even travel on the surface like this? Every time light hits my eyes its like someone is putting needles into them.”

“They don’t,” Flynn explained simply. “They are normally outfitted with special gear to move freely through the sun, and to be honest the fact you don’t have any of it makes you look very out of place. Ryonir, why don’t you go ahead and take our new dark elf friend shopping while I go to the merchant’s guild? I doubt there’s going to be anything that requires the three of us to go and hunt down information and we can make sure that Zefrit blends in better with his surroundings.”

Ryonir nodded and took Zefrit over towards the main outfitter’s square, a place where caravans went to get supplies and try to sell any extra goods so they could lighten their loads on the way home. With Flynn separated from them the Dragon Knight did feel a bit out of place as he looked around wearily while guiding the half-blind drow in his care. Every time someone looked at it him it felt like they knew who he was and why he was there, but without his armor and cloak he looked like just another mercenary, or at least he was supposed to. He just reminded himself the sooner that they could gear Zefrit with clothes for disguise the better, and then he would just need to get him something to hold it in for when he shifted back and forth.

It didn’t take long for them to find a store that sold drow merchandise, with the owner himself being one that looked Zefrit over as soon as they got in. “Welcome to my humble shop,” the drow said, his purple eyes flitting between the two of them before they settled on the drow. “Oh my, it’s rare that I see a surface dweller of our kind that is so ill-prepared, did you get robbed on the road? This one isn’t trying to sell you or something, is he?”

“I, well, I was robbed, yeah,” Zefrit replied after he had looked over to Ryonir before going back to the shopkeeper. “Ryonir here found me naked near the side of the road, if he hadn’t come along when he did I might have been done for. He loaned me a set of clothes too.”

“Sounds like quite the harrowing experience,” the drow replied as he once more glanced at them both before he gave them a smile. “My name is Yuan, and if you need any help picking anything out than just let me know. It really isn’t the season for drow caravans so we’re a bit slow and I don’t mind lending a hand.”

Ryonir gave Yuan a small nod before he led Zefrit over towards the line of clothing that was made for drow on the surface. As the disguised dragon looked through the merchandise Ryonir continued to keep a weary eye on the shopkeeper as well as the door itself to make sure that no one had followed them in. He wasn’t quite sure why he was feeling such paranoia, except for the one incident that happened with the assassin, which admittedly was a rather big deal, they hadn’t run into any other trouble and he didn’t see anything that pointed to a group against the Dragon Knights. As he had time to think his thoughts began to trail back down towards the root of his confusion on why there were those against his organization in general; since he was just tracking down an artifact he believed it couldn’t be him, but if that wasn’t it than why was Kal’s group on such high alert?

Part of him wished that Gildeon would respond to the missives that Flynn had sent them, Ryonir thought to himself as he sat there, but he had already sent a few inquiries about possible dread dragon activity in the area through message spells and only got the usual response. There was also the matter of his team; despite their bridges being mended between those within it still felt like the group was hiding something from him, though every time he found himself focusing on it his thoughts were distracted by something else. As he looked over at Zefrit trying on a cloak that would reflect the sun off of him he wondered if perhaps he could talk to him now that they were alone once more. The last time had been about their relationship and was interrupted by a drunk werewolf, but with the ice thawing on their feelings for one another perhaps the dragon would tell him if there was something going on.

As Ryonir got up to go over to Zefrit, who had attempted to put on a set of dark blue-tinted goggles only to have put them on upside down, he suddenly felt himself get knocked to the side by the Yuan who had an armful of clothes. “Excuse me,” the drow said as he walked by and put them down on a nearby table. “Sorry, these rows can be rather tight and this pile of leather is for those who wish to brave the desert lands to the southwest.”

“It’s fine,” Ryonir replied as he brushed himself off. “Listen, it seems my friend here is almost done, do you mind if we settle payment now so we can leave right away?”

“I think we can do that,” Yuan replied with a smile as he gestured towards a door that was half-hidden by a pile of black-leather backpacks. “Why don’t you come have a seat in my office while he finishes up, that way we can sit and discuss how much you owe me. Plus it might do well for you to have a rest, you’re looking a little pale.”

Ryonir was about to respond that he was fine when he started to feel the room spin slightly, and when he put his hand to his head he could feel a light sheen of sweat that hadn’t been there before. He found himself swallowing hard as he merely nodded and walked his way over towards the door with the drow. Just as he got to the door he felt the strength momentarily leave his body that made him weak in the knees. Yuan quickly caught him and brought him back to his feet, and as Ryonir felt himself struggle slightly he could hear Zefrit in the background ask if he was alright. Sweat had started to drip down the elf’s face but as he was brought into the office the one that escorted him there said that they were just going in to finish payment before he practically dragged Ryonir inside and closed the door.

As soon as the lock clicked into place Ryonir felt himself get pushed forward and stumbled into the desk, knocking over several rolls of parchment before he was grabbed by the shoulder and tossed into a nearby chair. “I have to say that I’m rather impressed with your constitution,” Yuan said as he reached over and grabbed the blade that hung on Ryonir’s belt before tossing it aside. “Most that I give that particular poison to would be flat on their back already, of course if you’ve been around my home country long enough perhaps this isn’t your first dose.”

Poison… even as it became harder for the elf to do anything but sit there his mind raced as he wondered how Yuan had managed to do that. It had to have been when he bumped into him, but the contact had been so brief it was hard to believe that he could have stuck him with a needle or applied it to his exposed skin. Yet it was clear he was under the effect of some sort of toxin as his body slumped forward slightly, only for Yuan to grab him under his armpits and hoist him back up before strapping a belt around his waist to keep him from falling. Fortunately Dragon Knights had a resistance to such things as poisons since some of the dread dragons specialize in its production, but whatever Yuan used on him was enough to pack a solid punch that had rendered him nearly paralyzed as he focused on his breathing to make sure it didn’t stop.

“I’m actually glad that you managed to survive,” Yuan continued on as he went to the other side of the desk and sat down, taking off his goggles and blowing out the candle in the room to surround them in darkness. “Now I can ask you a few questions that I’ve been meaning to ask since I started seeing your little group operating around here. The biggest is what have you done with that drow in your care and what are your plans for him?”

At first Ryonir had thought his abduction had to do with being a Dragon Knight, but as he stared into the darkness he thought back to the initial question that Yuan had asked him and shook his head as best he could. “Zefrit… not a slave…” Ryonir managed to say, though every word was a struggle as he had to put the breath behind it to vocalize the words. “I’m not… a slaver…”

“Just because you aren’t intending on selling him into slavery to one of our more barbaric neighboring kingdoms doesn’t mean you mean ill for him,” Yuan replied, Ryonir hearing the bite of anger in his voice. “This isn’t the first time that I’ve seen a clearly addled drow being drawn around like a dog on a leash, it just happens you were the first to enter into my shop. Now you are going to tell me the truth on what you did to that poor boy out there or I’m going to just stab you in the heart and try again with the next one that I happen to run across.”

Ryonir tried to think fast to put the pieces of this puzzle that had been suddenly dropped onto his lap before the drow made good on his promise as he could feel the intense stare of the other man on him. It was clear that Zefrit didn’t fool the actual drow, which made sense because he had been one for only a day despite hanging around them and it often took years for a polymorphed dragon to get the mannerisms of a certain race down, but instead of thinking that he was disguised Yuan believed he had him under some sort of mind control spell to make him act that way. But if that was the case that mean Yuan had seen those who acted in a similar manner, which may possibly have something to do with the artifact they were looking for. He remembered Flynn saying that it had properties that could manipulate the minds of others, and if they looked like a drow that didn’t act like a drow than perhaps this person could lead them in the right direction.

The first thing that Ryonir had to do though was get out of this interrogation alive, and though he couldn’t see the drow moving he could hear that the other man had gotten up. With the poison still coursing through his system it made it hard for the Dragon Knight to think of what to do, though it was being flushed out of his system through copious amounts of sweat it wasn’t enough for him to do anything physical and he had the feeling Yuan wouldn’t like any answer he provided. As he felt the tip of a blade begin to push against his chest he opened his mouth to speak only for a sudden crash to illuminate the drow that hovered over him as he turned to see the door opened and a silver scaled creature catapult towards him. Both Yuan and Zefrit crashed into the desk and flipped it over as the dragon immediately smacked the blade out of the hand of the drow before opening his jaws to bite down on his assailant’s head.

“Zefrit, wait!” Ryonir shouted as the dragon stopped inches from Yuan’s face, the dark elf bracing himself only to look up to rows of sharp teeth that glistened from the saliva that dripped down them onto his face. “We have a serious case… of a misunderstanding here.” With the strength quickly returning to his limbs Ryonir undid the belt that had kept him upright against the chair, though he had to catch himself as he got vertigo before he went to try and put the damaged door back into place.

“I think we do,” Yuan managed to reply as he wheezed from the hefty scaled paw that kept him pinned to the chair. “You’re a Dragon Knight, aren’t you?”

“Depends,” Ryonir said as he slowly moved back and sat on the tipped over desk to look at the drow, though his replacement of the door meant everything went dark again Zefrit conjured a ball of light in order to illuminate the room so he could see. “Do you have a problem with the Dragon Knights being in the Kingdom of the Burning Lily?”

“Of course not,” Yuan quickly replied, his eyes remaining fixated on the dragon that was on top of him as Zefrit continued to bare his teeth. “I have no problems with dragons or their companions, at least none that aren’t trying to slowly squeeze the life out of me. If your friend here wants to transform back I promise that I will try nothing further against you, and if you detect even the slightest hint of deception you can rip me limb from limb.”

That was enough for Ryonir and he gave a nod to Zefrit, who slowly backed off of the one that he had tackled and helped the elf sit down as the drow pushed his own chair back up to have a seat himself. Once the initial tension of the moment dissipated Yuan explained that he used to be a spy for one of the kingdoms to the North but had decided to give up the life and settle down to open a shop. Despite that old habits died hard and he had began to notice unusual activity in the area, namely caravans that came from the capital city had people in them that behaved in an odd manner. It wasn’t just those that looked to be dazed or completely out of it, those that accompanied them acted suspicious and unlike most of the caravan guards tended to keep to themselves.

Zefrit and Ryonir continued to make eye contact with one another as Yuan explained the activity he saw and had prompted him to attack the Dragon Knight. Through the natural link they shared, the same one that had prompted to Zefrit there was a problem in the first place, the feeling they had was mutual that this was possibly the artifact they had been hunting after. Since Yuan already knew their affiliation and seemed not to care they told him about the dread dragon that they were hunting down and the artifact as well as they helped straighten up the office the silver dragon had practically destroyed with his attack. As they got the desk back into place the poison had completely left Ryonir and he could feel his clothes dripping as he stood there in the mostly restored area.

“I do want to apologize again for the misunderstanding,” Yuan said as he saw Ryonir try to wring out his clothes. “Let me outfit your dragon, or rather your drow, for you free of charge as my way of saying sorry and to help you catch the bastards that are selling off my kind as well as others. I think I have a few elven clothes for you as well, I generally don’t buy them but sometimes I get a good deal and if someone orders them I’m prepared.”

As Zefrit mentioned he had already picked out a small pile of stuff that he had dropped to the floor the other two stopped him before he tried to leave, Yuan stepping forward and saying he would get everything for them and to just wait in his office. “He seems nice enough,” Zefrit said as he tried to wiggle into a position that wouldn’t knock anything over with his large body after they watched the drow slam the office door to make sure it didn’t fall over. “Are you sure we can trust him with all this?”

“He’s the best lead we have,” Ryonir replied. “If there is an increase in the slave trade, which is illegal in the Burning Lily, than its possible a dread dragon with an artifact is behind it. Not only would it expand his hoard but if he had plans to spread his influence it would make sense to get those slaves with people of power that believe they’re in control when it’s really this Saracchi, and from what I dealt with when it came to that assassin Kal the mental fogginess does track.”

“That’s terrible,” Zefrit said as he shook his head. “We need to find this dragon as soon as possible and stop him.”

“From what Yuan said it seems that they’re coming mostly from the capital,” Ryonir said as he began to take off the wet leather armor and tunic underneath. “All signs are starting to point in that direction, and that seems as good a place to go as any to find the source of this corruption. It’s likely if this dragon has been manipulating things he would go there in order to get the greatest amount of concentrated power, at least that’s what I would do if I was a dread dragon.”

Zefrit laughed at that and when Ryonir turned to him in slight confusion he just stated he thought that was funny before he began to shift back into his drow form. It was the first time that Ryonir got to see it and as he did he couldn’t help but watch as scales turned to black flesh as the dragon quickly shrank in size. As he watched Zerfit happened to turn his head back towards him, and as their gaze met he could see a smirk form on the shrinking muzzle of the creature as Ryonir saw the transforming dragon’s eyes wander downwards. The elf blushed when he saw that he had started to become aroused from watching the creature change in front of him, especially when the silver dragon pulled himself upwards and let his thick legs shift into a bipedal configuration.

“I didn’t think that I could get more turned on than when you’re a dragon,” Ryonir said as he closed the distance between them, his lusts getting the better of him as the other creature still towered head and shoulders above him. “There is something very sensual about watching you change back, it’s like you’re going slow on purpose for me.”

“Maybe I am,” Zefrit replied as he voice increased in pitch as he lost a few inches while his tail pulled up into his spine. “I think I will speed up just a little bit for this though.” When the dragon lost more height they were close enough that the two shared a kiss, Ryonir letting out a soft moan as he could still feel the scales on the lips of his draconic companion. When Ryonir wrapped his arms around Zefrit he could feel his wings folding in and merging with the rest of his body, though as he looked down he saw that one thing had kept its relative size. Both men couldn’t help but snicker even as they kissed as the silver dragon’s huge member slid up almost to the Dragon Knight’s pectorals as they rubbed up against one another.

The two continued the embrace until there was a pounding at the door that reminded the two naked creatures that they were in the office of someone else, and as Yuan tried to get the broken piece of wood open without breaking the frame further the two quickly separated. With no means for either of them to hide their erections Zefrit hid his mostly transformed body behind the desk while Ryonir pressed his cock between his legs and used his hands to keep it down as they heard the sound of wood creak loudly. Yuan came in with clothing around his arms and when turned back after practically jamming the door back into place he could see the two in their positions and smirked slightly.

“I can sense that I just walked in on something rather personal,” Yuan said, which prompted both Zefrit and Ryonir to speak in unison with their excuses before Yuan waved his hand. “Relax, I don’t care as long as you didn’t break my desk any further than you did. It is a shame though.”

“A shame?” Ryonir repeated as a pile of clothes was dropped into his lap before Yuan moved to Zefrit. “Why do you say that.”

“Because part of the reason I wanted to rescue this one is because he was quite cute,” Yuan replied with a smirk as he looked around the desk at the naked drow, which prompted him to laugh when Zefrit covered himself with his hands. “Exotic too, be interesting to be with a dragon. Alas, it seems that you two are more than just companions, though for some reason there is something that bothers the two of you about this relationship.”

“Oh, we just had a rocky start is all,” Ryonir stated as he waved a hand dismissively while he put on the clothing that was provided for him.

“No, I can see it in your eyes especially that there is something that bothers your greatly about being with him,” Yuan said as he stared at Ryonir, whose mouth opened slightly in shock at the accusation. “I was a spy for quite a few years before I decided to leave and I knew which marks I could manipulate either socially or physically, and I’m telling you right now that when you look at Zefrit there is great concern there. Normally I would find that in a partner who looked as though they wanted to cheat on their significant other with me, but as I’m explaining this to you it looks like you’re getting more confused than anything else.”

“Anyway,” Zefrit interrupted as he put on the deep blue cloak that he had picked out earlier. “I think we have more pressing matters at the hand than our personal relationship?” Though Ryonir had wanted to ask Yuan what he meant he knew his companion was right, they needed to stop this dread dragon and retrieve the artifact as soon as possible. It was the responsibility of a Dragon Knight after all and after the two had finished getting dressed, Yuan helping Zefrit with his goggles after he had put them on backwards once more, before they bolted in the office door for the last time after they had all exited the office.

“Thanks for the gear and not killing me,” Ryonir said as he shook the hand of the drow while Zefrit paced slightly behind him. “If you could just point us in the direction where you saw the most unusual activity then we can try and make sure that whatever you’re seeing doesn’t happen to anyone else.”

“Well you’re new to this city, right?” Yuan asked, the two nodding their head in response. “Thought so. Come on, I’ll show you where I usually see them milling about, don’t need you getting lost and end up in the wrong part of town.”

“Are you sure?” Zefrit asked. “What about your shop?”

“I already told you that it’s the off-season for drow caravans,” Yuan replied as he motioned for them to follow him out of the store as he flipped the sign from open to close. “As you have already seen I’m more than willing to kill for this, so I think closing my shop down for a while to help you get to the heart of the matter is nothing special. Plus having a dark elf that actually knows about things and isn’t a dragon playing pretend might help you more than you think.”

Though the last thing Ryonir wanted was to bring more people into this he knew that he didn’t have a choice, not unless he wanted to wander around aimlessly hoping to catch a glimpse of what Yuan was talking about. The two agreed with the drow and the three made their way out of the plaza and back into the main street that connected the inner gate with the outer one. It was the biggest road in the entire city and was where the bulk of the caravan traffic went, and as they crossed over and went down the road Ryonir and Zefrit saw that there were a number of caravans parked around a particularly large building. When the two realized what it was they stopped dead in their tracks, which prompted Yuan to turn and look at them when he saw that they no longer followed him.

“What’s wrong?” Yuan asked as he saw the two stare at the front entrance of the building.

“That’s the merchant’s guild hall, isn’t it,” Ryonir said.

“Yeah, you’ve been there already?” Yuan asked again.

“Nope…” Zefrit said as Ryonir sighed. “But someone we know is in there right now… asking about this…”

Chapter 8:

Once Zefrit and Ryonir realized that the building that Yuan had seen all the suspicious activities at was the same one that Flynn was going to investigate they immediately ran back to the inn in order for the Dragon Knight to get his proper equipment and to drag Samiel out of his bed. To their surprise the werewolf was already up and had been going around the tavern for another round of intel before the three of them caught up to him. After a quick introduction of Yuan to Samiel they got Ryonir’s armor on and disguised it as best they could before they made their way back towards the merchant’s guild. If the dread dragon or the artifact had taken over an intrical hub of the border city then they were probably going to protect it, which not only meant that Flynn was in trouble but there was serious resistance to be expected when they went in themselves.

As Ryonir put on the last of his armor he had a moment where he wondered where this intense fear for Flynn’s safety was coming from that clutched his chest. While he wanted nothing more than to save his friend there was something else that seemed to gnaw at the back of his mind, an urgency that seemed to be pushing him to go faster in order to save him. It took every ounce of his willpower in order to make sure that he didn’t just run in and start slashing at everything, especially since he had on his actual armor that marked him as a Dragon Knight. Yet as he went back down to the inn to gather the others and go to the merchant guild hall that was exactly what he wanted to do.

Leave a bloody trail of bodies from the door to Flynn.

To burn the place to ash if they hurt him.

It was feelings that threatened to overwhelm his better senses but as he saw Zefrit it must have shown on his face and the silver dragon told him that everything was going to be alright. Having his draconic companion there was like a balm that calmed him down as the four of them went down the road. As they walked they were surprised when Yuan asked if he could join them, and when they asked why he said that it was something that he wanted to see through to the end to stop them from hurting others. Ryonir didn’t sense any sort of deception in the drow and told him he was more than welcome to come along, which caused Yuan to grin as they made their way towards the back of the building.

When they got around to the neighboring house and turned the corner they could see that the back door to the merchant’s guild had a single guard at it. Since it was the middle of the day they were conducting business on both sides and this was where caravans dropped off their dues and fees, which meant less need for security on the outside and more for what was being stored within. Even though that was their way in they had no means to go through that door; in order to use that entrance they would need trading papers, a duty roster, as well as a merchant’s seal. When they turned back around to stay out of sight from the guard Ryonir asked if anyone had an idea of how to get through, only for Yuan to raise a finger and prompt them to wait before they watched him walk out of sight.

“You sure you can trust this one?” Samiel asked once Yuan was out of earshot.

“We wouldn’t have this lead if it wasn’t for him,” Ryonir stated. “If it wasn’t for him we might have looked for Flynn and wound up in the same trap that he might have sprung, especially since he hadn’t come back to the inn yet.”

“He also poisoned you,” Zefrit was quick to jump in. “I know he gave us this gear for free but if you weren’t a Dragon Knight you probably would have died.”

“Then I guess it was just lucky that I am a Dragon Knight,” Ryonir replied in a soft voice. “Either way if this drow has a means to get us into this building without raising alarms I’m willing to take it. The merchant’s guild is going to be heavily connected to the guards in this town and even if they aren’t a part of this they’re going to believe whatever the guild says over a bunch of people that tried to break into the building.”

Samiel merely shrugged his shoulders but Zefrit appeared unconvinced, though Ryonir couldn’t blame him after the close call they had at the blade of the other drow. Even though it was a misunderstanding it didn’t change the fact that he had almost died twice since they left the jungle for this mission. It was part of the duty of a Dragon Knight to put his life on the line, but he just imagined that it would be against the dragon itself rather than the journey to get to him. Ryonir didn’t have much time to think about it though as Yuan suddenly reappeared once more with a large bag in one hand and a small leather pocketbook in the other.

“What’s this?” Ryonir asked as he was handed the pocketbook while Yuan pushed the bag off on the other drow. When the Dragon Knight opened it he saw that there were a number of pieces of parchment in it that looked like a caravan manifest, complete with merchant seal stamped on it. “Where did you get all this?”

“Just because I’m out of the game doesn’t mean that I don’t like to keep practice,” Yuan replied with a small smile as he took back the pocketbook and flipped through the pieces of parchment. “They’re forgeries that I had made a while back to help someone that needed a job, turned out they didn’t need them though. I just made a few adjustments for us and it should get us past the guard, though any scrutiny from an actual member of the guild is going to see that they’re fakes so you’ll need to have a plan after we pass.”

Ryonir looked over the papers that he had been shown and knew that if it was him checking he would never have known the difference that they were fake. A sharp-eyed member of the guild would probably catch something though, it was what they were trained to do after all. For a guard though it would do just fine as they took a few seconds to get their stories straight. Once everyone was on the same page they decided to make their move and went towards the back entrance of the guild.

The second they entered into the range of vision with the guard Ryonir could feel his eyes examine him, especially when the others came up behind him. “Alright, state your business,” the guard said once they had gotten up to him, Ryonir handing him the papers that Yuan had provided for him. “Merchant dues huh, you exiting or entering the Kingdom?”

“Entering,” Ryonir replied. “My crew and I have a bit of a time crunch in order to get to our supplier so we would like to make sure we get out of here on time. I trust there will be no delays?”

“There are already a couple of caravans that are ahead of you,” the guard said before Ryonir took a pouch of coins and slipped them into the hand of the other man. “But I think that we can make an exception for you, go ahead and pay your tithe and inspection fees.”

Ryonir nodded and looked at the others, then walked inside the building. A variety of smells hit the elf’s nose as they walked inside as they went into the room and looked around. Not only was all the tithes processed through this place but they used it for storage to caravans that have excess material or that the guild sells through its own vendors. Leather, food, even steerage could be smelt despite he room being completely empty as they looked around for where to go next.

Just as they started to debate which doors they should try out first Samiel grabbed onto Ryonir and gave him a look of concern. When the Dragon Knight asked the werewolf what was wrong he leaned in and whispered that there was another smell that he sensed among the others. It was the smell of blood, and it wasn’t something that was supposed to be in a merchant’s guild or any other building in the border town. The others let Samiel take the lead as his nose darkened in order to enhance his perceptions even more.

It naturally led them to an area that was protected as well with another set of guards that were sitting at the landing that led downstairs. There was no reason for guards to protect anywhere inside the guild since it should just be guild members on the inside, and to Ryonir that meant there was something there that had even more restricted membership. Unfortunately there was no clue on what was needed in order to bluff their way past them and it was possible that there was no signal at all. Another thing that made the Dragon Knight nervous was that he didn’t see any sign of Flynn anywhere, which meant that he either had already left or something happened to him.

Ryonir quickly shook his head and tried to focus at the task at hand. Even if Flynn had just been turned away at the door and was out wandering the city there was the blood smell that Samiel found and the fact that Yuan said there was suspicious activity in this area. It was the only lead they had and if their archivist was in trouble he desperately wanted to save him before something bad happened. If a slaver ring was operating inside of this town and it had any connection to the dragon or artifact that they were seeking it had to be investigated. The problem was that if they went in with brute force and it turned out to be nothing than they not only would be in hot water with the entire kingdom but also potentially give themselves away.

The group knew that they couldn’t just stand around there forever as someone else could come in with a tithe of their own and recognize that they’re not merchant caravanners. “Well?” Yuan whispered as they all backed away from the door to make sure their conversation isn’t overheard. “What are we waiting for?”

“Just trying to figure out a way past the guards that doesn’t involve a fight,” Ryonir whispered back. “Samiel and I specialize in melee and Zefrit is still getting used to being polymorphed. Normally Flynn would be the one that would have something magical that could bypass this…”

“I guess it’s a real good thing that I came along then,” Yuan replied as he took something out of an inner pocket of their cloak. “I told you that I used to be a spy, luckily I still keep in practice. Just get ready to intervene in case I mess this up, hopefully I’m not as rusty as I think.”

The others moved away from the door with Ryonir next to Yuan, the Dragon Knight readied his claw weapons as he watched the drow put something into a long, thin black tube. The room was completely still as Yuan continued to lean in slightly back and forth to look at the guards until he had made his movements into a pattern. On one time that he leaned in to the open crack of the door he brought the tube to his lips and quickly exhaled, the dart that was loaded into the blowgun flying through the air before it landed square on the neck of one of the guards. As they began to teeter it caught the attention of the second one but before he could even turn to ask what was wrong Yuan had leaned back and loaded in another dart, then arched forward once more and fired again to hit the other guard square in the throat.

It didn’t take long before both guards were on the ground, both Ryonir and Samiel darting in to keep their armored bodies from hitting the floor and making noise while the others came in behind them. “Most impressive,” Zefrit said as he and Yuan watched the other two move the two to the side. “That’s not the same stuff that you used on Ryonir, right?”

“Oh no, just a mild toxin that causes unconsciousness,” Yuan said. “They’ll be fine in a few hours, as Ryonir said if this turns out to be a wild goose chase I would have hated to killed innocent guards.”

Ryonir frowned at the mention of his own foray into the poisonous nature of their new drow companion but decided to let it go as the way down the stairs was cleared for them. As Yuan locked the door behind them to keep anyone from finding the bodies right away the others carefully made their way down the stairs and into the darkness below. Like most buildings that had cellars the wooden walls gave way to hewn stone as Ryonir lit a small torch in order to banish the shadows. There was a chill in the air as they continued past the barrels that were stacked along the walls and he wondered whether it was just because they were technically below ground or possibly an indicator of the nefarious deeds that were happening down there.

As they walked Samiel picked up the scent of blood once more and led them to a set of iron doors that looked like they belonged in a dungeon rather than a merchant’s guild. Yuan looked it over and said that the construction of this door was recent and had a magical lock on it, which meant that he wouldn’t be able to pick the lock until they got the glyph off. As the drow investigated the door Ryonir could see the faint hint of magic that was on the metal, and if it was an arcane rune that he could see it meant that the power had to be draconic in nature. Not only did that mean it was likely that this group did have ties to Saracchi but also it could be neutralized by a Dragon Knight who had specific training to do so.

The others moved back when Ryonir instructed them too and went up to the runes that were magically transcribed on the door. He could feel the power that radiated from them was quite deluded, which meant that it was either someone using an artifact with dragon power in it or someone was gifted a boon by the dread dragon. It was definitely a red dragon then, they were the only ones that were known to try and manipulate kingdoms rather than outright destroy them. Some say they were the most destructive of the group, though as Ryonir thought back to his training he always thought that black dragons were the most dangerous as their reigns of terror involved chaotic mass destruction...

At that moment it felt to Ryonir like he had just gotten hit in the back of the head, but when he quickly looked around he saw the others had started to search the area while he tried to take care of the door. It was a bizarre sensation but he quickly reminded himself that someone’s life was on the line that he cared about and he quickly refocused his efforts on the glyphs. When he examined them he knew that he could use a cleansing ritual and attempt to wash them off that way, but it would take a while and he knew that they wouldn’t have forever until someone found the knocked-out guards. Instead a different idea came to him, one that he didn’t think would be feasible but found himself taking one of the claws of his gauntlets to scratch into the metal.

The weapon of the Dragon Knight sliced easily into the door and it didn’t take long until he had written something in draconic in the middle of it. It was another ward, one that he vaguely recognized during his training in dragon magic and language, and as the lines began to glow with a blue light he was shocked to see that the power bled into translucent arcane markings that hovered over the door and caused them to shatter. Ryonir was slightly stunned that actually worked, he would have never thought to use the connection between him and Zefrit to channel dragon power into a ward they controlled to override the other one. Strangely it also didn’t quite feel like the energy that would come from a silver dragon, but with time being of the essence he didn’t have time to ask the disguised dragon as he announced the door was ready to be unlocked.

With the wards under his control Ryonir allowed Yuan to lockpick the physical lock, and when he was done Ryonir opened the door and looked inside. Before the Dragon Knight could even take a step forward he could smell the odor that Samiel had been tracking this entire time as he felt the others step up behind him and look into the room with similar shock. “This isn’t a group of slavers,” Ryonir said as he saw the symbols of a dragon head and more draconic runes written in dried blood along the stone walls of the hallway. “They’re cultists.”

“Ugh, cultists are the worst,” Zefrit commented with a groan.

“My former pack dealt with a group of cultists that were in our hunting grounds,” Samiel stated as they slowly walked into the dimly lit room. “It was one of the few times I could say that I was truly disgusted in what they had decided to do. Such things should only dwell in the nightmares of one.”

“Your pack?” Yuan asked as he turned to Samiel and looked him up and down, a smile forming on the drow’s face. “Oh… you’re a werewolf, I should have guessed that. They say it’s in the eyes.”

“Quiet down guys,” Ryonir hissed back at the rest of the group. “We don’t know if anyone is down here.”

Everyone quickly went silent as Ryonir took the lead, everyone readying their respective weapons as they continued down the narrow pathway. Like the door this area had been recently renovated in the last few years and the bloody symbols continued on all the way down to the other side. There were a few other doors that just had storage in it and there didn’t seem to be any signs of life. As they got to the next metal door on the opposite end of the hall though everyone stopped as they heard what sounded like chanting, something that definitely wasn’t a good sign as Ryonir got close and slowly opened it to peek inside.

What they found on the other side was a small cavern where a dozen people in red cloaks surrounded a dais where another in similar garb was chanting in draconic. It was hard for Ryonir or Zefrit to pick up exactly what was being said but there was a lot of talk about loyalty and obedience to Saracchi. What caught their eye however were the people chained up to the walls that hung there by the shackles on their wrist. Most of them didn’t even raise their heads while others were opening weeping, but there were one or two that just knelt there with glazed looks in their eyes and smiles plastered on their faces. Ryonir had learned enough about mental manipulation magic to know about the signs of its use, and when he looked over at Yuan he saw the drow give him a small nod that indicated that this was what he had seen too.

With most of the prisoners looking down it was hard for Ryonir to find the one he was looking for, and just when he thought that perhaps he wasn’t there he managed to spot Flynn. Like the others he was stripped of his gear and clothing, the naked elf on display just like the others in the room as he kept his head lowered. He looked more roughed up than the others in the room but didn’t appear to have anything more than a few bruises and cuts on his body. With those in attendance fixated on the one that was on the platform, as well as some sort of pedestal that was covered in cloth, the group carefully made their way around the edges towards Flynn’s location.

As much as Ryonir wanted to go in and put an end to this cult the four of them weren’t going to be able to take on a dozen cultists, not without killing all of them if they were untrained or being overwhelmed if there were decent fighters or mages among them. The priority at that moment was to rescue Flynn and escape; once they had done that they could contact Gildeon and try to get extra help to stop a dread dragon cult. Fortunately Flynn was situated near the front of the cave that they had entered and with it being a natural cavern there were rock formations they could hide behind to avoid the gaze of the orator on the dais. When they got to the restrained elf Ryonir was about to motion to Yuan to get the cuffs off when they found it to be quiet in the cavern, the four looking at one another as the chanting that had filled the air for so long had suddenly stopped.

“It appears we have more interlopers in our midst,” the one on the stage said as the other cultists turned to look at the four. “And one of them is a Dragon Knight! Truly a worthy addition to Saracchi’s flock, or a sacrifice if you wish to do this the hard way.”

The four backed up near the wall as those in attendance pulled back their hoods and drew serrated blades from their cloaks Ryonir noticed that the heads of the cultists were altered. Some just had patches of red scales on their faces while others sported full-blown horns or ear-fins on their otherwise humanoid faces. Whatever magic was influencing their minds had also started to corrupt their physical bodies, something that caused the Dragon Knight to scowl deeply. These creatures probably didn’t even know whom they were serving as the dread dragon’s influence seeped into their minds and forced them to do its nefarious bidding.

“What’s the call alpha?” Samiel said as fur could be seen visibly sprouting from his face and arms.

“I can already sense there’s nothing left of them behind those eyes,” Zefrit said forlornly as Ryonir also noticed that they all sported bright red, draconic eyes. “They will remain forever enthralled to the dread dragon.”

“Nothing else we can do,” Ryonir said through gritted teeth as he bared his gauntlets at the approaching cultists. “Take them out.”

That was the cue that the others were looking for; Samiel arched back his head and let out a primal roar as his physique quickly rippled and swelled to shred his clothing as he grew the claws and teeth of his werewolf form while Zefrit also tore through his recently acquired garments to return to his dragon form. The sight of the silver dragon and werewolf was not enough to deter the cultists though and as they charged their blades glowed with bright red runes. Dragon magic… Sarrachi did more than just steal their minds as Ryonir rushed forward with the other two and used his gauntlets to deflect the flaming blade before striking with his own. The magic imbued in his silver gauntlets effectively neutralized the draconic influence in the blade and with a single punch snapped the blade in half.

While Zefrit swept his tail around and knocked several of them halfway across the cavern and Samiel had sunk his teeth into the throat of another Ryonir looked back to see that Yuan was busy unlocking the shackles of the prisoners in the cavern. As the battle raged it was clear that even with the enhancements the cultists had gotten they were no match against a dragon knight, dragon, and a werewolf as another cultist went sailing right past Ryonir and hit a nearby stalagmite hard. He had taken down two himself and was about to disarm a third when he heard a loud cry that rang out through the cavern. It caused the cultists to stop and drop their weapons before turning back towards the dais, and though Samiel had continued to rip apart the one that he had gotten hold of Zefrit and Ryonir stopped their attack as well to see what was happening.

“Gaze upon the eye of Saracchi!” The cult leader exclaimed as he placed his hand on a solid ruby orb that he had uncovered at some point among the fight. “See the splendor you could have enjoyed if you had just let his influence into your mind, but it can also be used to pacify our enemies! Quake in fear that the last thing you get to experience before you leave this mortal coil is a taste of what could have been your lives.”

Those that remained on their feet during the fight quickly got down to their knees and bowed to the glowing crystalline sphere, but as Zefrit and Samiel glanced at one another they both seemed to give a shrug. While there was power that could clearly be felt that radiated from the sphere both dragon and werewolf felt no effects, which prompted the silver dragon to smirk up at the cult leader. “Looks like Saracchi isn’t as powerful as you claim,” Zefrit stated. “Now it’s time for you to pay for taking our friend like that, and for enslaving these people to the will of a dread dragon.”

“Hmph, it appears that the power of Saracchi doesn’t effect other dragons, nor the beasts of the world that can’t contemplate his splendor… yet,” the cult leader said as Samiel growled, bearing his bloody teeth at the one on the dais as they watched him pull down his own hood. When the cult leader revealed his head they found that it had completely transformed to that of a red dragon, and though he was still humanoid in nature as he let the rest of his cloak fall away to reveal his scaled form they saw that he also had a tail and set of wings that adorned his draconic form. “Soon Master Saracchi will be powerful enough that even you will bow before him, but until that moment your friends will have to do.”

The smirk on the anthro red dragon’s muzzle widened as both Zefrit and Samiel looked at him in a moment of confusion before realization dawned on their faces. As Zefrit turned towards Ryonir he saw the elf’s gaze fixated on the orb while his hands were pressed against the sides of his head. When the silver dragon could feel some sort of corruption seeping through their connection he shouted for the werewolf to help him, only to hear a loud thud that caused him to turn around. The werewolf had fallen forward and already started to revert back to his former form as several darts stuck out from his back that had been shot into him by the drow behind him. Once Yuan had downed his target his gaze immediately went back to the orb and remained transfixed to it as his lips began to move with the same chant as the other cultists that bowed before it.

As Zefrit went back to shout at Ryonir to snap out of it the dragon suddenly found his vision start to blur as the Dragon Knight fell to his knees, both creatures hearing the chanting not only echoing in the cavern but also inside their own skulls. As soon as the orb had been revealed Ryonir couldn’t take his eyes off of it, and though he had the skills of a Dragon Knight even he found himself succumbing to its influence. He was able to fight it off more than Yuan did as he saw the drow almost immediately turn to neutralize the unaffected werewolf, and when he saw his friend drop it caused a surge of defiance to well up inside of him. But that momentary rebellion was quickly quelled and as the elf looked out of the corner of his eye he could see that Zefrit was being affected by the orb’s power through him, and though he wanted desperately to shut the connect between them off he couldn’t find the will to do so as he fell onto his hands and knees.

“That’s it,” the cult leader said as both Ryonir and Zefrit began to lose consciousness, the power of the artifact-enhanced dragon beating them both down as the Dragon Knight tried to move forward. “You have an impressively strong will, Dragon Knight. You will certainly be worth the trouble of conditioning when we ship you back to Gildeon to influence the others to see that joining a dread dragon is much better than fighting him.”

Ryonir tried to respond but there was no strength left in his body as the magic of the orb sapped it out of him. The only reason he was able to remain upright was because Zefrit was sending his power to help mitigate the effects, but that had caused the silver dragon to fall on his side and start to breathe heavily. The orb… he had to get the orb, Ryonir thought, but as he took another step forward all he accomplished was the transformed cult leader to let out a mocking laugh.

But as Ryonir felt to his stomach that laugh turned to a cry of pain and he mustered up enough strength to turn his head and see the cult leader reeling back with a knife embedded in his shoulder. In the next second Flynn suddenly appeared in his vision and tipped over the pedestal with the orb on it, which caused the crystalline object to fall to the ground. The cries of anguish from the cult leader were soon joined by the others as the orb smashed on the stone and shattered, which released a wave of energy that knocked those closest to it over. As Ryonir was pushed to his side he realized that whatever they used wasn’t the actual artifact of a dragon, merely a copy that Saracchi made in order to expand his influence without risking the actual artifact.

Even with the orb destroyed Ryonir couldn’t find the energy to do much more than roll onto his back as he felt a pair of hands grab his chest. When his head turned upwards he could see that Flynn was looking right down at him, but the words he shouted sounded like they were coming from miles away as he felt himself get shaken. As darkness crept into his vision he suddenly saw the eyes of the elf go wide, then glassy before he suddenly fell forward and collapsed on top of him. The last thing that Ryonir saw before he lost consciousness as well was a dart that was embedded in the neck of the other elf before he closed his eyes completely and sank into the darkness that had been waiting for him.

Chapter 9:

“So, I finally get to meet the Dragon Knight that has been heading towards my territory,” a deep, rumbling voice said as Ryonir slowly opened his eyes as he felt hot breath against his body. “I was wondering when you would first taste my influence, though I wasn’t expecting this when I wiggled in your mind. Tell me, do all Dragon Knights have this type of head space or are you considered special among them?”

When Ryonir opened his eyes he saw the huge muzzle of the red dragon looking down at him, a wicked grin showing his jagged teeth as he slowly moved back to reveal the forested lake that he laid next to. He was familiar with what this place was with the only change being that instead of the colossal black-scaled dread dragon he had met before it was replaced with a colossal red-scaled dread dragon that he had never seen before. It was clear that this creature was the one known as Saracchi, not only from the description but also because he could feel himself being drawn towards this creature through the corruption of the orb. As he thought back to that moment he remembered that Flynn had smashed the artifact right before he passed out, and a worrying thought crossed his mind as he remembered Zefrit and Samiel lying motionless on the ground before everything went black.

“In case you are wondering, your friends are fine,” Saracchi said as his smirk grew bigger. “You are being brought to the capital as my honored guests, after all it’s not everyday we get a visit from a Dragon Knight. Of course, whether or not they stay that way is up to you.”

“What do you want Saracchi,” Ryonir replied as he slowly got to his feet and tried to stand defiantly against the dragon. “You already know that as a Dragon Knight I’m duty bound to destroy you and any artifacts you might possess, even your orb wasn’t enough to dissuade me and had to knock me out. If you expect me to let you go on with your reign of terror after I saw that little cult you had made in that border city you have another thing coming.”

“Don’t try and tempt my hospitality Ryonir,” Saracchi replied with a growl, the elf taken slightly aback at the mention of his own name. “Yes, while you were out I happened upon a few of your surface thoughts, mostly just your name and a few pieces about the Dragon Knights and one or two very interesting tidbits about you…” Ryonir tried not to tremble when the red dragon leaned forward with his eye almost parallel with his own. “…dragon lover.”

The words felt like Saracchi had poured ice into his veins as he realized that Saracchi not only knew that he had a certain preference but also that he and Zefrit were currently engaged in courting. “After finding that out I thought that maybe we could come to a much more amicable situation than the one you’re currently in,” Saracchi continued as he lifted his head back around to stare directly back at the elf. “You’ve seen what my power can do to those who bask in it for long enough, and I’m sure that if you weren’t in the throes of battle it could have possibly enticed you. I could do that for you, I could make you into one of the very creatures that you lust after, and with you underneath my wing you could get an entire harem of dragons under yours that will serve your every last whim and desire.”

Though the idea of betraying the Dragon Knights and the others just to gain power and satiate his lust was something that he thought he would never consider Ryonir was shocked to find that a small part of him was actually intrigued by the offer. Something about the mental image of dozens of those anthro dragons actively serving him as a big dragon had struck a cord with something deep down inside of him, enough for him to pause and cause Saracchi to chuckle slightly. “You can’t possibly think that I would give up everything I swore to protect just like that,” Ryonir replied as he steeled his resolve once more, though his body continued to tremble slightly despite himself. “I will not be tempted so easily.”

“I was hoping that you might need a little more… convincing,” Saracchi said as he leaned back slightly, then snaked his long neck around to almost coil around the elf as Ryonir could feel the heat radiate off his scales. “I’m more than willing to give you a little sample in order to seal the deal dragon lover, and I would hate to let a meeting like this go to waste.”

As the muzzle of the dragon pressed up against him Ryonir was suddenly acutely aware that he was completely naked as bare skin rubbed against scales. With the dragon being so big there was no way that he could escape from him, and even if he did he had no understanding of this mental landscape to determine what to do if he could. All he could do was try to resist the advances of the dragon, but as Saracchi opened his maw and licked him from head to toe with that huge tongue it caused his entire body to tremble. Ryonir was well-versed on how flexible dragon tongues were and as he dripped with the hot saliva the appendage wrapped around him before the tip nestled itself between his legs right at his groin.

Ryonir tried to push himself out of the coil of the tongue but found his body sliding on the slick flesh, which only provided more stimulation to him as it continued to stimulate his groin. The elf found himself being lifted up into the air by it as he wiggled in its grasp, gasping loudly and tasting the saliva of the red dragon as Saracchi slid the tongue all over his body. He had never imagined what it would be like to be with a such a huge creature, even Zefrit was a little big for him, but soon he could feel his erect cock being licked as the dragon played with him a little more in the air before he finally set him down. As Ryonir lied their panting against the grass with his erection throbbing in the night air he gasped as he brought his hands to his face and saw that his palms were dotted with tiny red scales.

“It appears that my offer has intrigued you,” Saracchi said as Ryonir looked down at the rest of his body and saw that more patches had started to appear on his otherwise tan skin. “If I knew that it would be this easy to turn a Dragon Knight I wouldn’t have tried to so hard to keep you out, or is this once more a personal reflection? Either way I think perhaps I can persuade you to join my side sooner than I thought.”

Before Ryonir could respond that thick tongue once more pressed against his chest, stomach, and his groin that caused him to moan. The dragon knight knew that he was being manipulated, but for some reason he couldn’t stop himself as he writhed on the ground from the ministrations of the red dragon. He wanted this, wanted to feel the power coursing through his body as his entire body began to grow more muscular by the second. The heavy breaths coming out of his mouth started to have a slight hiss behind them as he felt his teeth sharpen and begin to push out past his lips as his back arched in the air.

There was a deep chuckle that came from the red dragon and despite continuing to fight against the sensations he knew that somehow Saracchi had won. As the hands and feet of his mental self grew claws and swelled outwards into a more pawlike configuration he could feel the offer of the red dragon become more enticing by the second. Soon he would be a red dragon himself, a feral creature ready to spread the influence of his master while getting all those that he brought into the flock to pleasure him just like Saracchi did to him. His cock had already started to become ridged and tapered at the tip like a dragon as he imagined Zefrit sucking on it, except that the scales of the silver dragon had turned to a bright red while a red-scaled werewolf-dragon nuzzled and licked between his legs.

How did this happen… Ryonir managed to think as his thoughts briefly rose above the lust as he began to feel his spine extend into a tail. Was he really about to fail the Dragon Knights like this, to become a traitor in their midst because some red dragon got into his mind and gave him a tongue job? He could feel his eyes starting to shift to a red coloration as his body swelled with more growth and Saracchi wrapped his tongue around the growing shaft as Ryonir dug his new claws into the dirt. Yes, Ryonir’s corrupted mind thought as his pupils began to stretch and his back muscles pushed out into a pair of wings, this was his purpose, he was supposed to be… a dread dragon…

As a large surge of pleasure hit the transforming elf he suddenly felt the tongue that had been stimulating him suddenly pulled off, which caused him to look up to see a the huge black dragon had returned and had gripped the red dragon by the muzzle to pull him away. “You call yourself a dread dragon,” the black dragon scolded as he continued to grip Saracchi by the muzzle and squeezed down even more. “If you were half as good as some of the reds I met then you should have known there was a reason that this one was succumbing to you so quickly.”

Saracchi let out a series of muffled grunts and prompted the black dragon to release him. “Who… what… how did you manage to get into this elf’s mind?!” Saracchi demanded, only for the other dragon to blow a cloud of blue fire into the red dragon’s face that caused him to recoil before he turned back to Ryonir. “You have very strange bedfellows dragon lover, trust me when I say we’ll met again.”

“You can count on it,” the black dragon responded before Saracchi disappeared suddenly. When the influence of the red dragon was gone Ryonir saw that his body had begun to revert back to its elf form and that the crimson scales had quickly darkened to black. “Should have guessed that he would try and take you that way, though he would definitely be in for a surprise regardless of how that went. Now as much as I would love to taunt you for getting into such a situation you need to get back to the real world, and once you do you have to escape and get the artifact from Saracchi.”

“Wait!” Ryonir called out, standing up once his feet were no longer twice as big as his body as the black dragon turned away from him. “Why are you helping me? I don’t even know your name and yet… it feels like I know you. Like somehow you’re connected to all of this.”

“All will be revealed shortly,” the dragon replied as a slight smirk appeared on his own muzzle. “In fact it’s probably going to be very soon since the rouse will soon no longer be needed. But that’s all I can say right now, see you when you get into the belly of the beast, just hopefully not literally.”

Before Ryonir could ask any more questions the scene dissolved around him, and when Ryonir awoke once more it was because his body was jostled and briefly rose up into the air before it fell back down. Almost immediately his senses were assaulted by the sounds of a wagon on the road and the sounds of people shouting as he tried to get up while the floor moved underneath him, feeling the cold metal of the cage he was in as his eyes got used to the darkness and saw he wasn’t alone. The cage also contained a drow that Ryonir thought might be Zefrit, but when he saw the purple eyes staring back at him he knew that it was Yuan instead. As the dark elf stared back at him it looked like he was in a daze and that the sclera of his eyes had started to turn red.

“Yuan?” Ryonir asked, not getting a response from the drow but not wanting to raise his voice in case there were more cultists nearby. “Yuan, can you hear me?”

When Yuan seemed to snap out of it and look at Ryonir the elf breathed a sigh of relief. “It’s about time you snapped out of it,” Yuan said. “We’ve been on the road for nearly the entire day.”

“What’s going on?” Ryonir asked as he tried to move his hands, only to find they were shackled to one of the bars that criss-crossed one another in their cage. “Where are they taking us? Where are the others?”

“Whoa, slow down there,” Yuan replied. “I don’t remember much but these cultists managed to capture all of us and they’re transporting us to the capital, at least that’s what I heard one of them say. Everything else is really hazy, like I keep slipping in and out of a fog…”

The eyes of the drow seemed to drift towards the left and when they did Ryonir could see more of the red in them, which he remembered was a similar trait that the cultists had. With how Yuan acted in that chamber and the fact he was the only one without any sort of protection against the mental influence of that sphere it made sense that he would have gotten the most affected by it, though that meant he had to be weary of what he said around him. From his own encounter with Saracchi it seemed the dread dragon had the ability to access the senses of those that he had taken. It seemed like Yuan had just gotten to the early stages of draconic corruption though and was thankful that Flynn had knocked over the orb before it caused any more damage.

As Ryonir replayed the scene in his mind something about it struck him as odd. He was a Dragon Knight and with Zefrit that explained his resistance, and it appeared being a werewolf helped Samiel as well, but if that was the case than how did Flynn manage to resist enough to attack the cult leader like that? He was an archivist with the Dragon Knights but didn’t have any of the training, and if Yuan was any indication he should have been affected almost immediately. But since Flynn wasn’t around to ask Ryonir decided to make his priority to escape and to reunite with the others that were hopefully nearby.

For the rest of the day Ryonir caught up with Yuan on anything else he happened to see before being locked up, though as night fell he could see the drow was having trouble concentrating. More than once he slipped a word or two of draconic in there when they weren’t actively talking and the elf could tell that the corruption was still eating away at his mind. If he didn’t do something soon then Yuan would likely be just another cultist by the time they reached the capital and after how much help the spy had given them he wasn’t going to let that happen. Unfortunately there was nothing they could do as they felt the wagon they were on stop for the night and a cloaked figure opened the tarp in order to feed them trail rations that could be slipped through the bars of the cage.

Though Ryonir could see a fire crackling it did little to banish the cold that he felt as he attempted to curl up on himself. Both he and Yuan were naked and with nothing to cover themselves with the chill of the night air was starting to get to him. The drow seemed fine on the other hand and Ryonir suspected that the influence of Saracchi had started to not just transform him mentally but physically as well. While there were no outer signs he could only wonder if he would be sharing a cage with a red anthro dragon like that cult leader was by the time they got to the capital.

A sudden noise from Ryonir’s side of the cage caused the elf to turn to his side as he saw the cloth canvas get moved aside to reveal one of those cloaked figures. “Hey, I think both of us could really use a bathroom break,” Ryonir said as he looked over at Yuan. “Considering we’re probably on the road in the middle of an open field or something you could let us stretch our legs without worrying about us streaking to the nearest town.”

“Quiet down,” the cultist said as he took out a set of keys and opened the door before sliding a pair of blankets inside and closing it. “Good to see you’re awake, I figured you might need something useful for the night.”

“Hey, how are we supposed to cover ourselves with this, use our feet?” Ryonir said, but got no answer from the cultist as he disappeared and the cloth covered their cage once more as he looked to Yuan. “Alright, I’m going to grab this one first and then kick the other one to you, if you need it.”

The drow just nodded and Ryonir stretched his sore legs to grab the fabric, grunting as he used his toes to grip the fabric while his arms hung from the restraints. After some effort he managed to get the blanket close enough to him where he could try and shimmy it up his legs, but as he got it close he noticed something that looked like it was hemmed into the fabric. It was a small key, and as Ryonir looked up he realized that it was probably the perfect size for the manacles that hung above him. As he looked over at the red and purple eyed drow he was about to tell him of the find before he stopped, not sure if Yuan was in control of his own faculties and decided to hide the discovery from him.

Ryonir managed to get the blanket up over him and kicked the other one towards Yuan, though the dark elf ignored it as the light from the bonfire outside their cage began to slowly dim. Even dragon-possessed cultists needed to sleep, and as the glow completely disappeared and left them completely in the dark he decided to make his move after his eyes adjusted. While he knew that Yuan could see perfectly well in the darkness he saw his head turned away and possibly asleep, which was as good a time as any to try out the key attached to his blanket. After taking a quiet deep breath Ryonir pulled the fabric further up until he could get it to touch his fingers, which curled around the hem until he felt the smooth metal of the key touch his skin.

It didn’t take much after that to get the shackles off, Ryonir rubbing his wrists where they had started to chaff before hiding his hands underneath the blanket. While he was free of his restraints he was still locked in a cage that the key he held was unlikely to open, so either he would have to wait for his mysterious benefactor to return or try to get Yuan to help. As the light of the moon slowly rose overhead the elf decided he would at least try to find out what was going on around him. The canvas was held down by a few ropes attached to the edge of the cart and the holes were big enough he could reach his arm through and pull them off, and when he did he immediately saw a hooded figure heading towards him.

Ryonir swallowed hard as he realized that if this wasn’t the one helping him that he had just given his newfound freedom away, especially as a red-scaled hand reached over towards his cage. To his surprise however the cultist put that finger to his lips and then slid up into the cart before opening the door once more. “What are you doing?” Ryonir whispered as he popped his head out from the cage. “Why are you helping us?”

Once more the figure said nothing and motioned for him to come with him, but as the elf began to step out of cage he turned back towards Yuan. “Hold on, I have to get him,” Ryonir stated, but as the cultist waved his hands to tell him to stop the Dragon Knight shook his head and used the key to unshackle the sleeping drow. “I know that he’s influenced by Saracchi, but I’m not leaving him behind.”

When Ryonir completely unlocked the cuffs the drow’s eyes suddenly opened, briefly exposing red draconic orbs before they returned to the purple irises that he was used to. Before Yuan could ask what was going on Ryonir clasped a hand around his mouth and told him to just follow along. There was a tense moment as he waited to see what would happen before Yuan nodded, the elf exhaling the breath he had been holding and proceeded to walk out of the cage with him. Though the hooded figure shook his head he continued to say nothing and proceeded to hand them their packs with some clothing in it for them to change into.

Once they had gotten some protection from the elements Yuan and Ryonir followed the hooded individual away from the camp and up into a set of dry plains dotted with rocky outcroppings. With the land being so hilly there was little chance that anyone would find them if they managed to get far away enough, though Ryonir still wasn’t sure of the intentions of the one they followed. Was this some sort of cultist trick in order to lure them to some ritual site, or was this some sort of defector that had managed to free himself from the control of the dragon? At this point it didn’t matter to Ryonir as they continued to walk in the moonlight for what seemed like hours until a shadow passed over their head.

At first Ryonir thought that Saracchi had managed to find them, but when the creature that created the shadow landed the elf’s eyes lit up upon seeing the silver scales of the dragon. “Zefrit!” Ryonir said as he ran forward and hugged his companion. “I could sense that you were possibly nearby but didn’t think you’d be out flying at night.”

“Well once we escaped the one that helped us told me to take the others and fly to a nearby river where we could make camp and wait for you,” Ryonir explained while they hugged. “As soon as the others got settled in I decided to try and see if I could find you since the one that released us said they would grab you once he was sure it was safe.”

“The others, so everyone else is with you?” Ryonir asked, the dragon grinning and nodding before the two turned their attention to the cloaked figure. “It seems like you saved us, but why would you betray your own like that?”

There was a moment of pause before the figure paused, then chuckled. “I haven’t been a part of them for quite a long time,” the mysterious man said as he pulled his hood down to reveal an elf with red scales on his face, though when he brought up his sleeve and rubbed it on them the color came off to reveal black ones underneath. “I think I prefer the new team that I joined a while ago anyway.”

“Kal?” Ryonir said, Zefrit looking at him in surprise as the hooded elf nodded. “Oh wow, you are alive! After we didn’t hear from you again I just sort of thought that your attempt to sway the opinions of the others had not gone well.”

“At first everything went fine,” Kal replied as he took off the robe and tossed it aside to reveal his scaled arms and feet that had black smudges among the red. “In fact people started changing around the same time I did, but as you can see my scales had a slightly different hue than they were getting. I managed to fake it for a while with some paint but they started to notice that I wasn’t visiting the orb at all, and by that point I split and waited to try and find you guys when you came into the Kingdom of the Burning Lily.”

“I’m just glad you found us when you did,” Ryonir replied as he looked the dragon-influenced elf over and noticed that his changes had just started. “I’d hate to think of what might have happened if we had gotten to the capital and was still captured. For now though lets go see the others, last time Samiel he was sprawled out on the floor and I thought he was dead.”

Zefrit gave the three of them a lift back to the makeshift camp that had been set up near the river, and as they got into the air Ryonir tried to see if he could find the one that they had just escaped. Eventually he could make out the road and followed that to the carts he guessed were them, but unless any of them had a pair of wings and knew where they had gone off to it would be next to impossible to find them. That was good enough for the Dragon Knight as Zefrit landed next to the fire that had Samiel and Flynn around it, both of them cooking something that one of them had probably managed to hunt down while they waited for the dragon to return. When the smell of food hit Ryonir’s nostrils he found his stomach gurgle with need, but first he had been swept up in a group hug by the others as Kal went down towards the river to wash up.

“That was certainly a harrowing experience,” Flynn said once they had settled down amongst the supplies Kal and the others had stolen from the cultist camp. “I suppose at least we learned something… um, are we sure that we should be allowing Yuan here with us?”

The others turned to see the drow sitting there silently, not looking at anyone as he stared into the fire. “He’s the only reason we were able to get down there to rescue you Flynn,” Ryonir replied. “I’m not just going to leave him to become one of them after he risked his life to save yours.”

“He almost ended mine,” Samiel said with a growl, his hair bristling as he looked at the drow. “If I hadn’t been in my wereform I would have been dead.”

“Let’s just focus on the present for now and let me deal with Yuan later,” Ryonir stated as he put his hands in the air. “We now know that Saracchi is creating a cult of dragon worshippers, and that he is using them to capture others in order to turn them as well. There’s also the fact that this dragon can make copies of the artifact that he’s using to influence people, and even when they’re not in its presence he can mess with their minds.”

“That actually explains why they seemed like slavers in the beginning,” Zefrit said. “Maybe they still are; if they can’t reach influential people they’ll get those whom they can control in their presence so they can turn them later. It’s pretty ingenious actually, when the cultists go into an area they already can control the major players and bring down a city or kingdom from within.”

The group continued to talk for a bit, Kal joining them after he had bathed in the river. With the red paint completely washed off of him it revealed the black scales underneath that the dread dragon had given him, though it reminded Ryonir of the dread dragon once more. It had made no sense for such a creature to protect him from Saracchi this time while also transforming Kal in order to help him out. He sat there deep in thought about this puzzle until he realized that the others were staring at him and that he hadn’t contributed to the conversation in a while.

“Sorry, I was just thinking about something,” Rynoir said as he looked over at Kal. “Seeing him here reminded me to tell you all… I met that black dragon again in my dreamscape, and I think he might be helping me. I don’t know what it means but if a dread dragon has somehow corrupted me to do his bidding I’m not sure I should be going on this path in the first place, I may put you all in danger if I’m compromised.”

The others looked to each other and to the surprise of the Dragon Knight surprise he saw a look of contemplation that was passed from one to another before finally Flynn looked at him. “Ryonir, I think it might be time that we let you in on the truth since we’re going to be hunted one way or another,” the elf said as he moved over to sit next to Ryonir and took him by the hand. “Did you happen to notice that I was able to attack that cultist leader?”

Ryonir found himself slowly nodding as he remembered that he had thought that was odd the elf had managed to fight of the effects of the mind warping stone without any abilities, and when he did he suddenly recalled another memory. He was at some sort of store and they were identifying some sort of artifact… and it had told him that Flynn was actually a shapeshifter. The Dragon Knight balked at how he could forget something like that as more images came into his mind. The dragon claw necklace Zefrit had worn was once around his own neck, and he remembered that while they were heading towards the Frostward Vale that he had started to turn into a dragon himself…

A black dragon…

Just as Ryonir was about to say something though the group heard a chuckle that caused them all to turn to the drow that had been sitting alone. Yuan’s eyes glowed with a faint red light as the drow stood up and looked at the group as though surveying them for the first time. “Looks like we finally get to meet,” the creature puppeting the drow said as a smirk formed on his face. “My name is Saracchi.”

Chapter 10:

Everyone in the campsite immediately drew their weapons as the possessed drow slowly approached them, red scales starting to form around his glowing eyes as sharpened teeth began to poke past his lips. It was clear the influence of being the vessel of the dragon was already corrupting Yuan and if they didn’t act soon they would have either a full dragon puppet or a brainwashed cultist on their hands. The only problem was that there was no way any of them could excise the creature out from the drow, at least no way that they knew of that didn’t involve killing the host, and Saracchi seemed to know that as he casually strolled towards them. As they all looked at one another to try and glean what to do next they saw Yuan move towards Kal and stroke his face with a clawed hand before the assassin backed away.

“So that’s how you managed to escape,” Saracchi said though the drow as he chuckled. “When I heard a rumor that a Dragon Knight was heading towards the kingdom I didn’t expect that they had already managed to break my hold on a scout, though admittedly they are enthralled the lightest. Then to find that the same Dragon Knight also has a dread dragon protecting them… the twists and turns just keep coming.”

“I think you know how this is going to end Saracchi,” Ryonir replied as he got the attention of the red dread dragon on him once more. “Even if I fail you now know that the Dragon Knights are aware of your presence and what you’re trying to do here. The full might of every Dragon Knight will be at your doorstep in less than a month.”

“I’m pretty sure that you haven’t had a chance to tell them about what you recently discovered,” Saracchi shot back with a slight growl in his voice that managed to translate even through the drow. “Plus I wonder what they would think of with one of their own in allegiance to a creature that they swore to destroy, they might think you are the one that needs to be eliminated. Is he around now or did he decide to abandon his plaything?”

Before Ryonir could answer back though his vision began to blur and the world around him started to spin, stumbling forward and causing both Zefrit and Flynn to break their fighting stances and move towards him. At first the Dragon Knight thought that Saracchi was doing something to him but as he felt his friends holding onto him he got a strange sense of vertigo like he was standing in two places at once. “I think you’ll find that I’m still right here,” Kal said, but as the group looked over to the advancing elf-dragon they saw he also had glowing blue eyes that looked straight at the possessed drow. “The seal hasn’t quite been broken yet but luckily this one was more than willing to let me borrow his body in order to deal with you.”

“A black dread dragon with the ability to possess?” Saracchi said as the drow took a step back in surprise. “Your kind are all about death and destruction, nothing so nuanced as taking over another creature when they merely demand the loyalty of lesser creatures. Did you run out of kobolds to do your bidding or something?”

Kobolds… even though everyone was fixated on the back and forth that was happening between the two possessed creatures Ryonir found himself slumping further down towards the ground. As everything faded to black he could hear Zefrit try to shout at him, but the words were lost in the shadows of his mind as he closed his eyes. Was this it, Ryonir thought to himself as he began to feel a chill seep into his body, did Saracchi or this other dread dragon somehow poison him? He didn’t feel like he was dying though, in fact he started to feel right for the first time since they started this journey as he floated in the void.

A sudden crack of thunder caused Ryonir to open his eyes again and when he did the elf found himself lying in the darkness on the cold rock slab of a cave. He didn’t feel Zefrit or Ryonir holding him up anymore but could sense that he wasn’t alone in this new location, and when another bolt of lightning illuminated the area he could see the outline of the black dragon standing near the entrance. “I figured that after our encounter with the cultists we wouldn’t be quite strong enough,” the dragon said in a deep, rumbling voice. “Do you remember this place Ryonir?”

Ryonir looked around the cave and as he did he saw the faint images of small, scaly creatures running around, ready to serve the black dragon at a moment’s notice if need be. “This is… your lair,” Ryonir stated, the huge dragon nodding slightly as he continued to look out of the cave. “You live in the Frostward Vale, I was supposed to come up here and destroy you before you started your reign of terror.”

“I see that the fissures in the spell are growing quite extensive then,” the dragon replied with a slight sigh. “We should have known that the enchantment would fall apart upon making contact with Saracchi, but I didn’t think it would deteriorate this quickly. I would help, but using dragon magic to enhance a dragon disguise would be quite counterproductive in this case.”

There was another crack of lightning and rumble of thunder and Ryonir had to cover his head briefly as chunks of rock rained down on the two of them. “So what do we do now then?” Ryonir asked once the debris had completely fallen. “Are you going to break this spell that you’re talking about?”

“Breaking it now would only leave us vulnerable to Saracchi and I don’t feel like giving up the ghost quite yet,” the black dragon replied as he turned and looked at Ryonir with glowing blue eyes. “I have a plan to banish Saracchi from Yuan’s body and keep the corruption from fully converting him, but Kal isn’t strong enough to hold my essence forever and I need a much more fitting vessel for what I have planned. The fact I asked about the Frostward Vale is because you once asked me to make an accord in order to save the lives of our friends, and now this time I have to do the same thing for the same reason and ask you to give up control of your body… to me.”

Ryonir felt his already chilled body go completely cold as the dread dragon told him that he needed his body. It was something that a Dragon Knight would never think of doing but as he stood there looking at the dragon another image overlapped that scene, one where he was staring into the reflection of a mirror talking to the same black-scaled creature. There was a familiarity there that he couldn’t quite put his finger on and the longer he thought about it the more it felt like he had known this dragon all his life. He heard his own words reverberating in his head as he remembered making the same deal with this dragon earlier except he had asked to be trusted, and though it defied all logical sense Ryonir found himself looking up and giving him a nod.

As soon as he did the cave suddenly began to rumble and cracks formed in the air where the entrance was. Instinctively Ryonir reached out to grab something as suddenly he felt a great force blow him out into the storm that had been raging the entire time, except after he toppled through the air a few times and landed he was back in the sandy plains of the campsite and was looking down at a pair of glowing red eyes. It took him a second to realize that he had his hands around Yuan’s neck, though his face had started to become distorted as red scales grew out of the deforming visage, and that his own hands had black scales and were tipped with claws. More oddities jumped out at him and as he looked back and saw the others standing in shock, and at first he thought that he had somehow jumped into Kal’s body only to see him passed out with Samiel holding him, which meant…

Ryonir didn’t have a chance to finish that thought as Saracchi took advantage of his distracted state and brought a knee up to hit him in the stomach, which knocked the wind out of him as the possessed drow attempted to wiggle out of his grasp. To his surprise though he felt a growl escape from his throat and felt his scale-covered hands go up to press against the drow’s skull where Ryonir could feel a pair of horns starting to push out. “This one is turning into a dragon man tonight,” Ryonir’s lips whispered into the ears of the drow, though the elf wasn’t in control of himself as they did. “But he’s not going to be yours.”

Yuan’s back suddenly arched as a surge of arcane energy pulsed through both of their bodies and tongues of blue flame suddenly surrounded them, scorching the earth around them but not those within. Saracchi let out a cry of anguish before gritting the recently grown fangs of the drow as Ryonir felt something attempt to push back against him, only for his body to continue to push down and pin the other man. “Fine!” Saracchi shouted as the red glow faded from the eyes of Yuan. “This drow can be your toy, but I will take your Dragon Knight eventually!”

As the flames continued to rage around the two the red coloration in the scales of the drow quickly darkened until they were a deep black as they continued to spread over the dark elf’s skin. Yuan’s eyes shifted from red back to purple, and then to blue as the dread dragon pumped his power into him. The entire time all Ryonir could do was look on in awe as he realized what the one that possessed his body was doing, taking the transformation that Saracchi had started and using his own power to push the spell in a different direction. With the red dragon no longer in control Yuan let out a sharp gasp that was distorted by his growing muscle as his hands and feet grew into claws.

When it was clear that Saracchi had completely vacated the body of the half-transformed drow Ryonir felt his body pull up and away, bringing Yuan up with him until the two were both back on their feet. As they turned to face the others while the blue fires died down he saw that they still had their weapons drawn but quickly put them away when they saw the two sets of glowing blue eyes look back at them. “It’s you…” Flynn said as he moved towards Ryonir. “Does this mean the spell has been broken?”

“The barrier between us has,” the dread dragon replied as he used Ryonir’s body to close the distance between them. “But because our separation is willful on both ends we are able to keep apart, and while this Saracchi knows of my presence the fact he thinks that a black dragon is merely pulling the strings leave us at enough of an advantage for us to keep it that way. There is no more need for secrecy when it comes to Ryonir though, so feel free to tell him everything… my dear Jalru.”

To Ryonir’s surprise he was leaned forward and kissed the other elf, and when that happened a flood of emotions came surging through his psyche. Even though it had been the first time that the archivist elf had ever shown any sort of intimacy towards him it was like they were old lovers, which was something that Flynn reciprocated as they continued to kiss. It was only a cough from Samiel that prompted the two to stop and when they did the blue glow had left Ryonir’s eyes and he felt himself in control again. When he realized he had his hands up Flynn’s shirt he quickly found himself blush in slight embarrassment before stepping away.

“Well, that was certainly… unexpected,” Ryonir said as he looked at the other two in the group. “Sorry about that.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Samiel replied with a scoff as he motioned towards the area where Yuan was, Ryonir and Flynn turning to see the two half-dragons fawning over one another as well. “It appears that love is in the air, or rather lust. As much fun as an orgy might be however we have bigger problems on our hands.”

“That’s unfortunately very true,” Flynn said with a slight nod before looking at Ryonir. “It seems that the secret is out though, do you know who you really are?”

Ryonir paused for a moment as he looked into the eyes of the elf, swallowing hard as memories and information that had been blocked from him ever since the forest was able to be accessed once more. “You… you’re actually a gold dragon named Jalru,” Ryonir said as Flynn nodded. “And I’m a dragon too… a black dragon named… um…”

“Best not to know it yet,” Flynn said as he held up a hand. “If your other self is right then not knowing your own name might be the one thing that is keeping your elf and dragon sides separate still. Still, since you already know who I am I think it’s time to ditch the Flynn act and call me Jalru, though I won’t take my dragon form yet since I don’t think Saracchi knows about my true nature either.”

“So what do we do now?” Zefrit asked. “Saracchi probably knows where we are and those cultists are still on the road nearby.”

“We’re going to have to do some night flying,” Ryonir replied as he looked out over the plains. “This dread dragon is going to probably start shoring up his defenses soon and we need to slip in before he can get whatever cultists he has already created to mobilize. That means heading to the capital and trying to find wherever Saracchi is in order to get the artifact he’s using and destroy him.”

“I can help with that,” Kal chimed in, turning away from his groping of Yuan to talk to the rest of the group. “I originally came from the capital and if Saracchi moved into the city then he’s probably going to be in the underground chambers that the palace is built into. Now I’m not sure of all of them but if I can get us close do you think you could find him then?”

“That’s my job,” Ryonir replied. “Let’s go then, we don’t have a second to waste.”

“Umm… there is one problem with this plan,” Zefrit stated as the silver dragon moved forward. “I can carry you two and Samiel easily enough, but there’s no way that I can also bring Kal and Yuan along too. Either Jalru is going to have to transform and carry them or they’re going to have to grow a pair of wings of their own, which means that the dread dragon that started the process in the first place would have to finish it.”

As everyone looked at Ryonir the Dragon Knight suddenly stepped back as he looked at Kal and Yuan. “I don’t even know how I did it in the first place,” Ryonir said with unease. “Back when I was this black dragon, which was me, all we did was break Kal free and then… well…”

“We had sex,” Kal interjected as he suddenly came up behind Ryonir and placed his clawed hands against the elf’s chest. “It was in the mental realm though so I only partially turned in the physical world, but I wouldn’t mind going all the way so to speak in order to have a romp with my lovely dragon master.”

Ryonir could feel his cheeks burning as the one he now knew as Jalru stared daggers at him while Samiel gave him a lustful grin and a wink while Zefrit just looked anywhere else but at him. “So… that’s how you managed to persuade Kal to join our team,” Jalru said as his eyes glowed with a golden hue briefly before he moved forward and grabbed Ryonir by the belt. “Kal, go wait with Yuan in a tent while I have a brief chat with our Dragon Knight here.”

The half-dragons nodded and went over to the tent as Jalru practically dragged Ryonir over towards a rocky outcropping with surprising strength before finally letting him go. Both Zefrit and Samiel were close behind and had caught up by the time Jalru had backed him up against the rock. “I can’t believe you!” Jalru said as he pointed a finger right at Rynoir. “Of all the ways to imbue him with enough energy to hold of Saracchi’s advances you pick that?!”

“I didn’t know!” Ryonir quickly attempted to defend himself. “It was the heat of the moment and I wanted to make sure that Kal was alright.”

‘I’m not talking to YOU Ryonir,” Jalru quickly corrected. “I’m talking to the one that’s going to be sleeping in the jungle for the next few years when we get home. I was willing to start trying to make an accommodation with your attraction to Zefrit, but then you go and screw a random elf that tried to kill you?”

Zefrit suddenly took a step back as he was mentioned in the conversation, but it was actually Samiel who spoke up first with a laugh. “The only reason you even softened on your stance with Zefrit is because you had rutted him first,” Samiel commented, which caused both Ryonir and Jalru’s jaws to drop. “What? Ryonir is just using what information we let him know about, but you’ve always been Jalru and knew exactly what you were doing.”

“That… that was different!” Jalru replied as a deep blush formed in the elf’s cheeks. “It had to be done in order to get Zefrit into the border city!”

“That’s no different than Ryonir’s dragon side flipping an assassin that tried to kill him and burning out Saracchi’s influence in them,” Samiel interjected. “Well all understand that you’re worried about your relationship when Ryonir is no longer Ryonir, but considering how we’ve seen the extent of what a dread dragon can do when he manipulates the minds of others is it really worth being angry that he used a means to get further in the mission that you already did?”

It was clear the words of the werewolf were getting to Jalru and as Zefrit continued to shift his paws about nervously the disguised gold dragon finally sighed and as his anger fizzled out. “You’re right Samiel,” Jalru said. “Now is not the time to discuss something that Ryonir didn’t even know was a thing up until a few minutes ago, and I should just be happy that I don’t have to play as Flynn anymore. Go and get those two finished up so we can get on our way, the sooner we can get to the skies the better.”

Though it was clear that Jalru was still upset he didn’t say another word as he left, Ryonir still standing there in slight shock as Samiel went up and patted him on the shoulder. “Jalru is still getting used to the whole concept of sharing,” Samiel explained. “But if he can be alright with you being my alpha and also open himself to the concept of being with Zefrit then you two will get through this as well. Maybe you finally will let him know what you really want instead of just venting to me when we have our little wrestling sessions and leaving him in the dark on our desires.”

Before Ryonir could say anything else the werewolf just gave him a leering smile and gently pushed him towards the camp and more specifically the tent that the other two had gone into. What he desires… the idea hadn’t even really struck him until that moment that Ryonir wanted anything, although as he glanced over at Zefrit he knew that he had attempted to start up a relationship again with the silver dragon. Was that was Samiel was talking about, or did his dragon side have more that he didn’t know about… though either way it didn’t matter, as Flynn had said he needed to get things done so that they could travel to the capital and stop Saracchi once and for all.

Ryonir tried to put everything else out of his mind except for the task at hand as he went to the tent and opened it, his eyes widening at the two naked men that laid there on top of the bedrolls they had stolen from the cultists. Both of them were already half-hard and looked at him while stroking one another’s bodies, something that made the Dragon Knight feel his own arousal stir as he stepped inside. Though both had large patches of black scales on their bodies he could still tell which one was Yuan and which one was Kal, the drow and elf beckoning him forward before they got into a kneeling position. While he had already had an encounter with Kal this would be the first time for the dark elf, though Yuan seemed to be more than ready to go as he licked Ryonir’s nipple as soon as Kal pulled the shirt off of his body.

Even though he was just doing this to push the magic that had transformed the two a little further Ryonir couldn’t help but let out a soft gasp as Kal made quick work of stripping him down until he was naked as well. As Ryonir watched the drow continue to press his lips against his toned chest he couldn’t help but be impressed at how much pleasure he was feeling from the simple actions and remembered that Yuan had mentioned he was a spy. How much of his work was in the bedroom, the Dragon Knight thought to himself, and when they were in the shop the drow did remark he thought that Zefrit was handsome. As Kal started to curl his arms and legs around the elf in front of him Ryonir suddenly felt something cool press against his chest.

“I managed to get something for you that was taken from Zefrit,” Kal whispered into Ryonir’s ears as Yuan’s proto-muzzle slid further down towards his groin while the elf saw a familiar pendant against his chest. “When I showed it to him the dragon said it actually belongs to you, so I thought I would return it to its rightful owner. Now since Yuan still needs to be properly bred by you I thought that he could take your front while I did something that your dragon side said you would enjoy…”

Ryonir couldn’t help but swallow hard as he suddenly found the attention of two men solely on him, especially as he felt Yuan’s fangs brush against his cock as his breath caught in his throat. Even though he knew that the others were outside, likely further away from the tent to give him some space, all he could do was bask in the pleasure that was being fed to his body as Kal started to slide him back. Something began to press against his thigh and the Dragon Knight thought that it was his cock, but when he looked down he realized that it was a black-scaled tail that slid along his outer thigh. It was hard to see the transformation that happened to Kal but the drow could clearly be seen as his own tail started to stretch out from his spine.

This shouldn’t feel so good, Ryonir thought to himself as he let out a little gasp when Yuan began to lick down the sensitive flesh of his maleness, as a Dragon Knight he should be fighting the thralls of a dread dragon. But as he felt another rather thick appendage, this time the transforming elf’s cock, press up against his lower back he knew that this would be something a dread dragon would enjoy. He definitely was enjoying himself too as his lips curled back into a snarl and exposed growing fangs, his breath coming out in huffs as he felt his chest and stomach expand. It appeared that the two weren’t the only ones changing as Yuan wrapped his lengthening tongue around his shaft and saw ridges start to form.

Kal once more whispered into Ryonir’s ear for him to enjoy himself and relax as he shifted his body once more, this time to sit back to allow his growing tail while keeping the other male on his lap. Ryonir exhaled deeply as the tapered tip of the cock slid up between his cheeks and as it began to slowly spread him open a growl came from his throat. The pleasure was so intense that he couldn’t help it, and a growing part of him didn’t want to as the dragon drow took more of his growing cock into his mouth. With teach bob of Yuan’s head more of his muzzle stretched out until it was a proper dragon muzzle, at least one for a humanoid creature he took his clawed hands and put them on his own scaled hips.

With the growing elf propping him up Ryonir found himself reaching down and grabbing onto the growing horns of the other man between his legs, his lusts overwhelming him as he felt his own face start to puff out. Even though he knew that he was still himself and not this dread dragon he could feel his other side starting to manifest, even feeling his back twitch as he began to grow a pair of wings. That was what he needed the others to have but as Kal’s cock continued to slip down inside of him he found it hard to focus. As he continued to push backwards in order to have the increasingly draconic member spreading open his insides it itched a scratch he didn’t even know he had as he pulled the transforming drow off of his own thicker cock and told him to get on all fours.

Yuan was more than willing to comply and as soon as he did Ryonir licked his scaly lips at seeing the growing hips of the other man wiggle at him. As he got onto his own kneeling stands Kal quickly pushed up as well, keeping his cock inside the other elf-dragon as much as possible. Even as he felt the humanoid black dragon behind him nuzzle possessively against his body Ryonir knew that Kal was already his, which meant that he could put his full focus on the mostly dragon male in front of him. As Ryonir leaned forward he thought nothing of pushing the swishing tail out of the way and pushing his increasingly draconic cock between those scaled cheeks.

All three creatures growled and hissed as Ryonir was sandwiched between the two males, gasping loudly though his growing muzzle as a surge of growth in Kal’s cock sank it even deeper into him. That caused his own to do the same as he reached forward and stroked between the legs of the one in front of him. Both Kal and Yuan had outstretched new wings that were pressing against the side of the tent but it didn’t prompt any of them to stop, in fact it only seemed to grow even more insistent as their toe talons dug into the ground. They could hear fabric tearing from their horns and claws and as they orgasmed together for the first time they all couldn’t help but let out a loud roar that echoed throughout the plains…

Chapter 11:

As the moon slowly began to sank below the horizon Zefrit and Samiel sat against a rocky ridge that faced the direction of the cultist camp that they had escaped. They had decided to keep a look out while Ryonir got done with Yuan and Kal, both of them trying not to look back when they heard another set of roars. “Is that two or three?” Samiel asked the silver dragon.

“I’m not really trying to keep count,” Zefrit said as he shrugged his shoulders. “Do you think we should get them to hurry up? It didn’t even take me this long to transform.”

“If you want to get in between three rutting dragon creatures be my guest,” Samiel replied, chuckling as he watched the silver dragon look down. “Relax, there’s no scent on the wind that indicates they’re coming and even if they get some power from this red dragon they’re still mostly human. I’d say we just go there and take care of them, especially with one of Jalru’s fire breath.”

“That would defeat the purpose of my hiding myself,” a third voice chimed in, the two turning to see Jalru standing there with his arms crossed. The two looked at one another and tried to say something only for the disguised elf to wave a hand in the air and shake his head. “Come on, I’m pretty sure my mate is done with his romp and we don’t have to get between three rutting dragons.”

Zefrit and Samiel grinned sheepishly at one another and followed the still fuming elf down into the camp that had become quiet since the last round of roars. As Jalru was about to go to open the tent the werewolf quickly stepped forward and told him that he was more than willing to check on the status of the three. Jalru gave him a look but nodded and walked back towards the silver dragon, the werewolf waiting for a few seconds before he opened the tent flap and ducked down inside. When he looked down he saw Ryonir back in his elf form and lying in between two lithe, black-scaled humanoid dragons that were cuddled up on either side of him with their arms, legs, and even new wings and tails.

“Time to wake up stud,” Samiel said as he kicked the foot of the naked elven male, which prompted Ryonir to bolt upright and cause the other two to practically roll off of him. “If the Dragon Knights could see you now…”

Rynoir groaned as his body continued to tingle even after he had reverted back to his elf form, though he still felt a bit like a dragon as he moved to grab his clothes where they had been discarded. “From the sound of it my time in the Dragon Knights had long since passed,” Ryonir stated, which only caused the werewolf to snicker even more. “Alright, alright, get out there and tell the others we’re ready to go, I’ll rouse these two and get them as decent as they can get.”

Samiel nodded and left Ryonir to get dressed while the other two began to stir after being rolled to the side. Ryonir couldn’t help but watch them as they moved their new bodies, their scaled limbs stretching out as they both yawned with their draconic muzzles. Any hint that they used to be an elf and drow were gone, save for the silver and blonde mane of hair they were almost hard to tell from one another. As they woke up and rubbed between their legs they both suddenly got up and looked down when they didn’t find their members, only to find something else there instead.

One aspect of being a dragon that both of them seemed to have gotten was slits that housed their cocks, and though it was fun to watch them play with the opening Ryonir quickly got their attention and told them to get ready. The two immediately perked up and nodded before looking around for something that they could possibly wear. The group had grabbed clothing along with other things when they raided the cultist camp before they left, but none of that fit them anymore with their new assets. With them having to go to the capital there was little they could do but attempt to use the cloaks they had stolen to cover themselves up, and though they could it was impossible to fly with them as the others watched them struggle.

With the sky starting to grow light again Ryonir knew they couldn’t spend much more time in their campsite that Saracchi knew about and told the two that they would dress them up later before he, Jalru, and Samiel all hopped on Zefrit. Despite the danger that was inherent in flying over the land they had to hurry towards the capital as fast as possible and with the long stretches of barren land they could possibly fly unimpeded. The silver dragon sailed through the air for the entire day with the two humanoid black dragon men on either side of them and their flight remained uninterrupted even as they stopped so the fliers could get some rest. By the time night rolled around again the combination of their speedy travels through the air and the direction of Kal had gotten them to the foothills of the mountain range that the capital city was nestled in the crux of.

The group could see the fires of the torches lit near the front entrance, but as they continued to make their approach on land they saw another glowing light source that caused them to pause. It was a glowing ball of red light; Ryonir and the others looked at one another as they knew exactly what it was, and as they scanned the skyline of the city they could see quite a few others as well. There was also a recently built stone tower that was near the center of the city and saw the beginnings of a huge sphere that was bigger than anything else in the city even in its incomplete state. If they were all copies of the artifact then it was clear that Saracchi had managed to extend his influence to the entire capital and Ryonir could only imagine how enthralled the citizens of the capital were to the great dragon.

Their intention wasn’t to go through the city at all; even with Kal and Yuan using the special dye that the assassin scout had used to dye their scales red and Zefrit returning back to his drow form it was likely that they had magical countermeasures to find them, or the fact they weren’t mesmerized by the power of the artifact could be sensed by those who were. Fortunately Kal had an alternate way of getting past the initial defenses of the thick outer walls and led them to the area where the wall met the mountain. It was an entrance that only the scouts of the capital knew about and allowed them to sneak out of the capital so that their movements went unnoticed. Yuan commented that spies would also know about such tunnels as they carefully lowered themselves into a small river and dived down into the drainage tube that was hidden beneath the surface.

After about a minute they emerged once more in the darkness of the tube and crawled their way out. Between the werewolf, drow, and dragons of the group there was no need for a torch as they made their way through the large carved tube through the wall. Eventually they got to the other side and emerged in a drainage alley that funneled water from the mountain that wasn’t used by the citizens of the city. Almost immediately they could feel the presence of the energy of the artifact that they had been exposed to before as they carefully snuck up and through the dark streets. Fortunately the area they ended up in was mostly a business district and aside from the guards that patrolled the streets there wasn’t likely no one in the warehouse they broke into to change clothes and put on their equipment.

“Alright, Kal and Yuan will go to the castle and try to warn anyone that isn’t enthralled about Saracchi,” Ryonir said as he flexed his fingers with his claw gauntlets on them. “Fl… Jalru, Samiel, Zefrit, and I are going to confront the red dragon himself and try to take the artifact. Be careful you two, if we aren’t able to wrestle control of the artifact away from him then it’s possible this entire city of people will turn against us.”

“Glad that we have wings then,” Kal said nervously as he nodded to Yuan, Ryonir noting their scaled fingers sliding around one another before they clasped together. “Just defeat Saracchi, we’ll try to win the hearts and minds of the public if you can’t.”

The four watched the two dragon men put their cloaks over their heads and then leave the warehouse, heading down the streets with the light shining on their red scales. Ryonir hoped that the transformation would leave them resilient to the effects of the artifact and all the copies spread around, even as they got themselves ready he could still feel the almost oppressive atmosphere of all the orbs. Despite the enthralling nature Ryonir and the others continue to move their way though the city towards the tunnels that Kal had told them about, avoiding the guards where they could while they made their way towards the castle themselves. More than once they had to go around a plaza or courtyard where several had gathered around one of the artifact copies with several having clear signs of draconic corruption.

Ryonir couldn’t help but shake his head as they avoided yet another group of potential cultists in the making. He wasn’t sure whether or not they had intervened in time and could only imagine what would happen Saracchi had converted all those that have been enthralled into draconic creatures like he had done with Kal and Yuan. It angered him as both a Dragon Knight and his dragon side, and as he snorted slightly there was a flash of blue as a tiny wisp of fire came out. Even though he knew that he was this black dragon it still surprised him when he saw something emerge of this other side of himself. As their group finally got to the base of the castle and the secretive scout entrance Ryonir had managed to calm himself down enough and resumed his mantle as a Dragon Knight.

It was hard for Ryonir to believe that of all the places for a dread dragon to make his lair he would find one in the catacombs underneath a capital fortress. He couldn’t help but feel a little jealous, something that he attributed once more to his dragon side as the four continued down the stone hallway. Unlike the usual chill and dampness that usually came with such underground tunnels they found the atmosphere to be almost stifling as they all began to sweat. It wasn’t long before the Dragon Knight could sense Saracchi and knew that they would be approaching their first and hopefully final confrontation.

Eventually the group got to a metal door that was hot to the touch and Ryonir looked back at the others, watching the werewolf transform into his primal form while both Jalru and Zefrit readied their weapons. Though he would have liked them to be in their dragon forms there was hardly room for the hulking lupine creature, which made him wonder if Saracchi was in his humanoid form or in his dragon form. It didn’t matter either way; Ryonir braced himself for a fight and after finding the door locked he used his claws in order to slice through the metal. Once he had sliced through the hinges and the lock itself he backed away and allowed Samiel to take his place as the werewolf leaned back and kicked down the door with a kick of his large foot paw.

The metal barrier fell inside of the room and the four rushed inside ready to attack, steeling themselves for the initial breath of fire that would likely happen when the dread dragon saw them… except that it didn’t happen. All of them breathed hard in the oven-like cavern as they entered into the huge cavern and when they finally laid eyes on the red dread dragon Saracchi their mouths dropped in utter shock. Ryonir could hear Jalru and Zefrit gasp as audibly as he walked forward towards the huge red dragon that was bound and shackled to the stone floor. The sound of chains rattling slightly could be heard as he approached the dragon, though he knew that Saracchi couldn’t see him since his head was completely covered with a solid metal hood that only had a slot at the mouth and was connected with a glowing red color.

“No way…” Zefrit said as he and Jalru moved forward to join Ryoinr in examining the bound dragon.

“This doesn’t bode well,” Jalru stated as he walked down towards the forelimbs and saw cuffs that glowed in a similar nature to the collar bound to the red scales, the disguised dragon waving his fingers over the metal to reduce the arcane aura and see the runes inscribed. “I’ve seen these runes before, they’re similar to the ones that were on my mirror… ancient magic. But this is clearly not a dragon in control; whomever is behind this is using him as a catalyst, an amplifier for the corruptive artifact that someone is using to enslave this kingdom.”

Ryonir was at a loss for words as he continued to watch the red dragon breathe heavily, the imposing creature that he thought he would have to fight and destroy rendered completely subservient to the whims of another. “This is impossible,” Ryonir finally said as he scratched his head. “I saw him in my dream space, he interacted with me and even propositioned my dragon self!”

“No doubt under the orders of whomever is actually holding his leash,” Jalru said. “This complicates things; Saracchi clearly is an experienced manipulator and dread dragon, but in this case it appears he’s as much a victim as everyone else that we’ve met so far. The real mastermind could be anywhere in the capital at this rate and right now we have two of our own that’s currently heading towards the capital, if they make contact with the real artifact-wielder they cold be in grave danger… along with any of us if this item is strong enough to enthrall a dread dragon.”

“Well we can’t interrogate every person in the kingdom,” Samiel growled.

As the others continued to talk about what to do Ryonir looked down at the bound red dragon and had an idea. It was something he hadn’t tried before intentionally before but knew he had to give it a try, sitting down and pressing a hand against the mask of the dragon. When they looked down and saw that the Dragon Knight had sat down they looked at him in question, only for Ryonir to give them a little nod before closing his eyes. He heard Jalru say something but didn’t know what it was as the world around him began to slough off around him and he focused on one spot in particular that he had visited before…

When Ryonir entered into a meditative state he found himself back at the lake, except that the metaphysical world had altered significantly since his last appearance. The water was boiling and the trees that surrounded it smoldered or were even enflamed in certain areas. Saracchi was there as well but he also was different as the shackles and bindings were around his body, though the dragon was able to move more in this realm as they were joined by the black dragon as well. “So, now you two have seen the truth,” Saracchi said as the black dragon gave him a leering grin. “How embarrassing… a dread dragon such as my self being rendered like this…”

“We’ve all been there,” the black dragon replied as he patted Saracchi on the head, which caused the red dragon to snarl at him and attempt to lunge forward only for the chains to pull him back. “You know, if you find the right person you might actually enjoy it. But we’re not here to speak to the puppet, we would like to talk to the ones that are pulling the strings.”

The intense anger continued to seethe on Saracchi’s face, but then his eyes suddenly started to glow and he backed away. With the two tightens hovering above him Ryonir almost missed that someone came from the ash and smoke that permeated the forest. It was a young man that had a rich tan and red hair, signature traits of a desert elf, and as he moved forward the flames that were on the ground parted from him. Even though he wasn’t sure who this person was the Dragon Knight could guess that they were royalty, and since he had heard the king and queen were older he mused that this was probably either the prince or some sort of usurper.

“So this is the Dragon Knight that is causing such a stir,” the man replied with a smile before he bowed. “My name is Azi, I am the sworn prince of the Burning Lily and soon to be ruler of the world.”

“I have to say that I am surprised,” Ryonir stated as the black dragon leaned in towards Saracchi and petted his head. “All the times that something like this happens it’s the dread dragon that is at fault, not many people can out-bastard one. I guess I should say congratulations.”

“I will wear that honor with pride,” Azi responded with a smirk. “It was going to be the perfect plan; you and the other kingdoms would chase an evil red dragon all over the continent while my power rooted deeply into the minds and bodies of those that he affected, and eventually once he was dispatched I would already have an entire army of actual dragon warriors at my disposal. Had your annoying order not sent you to investigate and you got so far I would have completed my project and would no longer need Saracchi, but I have to admit that your pet dread dragon got one over on mine so I can’t be too angry at that.”

The heat of the metaphysical realm intensified as Ryonir saw the red eyes of the other elf glow and he looked up to find that black dragon had turned his attention to Azi as well. Whatever artifact Azi had under his control had clearly corrupted him and the Dragon Knight guessed that there would be no talking him out of it. “You know that I can’t allow this to stand,” Ryonir said as he gritted his teeth. “As a Dragon Knight I hereby claim control over this artifact and bring you to justice for the crimes you’ve committed against the kingdom through the use of this dragon.”

Azi merely chuckled and then his form began to disappear into the flames once more. “A shame, if you’re as much of a dragon lover as I think you are than we could have made quite the team,” Azi replied as his face was the last to disappear, the prince sticking out his tongue. “Very well Ryonir, if you want to take it feel free to come and get it.”

Before Ryonir could say or do anything the other elf disappeared out of sight and left just the black dragon along with Saracchi, and with the red dragon appearing to be in some sort of tranced state and looking off into the distance it was clear that Azi wasn’t going to let the dragon say anything else. The next second the Dragon Knight returned to the real realm as well and saw the others look at him with equal notes curiosity and concern. “So I know who is the mastermind behind this entire thing,” Ryonir said with such distain that his voice was practically a growl.

“Really?” Zefrit asked in slight shock. “How?”

“He came to gloat and size up the competition,” Ryonir replied. “It seems that the ruse of me actually being a dread dragon has not come to light yet, though I feel like that’s going to come to light real quick here. Hopefully it lasts just long enough for me to get close enough to Azi in order to rip his heart out of his chest and show it to him while it’s still beating.”

“Azi? As in Prince Azi?” Jalru asked, stepping in front of Ryonir when he didn’t get a response. “Look, as much as I know that seeing this has gotten you back into the particularly murder-orientated mindset of your former self you can’t just go up and try to kill a member of the royal family, especially if they’re enthralled by him. I know we have to take him out but we have to be a smart about it or we’re going to end up being considered dangerous by every kingdom on the continent.”

Ryonir’s frown deepened but he knew that Jalru was right; part of the brazen nature of this elf prince was the fact that if they did move against him and fail they would be enemies not only of this kingdom but every other one that happened to get word. If they were going to take a run at Azi they would need to make sure they succeeded, and find a means to cover their tracks for the attack. As he looked over at Saracchi he could see that what little movement came from the dread dragon was muted once more as he laid his head down on the stone floor that glowed slightly underneath him. Ryonir continued to think before he saw both Jalru and Zefrit moving towards the throat of the red dragon before he shouted at them to stop and look at him.

“Ryonir… we can’t just leave Saracchi like this,” Jalru said as he moved over and put a hand on the shoulder of the Dragon Knight. “He’s still a dread dragon and if we succeed he’ll probably take advantage of the situation to rule, and even if he doesn’t we can’t just leave him like this. Who knows, maybe when we kill him it’ll power down the artifact and allow the rest of the kingdom to be freed from the influence of the prince.”

Even though it rubbered Ryonir completely the wrong way his friend, or rather lover as he had found out recently, was right. Saracchi was a major threat to this kingdom and he couldn’t afford to let him live only for the dread dragon to go back to his old ways, or for the prince to keep using him like this… unless… “Wait, don’t you find something strange?” Ryonir said suddenly as he looked at Jalru. “How long do you think we’ve been down here talking?”

“Probably about ten, maybe fifteen minutes,” Zefrit chimed in. “Why?”

“Azi knows that we’re down here with Saracchi,” Ryonir explained. “He could have had guards come in the second he learned of our presence down here and yet we’re still completely alone without threat. He also told me in a roundabout way that the endgame of his plan was for Saracchi to eventually be considered enough of a scourge to be killed, which means… the bond between them isn’t just mental.”

“You’re thinking a bond like a Dragon Knight,” Jalru said as the two of them looked over at the silver dragon. “Azi is getting power from Saracchi just like you get it from Zefrit, except-“

“Except the artifact is leaching the dragon’s power without returning any of it,” Ryonir finished as he put a hand against the hot scales of the red dragon. “The amulet isn’t just using Saracchi as a catalyst or amplifier for the artifact, it’s draining all the power from him too. I’m guessing if Saracchi dies than all the power flows into Azi and he’ll transform like the cultists are, and if no one kills him then he’ll still just die naturally, but if he dies by the hands of a Dragon Knight then it’ll look like an ordinary slaying.”

“That’s… incredibly diabolical,” Zefrit said with a slight shudder. “What do we do then?”

“I think I have a plan actually,” Ryonir replied while looking at each of them. “Well… it’s more like a fourth of a plan, but I’ll put the rest of the pieces together along the way. For now though I need Zefrit to come with me to confront the prince and help our other friends while Jalru and Samiel stay here, but first we need to go off and have a little discussion about your role where there are no prying ears to hear it…”

Chapter 12:

The desert air had a chill to it as Zefrit and Ryonir emerged from the catacombs beneath the castle into the city proper. The two could see that Azi was well aware that they had no intention on killing Saracchi as they noticed most of the guard was outside of the fortress gates. It was clear to the elf that the prince was certain that they were going to try and make good on their promise, which was something that the Dragon Knight couldn’t help at this point. The only thing they still had going for them was that they were already inside the inner wall thanks to Kal and only had to sneak around the courtyards in order to get inside.

As they passed by the bushes and fountains the two had to stop and hide more than once to avoid a passing patrol. When they watched the guards pass by they could see their eyes were completely red, Ryonir guessing that the royal guard were some of the first that Azi had corrupted with the artifact. Though the transformation was minimal the two could see patches of red scales on their exposed arms with one sporting full horns that poked out past his hair and prevented him from wearing a helmet like the others. They could also feel the power that was controlling these men getting stronger the closer they got, Zefrit whispering the joke that at the very least they wouldn’t have to go looking for the artifact as Ryonir rolled his eyes.

Eventually the two got to an area they could scale up, Ryonir using the claws on his gauntlets to climb up before lowering a rope and letting Zefrit climb up as well. With the disguised dragon inheriting the drow elf’s gift of night vision he was able to lead them through the pitch-black hallways and rooms without being spotted by those that patrolled the inner rooms. Eventually the two got to a spare bedroom that they deemed safe enough to hole up in for a few minutes to catch their breath and prepare. After one last look down the hallway it was attached to Ryonir closed the door and locked it while Zefrit leaned against the opposite wall.

“I don’t think I’ve ever been this nervous on a mission before,” Zefrit stated as he ran his hands through his long silver hair.

“Personally I would rather fight a dread dragon than do this myself,” Ryonir replied while he sat down on the bed. “Even if we do this right we’ll probably never get invited to come here ever again.”

Zefrit chuckled at that before his face got serious again and sat down on the bed next to Ryonir. “I think that dispatching a member of the royal family isn’t the only thing that your mind is preoccupied with,” Zefrit stated, which caused Ryonir to look at him in confusion. “I’m not sure how much you remember of your real life but I can imagine that with the knowledge that you’re a dread dragon yourself the idea of killing Saracchi because of what he is can’t have left a good taste in your mouth.”

“I will admit that seeing you two there about to kill him brought a surge of emotion that I would rather not repeat,” Ryonir replied. “But one thing I learned in all this is that we have the ability to be redeemed, but we have to want to change. Jalru did it for me when I was… well, a black dragon, and once we takeout Azi maybe Saracchi will do the same with his help.”

“Yeah, maybe,” Zefrit stated, the drow’s eyes going down to the floor. “Speaking of Jalru, I know that this is probably not the time for it but now that you know who he is and what he means to you do you know where that puts us?” Ryonir just looked at him and suddenly he could see Zefrit grow increasingly embarrassed. “Sorry, priorities I know, but I feel like if I don’t know now it might haunt me if we don’t make it out of this.”

“First of all we’re going to make it out of this,” Ryonir said with a small smile as he put a hand on the back of the drow. “Second once we do Jalru, you, I, and even Samiel and the other two will have a long talk about our relationship when we get out of here. Let’s just focus on the task at hand, but if you must know I think once we’re done here you’ll be just fine.”

The words of encouragement brightened Zefrit and the two shared a smile before they got back on their feet. “For what its worth I have to say that it was fun going back to the way it used to be,” Zefrit said afet they checked their equipment to make sure they were ready for the next phase of their infiltration, the drow’s face looking slightly more forlorn as Ryonir felt himself swallow hard. “In case I don’t have a chance I just wanted to say that you were the best friend I ever had Ryonir, and I’m really going to miss you.”

Ryonir wasn’t quite sure what to say in response to that, finally just giving Zefrit a nod. Before he could turn back towards the door however the drow quickly darted forward and kissed him, taking the other elf by surprise as the two remained together for several seconds before Zefrit finally pulled away. Ryonir was somewhat surprised by the sudden display of affection but it seemed to put his partner at ease before they walked back out into the dark hallway and towards their destination. They had started to head towards the quarters where the royal family slept, but as they made their way through an area that was lit by torches they both suddenly felt something that caused them to pause and look at one another before changing their destination.

Their path led them to the main chamber of the fortress that was brightly lit upon their arrival. It appeared to be devoid of life though as they passed by the great hanging banners emblazoned with the symbol of the Burning Lily on it. As Ryonir and Zefrit continued to make their way down the plush carpet that went from the entrance to the other side of the room where the thrones of the monarchy sat on a raised platform. When the two got halfway through the room however they saw someone walk out from behind one of the grandiose chairs and sit on it, the Dragon Knight recognizing him instantly and prompting Zefrit to stop.

“Bold move Dragon Knight,” Azi said with a smirk that revealed pointed fangs as he looked at the two with bright red eyes. “I didn’t think you’d actually have the gall to try and come up here after sparing my dragon, but it seems that you are either braver or stupider than I thought. And let me guess, the drow there is your dragon in disguise?”

“This doesn’t have to end in bloodshed Azi,” Ryonir said as he stepped forward. “Release the people of this kingdom and turn over the artifact and I’m sure your parents will be lenient on you when they consider your punishment.”

Zefirt and Ryonir both jumped slightly and remained on guard as Azi let out an almost maniacal laugh at that before turning towards them once more. “Do you really think I would start doing this if there was someone that could stand in my way?” Azi asked as he pressed a hand against the throne he sat in. “My parents were the first that I fed to Saracchi once I had taken control of him, though they certainly weren’t the last.”

Ryonir felt the blood in his body turn to ice when he realized that Azi hadn’t mesmerized his parents like the others but got rid of them instead, which meant that he wasn’t the prince… he was their king. By that point he had probably ensnared the guard and royal court to the point he could get them to think they died in their sleep or were off on some sort of diplomatic trip only to never return. This elf was clearly beyond redemption, and it made what they needed to do all that much easier. The only problem was that as he continued to look at the elf as well as around the throne room he didn’t see what he was looking for either.

“Oh, are you looking for this?” Azi said as he leaned forward and pulled something that was hidden behind his back, a golden mask shaped like a dragon with rubies as the eyes and one large spherical gem in the middle of the forehead. “This is actually an ancient treasure that was found in the vaults of a ruined civilization that came before us, the ability to control the dread dragons and make them subservient to us. As a Dragon Knight I’m sure that you can at least appreciate the idea that these brutal, savage creature could be brought to heel, organizations like yours wouldn’t even have to exist if the kingdoms controlled these monsters.”

“Yes, because you’re proving a great example of what the kingdoms would do with such power,” Ryonir shot back as he continued to step forward. “Like I told you in that metaphysical plane, by my power as a Dragon Knight I will be taking that artifact and then dealing with the Dread Dragon Saracchi. This will not go the other way around like I’m sure you wanted.”

“Well well, aren’t we the clever ones,” Azi replied as his smirk faltered slightly, the desert elf hopping off the throne and approaching as well. “Well like I said in that realm you are going to have to take it from me, but since you have a pet of your own why don’t you just join me? Together the two of us could rule this entire world with our dragons raining down destruction on the land, and then once they have served their purpose you can take their power for your own.”

“Hard pass,” Ryonir replied as the two continued to close the distance between one another, the elf holding up his gauntlets and igniting them with blue flame. “I already have the power of a dragon!”

Ryonir rushed forward to try and close the distance and maybe take Azi by surprise, but the other elf was too quick and brandished a flaming weapon of his own. It was a daggertail whip, the interlocking metal segments extending out with a flourish as the deadly sharp serrated edges flew towards him. There was a fiery clash as the two weapons made contact with one another before Ryonir continued his charge. As he expected though this elf was also very well trained in the art of fighting as he jumped back and made another flourish with his whip to send the spiked chain flying towards him.

With the battle started Zefrit ran forward in order to try and flank Azi, only to have to dodge out of the way as a creature came down from its hiding spot behind one of the banners and made a lunge for him. Ryonir looked over at concern as his companion found himself the one being flanked by two black-scaled creatures with glowing red eyes. “I found the two companions of yours skulking about,” Azi said as he let the flaming daggertail whip slide along the ground. “It didn’t take much persuasion for them to fight for me again.”

Ryonir gritted his teeth and moved forward with his gauntlets outstretched, jumping in the air to avoid the daggertail and slice as Azi’s face. Though the other elf managed to avoid it he could see the surprise on his face at getting so close before rolling out of the way. When he pivoted to make another swing though he heard the loud clash of metal against metal and a stinging sensation in his side. He shifted and jumped to the left before glancing down and seeing that there was a large rip in his metal armor where the metal was singed.

Ryonir’s armor wasn’t imbued with dread dragon magic like his weapons were, he mused as he felt tiny droplets of blood start to leak down between the metal and his body, and with Saracchi powering Azi’s daggertail all it would do was slow him down. When he glanced at Zefrit he saw that the silver dragon had shed his drow disguise and had managed to tail whip one of the two into the wall, but the creatures were proving hardier than he thought and would start to flank him again before he could get any sort of advantage. At any moment this grand hall could also be swarming with guards, it was only the arrogance of the elf prince that kept them at bay for the moment. Ryonir knew if he managed to down Azi they would be surrounded in seconds, but his target was for the mask itself as he made another lunge for it.

This time though Ryonir let out a cry of pain as the end of the daggertail whip pierced through his shoulder, causing an intense heat to flood the area as the weapon was quickly pulled out and brought back to the side of the one who wielded it. “Not as tough as I thought,” Azi sneered as Ryonir panted while recovering from the pain. “A Dragon Knight is more important to me dead than alive, so let’s see if we can make you see the light.”

Ryonir grimaced as he watched Azi put on the mask, his face disappearing behind the gold and rubies as the power that had been stifling before intensified even more once he had put it on. As soon as the artifact bonded to the elf both Ryonir and Zefrit let out a cry of surprise as the oppressive nature of the magic hit them once more. This was nothing like the copy they had encountered in the border city and as Ryonir staggered forward Zefrit was practically brought down to his stomach right away. The other two that were being controlled stopped their attack and went to the side of their master as Azi slowly stepped forward towards the Dragon Knight.

“I think it’s time that you kneel before me,” Azi said, the command reverberating through Ryonir’s head as he found himself falling to his knees which caused the other elf to laugh. “See, I knew we could come to some sort of arrangement. Now… shall I convert your companion first, turn him into a red dragon that corrupts you, or maybe I should make you like these two instead and then save the actual dragon for later?”

As Azi began to circle around the Ryonir all the Dragon Knight could do was pant from the oppressive weight of the artifact’s magic. “You… won’t… win…” Ryonir gasped out before another surge of arcane force brought him down to all fours. “You’re… going to… be… unggghh…”

“I’m sorry, what was that?” Azi said as his grin could be seen through the mouth of the mask as he put a foot on Ryonir’s head. “Don’t worry Dragon Knight, I have grandiose plans for you once I finally break that spirit of yours. First thing you’re going to do is take care of the dread dragon Sarrachi, and once you kill him and take his head back to your guild you will report that the corruption in the Kingdom of the Burning Lily has been vanquished. Then when the time comes and I march on Gildeon you will be there to welcome me with open arms and an additional garrison of dragon men and dragons to conquer the world, what do you think of that Dragon Knight Ryonir?”

To the surprise of Azi the one that was under his foot began to laugh, a soft chuckle at first before it turned into cackling that caused the desert elf to back off. “Sounds like… a lot of fun…” the creature that was Ryonir said as he looked up, his eyes the solid blue orbs of a dragon as a pair of fangs grew from his lips. “One problem though; I’m not Dragon Knight Ryonir… my name… is… Dread Dragon… Xralix…”

As soon as the words left his lips what remained of the barrier between elf and dragon was shattered as Xralix shot upwards and dug his clawed hand between the forehead and mask of the desert elf. Azi let out a howl of pain as the mask was ripped from his face as Xralix took advantage of the proximity to grab the artifact he had been after this entire time. The prince recoiled and covered his clawed up face as he took the mask and tossed it to the ground, then inhaled deeply as his face quickly pushed out into a muzzle and black scales cascaded down his throat. He could hear Azi scream to stop and that only made it all the sweeter as his eyes glowed before he unleashed a stream of bright blue flame that completely engulfed the mask and caused the metal to start melting.

Something suddenly hit Xralix in the side that bit into the scales forming there and his flaming breath arched upwards, slicing into and setting the nearby banners on fire as the daggertail whip dug into his side. When he turned to the source of the pain he saw Azi standing there with blood dripping down his face and his hand gripped tightly on the whip. “This is impossible…” Azi muttered as he pulled back and let the metal rake against the changing creature’s side. “You can’t be a dread dragon!”

“I can be whatever the fuck I want!” Xralix shouted, his last words ending in a roar as the wound he received quickly knitted back together before he charged. His footsteps made increasingly large thuds as his boots popped from his feet becoming draconic as he rushed the elf before he could attack again, pinning him up against the wall. Unfortunately his transformation also made the changing dragon clumsy and the increasingly smaller elf managed to wiggle out and try to lash out once more with his weapon. There was another loud clang as Xralix deflected it with the gauntlets that grew with his forepaws while the rest of his armor popped off of him to reveal the deep black scales underneath.

When the dread dragon braced himself for another blow the prince feinted instead and made a run for the partially melted mask, which had started to form glowing cracks on it. Xralix didn’t bother to go after him, instead watching as the desperate prince attempted to grab it only for the molten metal to burn his hand. “Looks like you could use some help,” Xralix growled with a mixture of elation and anger as he took the prince and pinned him to the ground with one forepaw while grabbing the mask with the other. “You want the power, here it is!”

The smell of burning flesh filled the air along with the screams of the prince as the mask was put on his face, Xralix letting the elf squirm before finally letting him go as Zefrit came up next to him. “A bit excessive…” the silver dragon commented as the transforming elf just smirked with his new muzzle at the flailing prince as his size continued to increase. “Now what?”

“Now we wait,” Xralix replied, a groan punctuating his words as his spine stretched to allow for the growth of his tail as he felt his horns push out of his skull quickly enough it weighed his head down before his neck muscles grew to compensate. “That magic of that mask was lost as soon as I hit it with dragon fire, which means we’re going to have a guest very soon.”

Zefrit tilted his head slightly in question before the floor suddenly began to rumble underneath their feet, growing in intensity until the side of the fortress exploded outwards with a large gout of fire. A loud roar echoed through the capital city as the two walked over towards the entrance of the main hall to see a red and gold dragon both flying through the night sky. While Xralix intended to meet Saracchi in the main throne room the damage that had been caused by the explosion caused the fortress to start to crumble, large chunks falling from the ceiling and windows shattering. As the floor tilted Xralix, who had completely transformed back to his dragon self, rushed in to grab not only Yuan and Kal’s unconscious bodies but also that of the still screaming prince before rushing out with Zefrit as the huge building collapsed behind them.

Once the cloud of dust and debris had settled Xralix and Zefrit met the other two dragons in the large gardens that bordered the now destroyed fortress, Jalru landing next to Saracchi in his own dragon form before going up and nuzzling Xralix. After the reunion of the two the black dragon once more looked at the red-scaled creature before him, noticing that while the hood and collar were gone the cuffs were still on his body. “So your mate told me that you had a proposition for me,” Saracchi said as he puffed out his chest, though Xralix could see that there was still weakness in his form. “If it’s to join me in the leveling of this city to ash I wouldn’t say no.”

As Xralix’s scaly lips curled up into a fanged grin a sharp look from the gold dragon next to him quickly brought his thoughts back to the matter at hand. “This city and the Kingdom of the Burning Lily have lost the entirety of their royal family, or at least they will soon,” Xralix explained, the blue and red eyes of the creature looking down at the desert elf that whimpered while pinned beneath the huge talons of the black dragon. “While the artifact might be destroyed the corruption that it caused will continue to linger, and that means things will never go back to normal and these simple creatures will likely be enthralled by the next being that comes by with enough power.”

“All I’m hearing is more reason to burn this entire kingdom to the ground,” Saracchi said before Xralix quickly hushed him.

“The mask was created by a dread dragon,” Xralix continued to explain. “Not sure why, don’t really care, but that means that a dread dragon is in the best place to make sure that this kingdom can eventually return to normal.”

“A dread dragon… such as you?” Saracchi asked in question, scoffing when Xralix nodded. “What a novel concept, a dread dragon running a kingdom. You know as well as I that your Dragon Knights won’t ever approve of one of us in that sort of power, especially not a black dragon such as myself.”

“I will go and talk to the Dragon Knights on your behalf in order to give you a short leash in order to rehabilitate those that were affected,” Xralix replied with a dismissive wave of his forepaw, showing off the weapon that was still attached to it. “They do owe me one after all this, and to be fair I’m just going to be handling the power aspects, Jalru here can be the one that the other kingdoms deal with.”

“They certainly will respond better to a goldie like your mate there,” Saracchi said with a chuckle before his face turned serious. “Still haven’t told me what my part in all of this is going to be.”

The grin on Xralix’s face grew bigger as he began to circle around the red dragon, which he found was smaller than him. “Simple, you’re going to work for me,” Saracchi hissed at that but the black dragon quickly bared his teeth to show he was the one in charge, which seemed to work as the red dragon calmed down. “The effects of this artifact are too widespread for me to handle on my own, and since you were directly involved in the spread you’re going to have to cull those that need it. Plus I feel like being the slave of this former prince will have broken you in to the concept of following one that’s stronger than you, and as I mentioned before you might just find yourself enjoying it.”

Though a growl came from Saracchi’s throat it did little to dampen the lustful smirk on Xralix’s muzzle, which prompted both Zefrit and Jalru to roll their eyes before sitting down. “Well… I suppose the alternative is death if I disagree,” Saracchi stated, Xralix nodding his head. “Fine then, you did save my life after all, question is what we’re going to do with the little bastard.”

“Oh, this one?” Xralix said as he took the half-conscious desert elf and tossed him in front of Saracchi’s feet. “He decided that he would end the line of royalty after killing his parents, I figured that it would only be fitting for him to share the same fate now that we’re taking control…”

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A few months had passed since Xralix had taken control of the Kingdom of the Burning Lily, though technically it was Jalru that became the guardian of the lands after Azi’s treachery was exposed along with his plans to take over the neighboring kingdoms. He had taken care to move everything from his jungle lair to the capital city with the permissions of the Dragon Knights, who despite not being keen on the idea knew that they owed the dread dragon and that he was also uniquely situated to deal with the magic that still corrupted the land. With Saracchi making sure that those who had continued to form cults were properly taken care of it left the black dragon with being able to soak in a large set of hot springs that were near the capital. As he sat there in the bubbling waters he let out a little yep as they briefly grew hotter for a second which prompted him to look up and see Jalru had landed in the water with him.

“If it isn’t our resident diplomat,” Xralix said as he relaxed back into the water while watching Zefrit slide off of the gold dragon’s back while in his drow form. “And your brought our figurehead for the kingdom as well, how are our new neighbors fairing with the knowledge they have dragons as neighbors?”

“As well as you expect,” Jalru replied with a sigh. “The Dragon Knights are helping to smooth things over but the fact that there is a black and red dragon reported being spotted within the kingdom makes the others nervous. To be fair this type of situation has never happened before, so people are naturally a bit cautious about it.”

“I suppose that’s to be expected,” Xralix stated with a chuckle before looking down at Zefrit. “How are the drow and our werewolf pack from the jungle taking the relocation?”

“Samiel has the pack under control,” Zefrit reported. “Yuan and Kal are helping with the drow taking over the mountain range to help with our defenses. I was hoping Kal would go and deal more with the scouts but ever since they became a mated pair it’s hard to separate the two for a few seconds, much less several days.”

“Sounds like everything is pretty stable so far,” Xralix said as he grinned down at Zefrit. “You going to join Jalru and I for a soak or do you have that pretty drow boyfriend you need to get back too?”

“Actually…” Zefrit said with a grin of his own as Xralix suddenly found himself pinned on his back by the gold dragon that had approached him while he wasn’t looking. “With all this time we’ve been spending working on this kingdom I haven’t had a chance to be with my new mate. Plus ever since you and Jalru told me about your secret I’ve been waiting eagerly to join in on the fun.”

Xralix tried to squirm out of the way but with Jalru on top of him it was almost impossible, and as he laid there in the water he could feel that the gold dragon was ready for some fun of his own. With his legs splayed out in the air all he could do was lay there as the drow came up to his head and told him to lick until he was big enough to suck. In the back of his mind the dread dragon wondered how smart it was to tell two metallic dragons that he enjoyed being the sub, but there was nothing he could, nor wanted to, do it about it as he did what he was told. Zefrit let out a moan and gripped the much larger muzzle with his body as that thick tongue slid over him, easily enveloping his body until he started to grow.

As Xralix watched ebon skin turn to silver scales the gold dragon on top of him began to push in, the black dragon’s entire body growing tense as Jalru grinned down at him. “Look at you so eager for other dragons to dominate you,” Jalru teased as he began to spread open the hole of the bigger dragon. “Maybe we should get Saracchi in on this, I’m sure with a big guy like you there’s more than enough room for one.”

“I think… I’ve created a monster,” Xralix gasped between licks until the rapidly growing cock of the drow swelled enough that it started to fill his mouth. With his head leaning backwards he could only watch while upside down as the flanks of the growing male pressed down against him with every inch of height that Zefrit gained. He watched as the grinning face of the drow stretched out and turned a shiny silver while the rest of his body grew to suit, including the member that was already big enough that he had to shift his tongue to keep it from being pinned down. He let out a muffled huff as the silver dragon was big enough to reach where Jalru had pressed his belly against Xralix and when their muzzles got close they met in a deep, passionate kiss with the black dragon underneath them.

Even though Xralix was preoccupied with the cocks spreading open his maw and tailhole he still was able to appreciate above the pleasure being fed to him that the two had grown so close together. Especially Jalru, who embraced a bit of the black dragon’s way of thinking after he had sex with Zefrit during their mission, then decided to also have the same experience with Yuan and Kal. He even let Xralix watch as the two smaller anthro dragon men took Jalru from his own elven form and pleasured him all the way until they worshipped his draconic body. The fact that the gold dragon even floated putting another dread dragon in the mix was something that surprised him, even more than when he not only allowed Xralix to mate with Saracchi but encouraged it to establish his dominance.

But in those hot springs the only two dragons that Xralix cared about was those that he considered to be his mates, the ones that knew his secret as a growing silver dragon humped into his muzzle while he was stretched wide by the gold dragon on top of him. He was more than willing to let the lengthening shaft of Zefrit start to slide down into his throat, though he was unable do anything with the weight of two dragons on top of him now instead of just the one. As the tail of the silver dragon slithered out and waved into the air it only served to bring Zefrit to thrust down deeper so that Xralix’s throat bulged out. He let out a muffled grunt of pleasure as both Zefrit and Jalru stopped their movement so the dread dragon beneath them could feel the full measure of the throbbing shafts that were hilted deep inside of him.

“I bet this beats a bunch of kobolds up in a mountain, huh?” Jalru asked as he began to thrust once more, feeling the hind legs of the black dragon bounce up and down as Xralix attempted to mutter a response only for the vibrations to cause Zefrit to shudder. “Naughty dragon, trying to talk with your mouth full like that.”

Xralix just groaned as best he could with the silver dragon cock deep in his maw while Jalru rubbed his flanks. As the black dragon relaxed and allowed his two mates to use him as their personal lust toy he wondered in the back of his mind what he had done to deserve to be so lucky. His past as a destroyer was long behind him and he had long since wondered if he had managed to atone for his past sins, but it appeared he had done so to have two mates that kept him straight while also catering to his every whim. It only made him wonder what the future might hold for the king of the kingdom as they rutted long into the night…

The End