Chapter 2:

Several days had passed since the three had left Gildeon for the Frostward Vale, flying on Zefrit when they could and taking the main roads if weather didn’t permit it. On the third day they faced a major waylay of a storm that rolled in from the west, causing the three to find shelter in the closest inn they could find. Thankfully their aerial advantage spotted the huge thunderhead early enough that they were able to at least find a place, which the two elves in particular were grateful for. A roof over their head and strong walls to block out the storm definitely beat anything they would be able to create as they landed in one of the fields near the town so they wouldn’t startle anyone with their landing.

Thankfully they were still close enough to Gildeon that accommodations could be made for Zefrit that wasn’t putting him in the stables for the night. Most cities in the kingdom haven’t even seen a dragon before, or if they have its likely one of those that had burned down half their farms or killed their citizens. If they were going to have to layover someplace Ryonir was glad that it was here and not one of those places where they would be looked at with suspicious eyes. Instead they were treated with a hearty welcome and an inn with a door big enough for the silver dragon to squeeze through and a room where he wouldn’t bump his head as they settled in.

“Looks like we got here just in time,” Flynn said as he looked out the window and saw the rain starting to come down in sheets before the innkeeper boarded them up. “It appears the heavens have deemed it fit to open up. Not that I’m complaining, our newest Dragon Knight here has been cracking the whip in order to get us to our destination even if it meant that we’d be half dead when we got there.”

“I just want to make sure that we’re not late to whatever apocalypse this dragon is planning to bring to the surrounding area,” Ryonir replied as he brought out a map of nearly the entire continent and pointed to the area near Gildeon. “This is where we currently are.” The elf than slid his finger all the way across the map to nearly the other side where a number of mountain peaks had been drawn in. “This is where we need to be, and in three days we’ve moved about an inch towards our goal.”

“To be fair we ran pretty far away from those mountains in our early days of traveling,” Zefrit spoke up, shifting his body in the corner he had jammed himself into so he wouldn’t block anyone else from getting through. “Plus I’m not going to lie, we’re only a few days away and I’m already missing the creature comforts that came with living in a place that catered to dragons and elves equally.”

“I still can’t believe you’re too young to shapeshift,” Flynn jabbed with a chuckle. “I thought most dragons your age should at least be able to obtain a humanoid form by now.”

Zefrit just rolled his draconic eyes and focused his attention back on the meal they were waiting for. Though Ryonir continued to make small talk with the other two as thunder rattled the walls his mind kept drifting back towards the Frostward Vale and what they would find there. His thoughts were so distance he didn’t even notice when his food arrived, not until repeated attempts from both Flynn and Zefrit brought him back to the present location. He only ate a little bit before excusing himself, informing the two that he was going to go upstairs and get some much-needed rest.

The other two looked at one another before asking Ryonir if he was feeling okay, which the elf quickly dismissed by saying he was fine before heading through the only hallway on the first floor to where the rooms were. Much like the inn itself all the rooms on the first floor were designed to house a dragon and that was the one they had gotten. Flynn opted to go in on his own room on the second floor so they wouldn’t have to share a bed and also so that he could avoid the snoring he accused the dragon of having. At this point through with all the thunder it was unlikely that anyone was going to hear anything beyond that as Ryonir opened the door to his room with the key given to them.

When he closed the door behind him Ryonir finally had a chance to breathe and when he did he realized just how badly he had been holding back his shaking. He had already started to feel the sweat dripping down his face when he started to eat and as the storm outside grew more intense it only seemed to rattle his nerves anymore. In his mind he tried to justify it that Gildeon didn’t often get storms so he was unused to such things, but Ryonir knew this was much more than something that was just playing off of fear of the unknown. The strange thing was that he never remembered having such a visceral reaction to storms before as he found himself taking off his tunic because he had sweated through it.

Ryonir continued to sit on the edge of the bed that was meant for him and rocked slowly back and forth as he tried to calm down his body, still feeling perspiration dripping off of his face and down his back despite the room being quite cool. A growing part of him wondered if he had somehow been poisoned but his stomach didn’t hurt and other than his trembling body he didn’t feel weak or unsteady. Yet with every crash of thunder he felt his body practically convulsing until finally he fell backwards on the bed practically panting. His legs were practically swimming in his breeches at the time and he found himself stripping down to his undergarments before collapsing back down. At first he thought it might help to stay down and try to steady his breathing but all it did was seem to make the room spin around him as it got darker… and darker… until Ryonir found himself floating in complete blackness…

Even though things got completely dark the sound of thunder could be heard still, eventually growing louder until it practically reverberated in his skull. Eventually the shadows that had enveloped him were momentarily banished as a bolt of lightning could be seen in the difference. Though the flash was brief it gave Ryonir the impression he was in a huge cave with an opening that faced the sky, which was definitely not the inn that he had passed out before. As a second round of lightning split the sky he also realized as his heart jumped into his throat that he was not alone… briefly seeing the shadow of a massive creature sitting there in the cave before the illumination dissipated once more.

With the setting unfolding before him Ryonir realized he was in the den of a great dragon, though what kind of dragon remained to be seen. The elf still couldn’t feel his body or how to move himself as he remained in that position while the cavern was filled with a great sigh. “Tell me…” an impossibly deep voice said in draconic, his eyes just able to see movement of a very large dragon head moving to look outside of the cave. “Do you believe that it is possible for one to set themselves on a path that is not ordained by the whims of fate?”

Ryonir briefly wondered if that question was meant for him before he heard a sound that might have been the voice of another, though it seemed somewhat distant and the growing noise of rain and thunder drowned most of it out. “Perhaps you are right,” the great dragon continued on. “Perhaps we have no more control over ourselves than the leaves in the wind of a storm. All we can do is ride it best we can… even now, when I have the thought of just staying here and living out the rest of my days in solitude, I can hear that voice saying to go out… burn… destroy… create chaos…”

Even though Ryonir couldn’t feel his body the words of the dragon caused his blood to freeze. Nothing was making any sense at the moment and the storm had only continued to intensify in nature. Even though the dragon had continued on it was impossible to make out as the rain sounded as intense as drums beating next to his ears. Then there was a loud roar and the feel of water splashing against him suddenly realigned his perspective with his body once more…

The elf let out a loud gasp and bolted up in the bed, sputtering and spitting out the water that had been poured on him. As he struggled to regain his breath, he looked around to see himself back in the dark room of the inn with a silver dragon standing there holding the handle of a pail of water in his mouth. “You looked like you were having some sort of nightmare,” Zefrit said after he had spit the now-empty bucket onto the floor. “My previous attempts to wake you didn’t seem to do anything so I resorted to more drastic measures, I apologize.”

“No… it’s alright,” Ryonir replied as he took his sopping wet hair and flipped it out of his face. “I was having a… very bizarre dream, or maybe it was something else.”

“Something else?” Zefrit stated as he cocked his head to the side in question.

“Yeah, I think there is something more arcane in nature that is happening here,” Ryonir tried to explain, though his own mind was attempting to figure out as he was speaking. “I saw a dragon sitting in the cave, and even though I didn’t see outside of it I feel like I was in the Frostward Vale. The only problem is I don’t know if it has something to do with my past or my future… I guess it’s the problem with not remembering, I have nothing to compare it to.”

“Well maybe it’s something that we should do in the morning after you get a good night’s sleep,” Zefrit stated before he and Ryonir looked down at the bed that was now soaked with both sweat and the water that had been dumped on him. “I don’t suppose that you think they might have another room that you could switch too?”

“I highly doubt it,” Ryonir said with a sigh as he went over to the bag he had set down previously in order to grab something to dry himself off. “Maybe Flynn will let me share his bed for the night, there’s no way that I’m going to be sleeping on this.”

“Nonsense!” Zefrit declared as he went over to the area that was designed for dragons to sleep. “You can share my bed; it wouldn’t be the first time we had to do such a thing. Remember when we had to cross over those mountains in order to avoid the battle happening in the valley below and we couldn’t find any shelter before night fell?”

Ryonir nodded, remembering the winds being so bad that it was threatening to tear his skin up and he had to take shelter under the dragon’s wing. The silver dragon went over to the pile of fluff that served as the bed and settled in first before inviting the elf to do the same. Though it really wasn’t designed for the body of an elf he found it still somewhat comfortable as he pressed his body against the scales of the other creature. He was always surprised with how warm the dragon was as he pressed up against him, for some reason the silver coloration making him think of snow or something like that. It didn’t take long for the two to fall asleep, the storm continuing to rage around them…

The next morning Rynoir awoke to find that the storm had not abated during the night, though it did sound a little less intense as he carefully got up from his still sleeping companion and made his way over to his bedroll. As he changed into a fresh pair of clothing he found bits of fluff sticking to his skin and realized with slight embarrassment that he had fallen asleep with nothing on. Though he was sure that the dragon wouldn’t realize or care that he had just slept next to him while naked it was still something he had never thought of actually doing… but it did allow him to keep his spare clothing fresh as he hung up the still damp ones to try and get them to try quicker. He also took a quick check of the bed and found it still very moist, making the elf wonder if he was going to have to once more share a bed with the dragon as he went down into the tavern part of the inn for breakfast.

“Good morning,” Flynn said, waving briefly to him while eating from a large plate of eggs and staring at the pages of an ancient book. It wasn’t surprising to find his friend this way, more often than not he found him in such a situation that it made him wonder if the other elf’s only activities were eating and reading. “I found some pretty interesting stuff on this dragon that inhabits the Frostward Vale.”

“I don’t suppose its if we say his name three times it’ll banish him to another realm for which there is no return,” Ryonir joked, which caused Flynn to look up at him incredulously. “Sorry, but kind of hoping that it would be that easy. What’s it say?”

“The dread dragon Kralix-“

“Karlix,” Ryonir interrupted, once more getting a glare from the elf. “Sorry, it’s just that’s what the elders said his name was.”

“My mistake,” Flynn said, a hint of annoyance still in his voice as he put his finger down on one part of the page. “Anyway, the dread dragon Karlix is known as one of the oldest black-scaled dragon in the Frostward Vale, having spent centuries terrorizing the surrounding area. Normally people stay clear of a chromatic dragon’s stronghold but the valleys around this particular area of the mountains is very fertile and the mountains have ores in them that are not found in many other places. Plus he only seems to rampage once every few decades instead of the constant stream of destruction most of his kind rain down on the land.”

“Clever,” Ryonir said as his brows furrowed on seeing the artist’s rendition of the creature. “Lulls them into a false sense of security, or possibly gets them to forget where his radius of terror is and then probably reaps the area when it looks like there’s enough good stuff out there for him.”

“That’s not the only thing,” Flynn stated as he turned the book around and crossed the table onto Ryonir’s side as he pointed out a map on the next page. “It appears that as time has gone on his attacks have become less frequent… but when they do happen the radius of them greatly blossoms out. That’s probably how the kingdom bordering the Frostward Vale figured out that it was one dragon doing it all, the last two times he pushed so far outwards that it burned two major cities.”

Ryonir congratulated Flynn on the catch but as he did something caught his eye that caused him to pause, then take out one of his own maps of the Frostward Vale he had packed for the journey. Unlike the one in the book this one stretched out further so he could see the entirety of the Vale, as well as the land that surrounded it. “Look at this…” he said as he pointed to the distances of expansion of the dragon’s destruction in the book, then moving it over to the map. “If this is constant and how far he expands his destruction radius is proportional to the time between raids, then that means if that holds true for how long its been…”

“My gods…” Flynn said, his eyes widening in surprise as he pointed to the rather large dot within the new circle they had figured out. “That’s the capital…”

“Exactly!” Ryonir explained, several others that had been eating looking up at them in question before going back to their meals as the elf quieted himself. “No wonder they wanted the Dragon Knights to take care of him now, if the book is even half right on how old this dragon is it has the capacity to take out the entire capital city whether they kill it or not. I also know they’re currently in a border skirmish with the kingdom east of them too, if their capital is taken out by a dragon attack it’s going to leave them completely vulnerable.”

“So that’s their motivation…” Flynn said as he leaned in closer. “I suspected as much, though I really… couldn’t…” the elf trailed off and Ryonir could hear him sniffing at something, turning his head to see Flynn looking right at him. “Why do you smell like you’ve been sleeping in hay all night.”

“Oh, yeah…” Ryonir said sheepishly. “I had a nightmare about the Frostward Vale, something maybe from my past, but Zefrit panicked when he saw me thrashing about and woke me up with a bucket of water. Since it was unlikely they were going to switch rooms I decided to just bunk down with Zefrit instead.”

“Oh,” Flynn replied simply, shrugging his shoulders as he went back over to his side of the table. “You know you could have just slept in my room, I wouldn’t have cared. I was up late studying anyway.”

Just as Ryonir was about to explain he didn’t want to inconvenience him they heard the sound of Zefrit and turned to see the dragon walking up to them. He let Flynn fill in the dragon on what he had heard as he attempted to find some means of washing off the previous night from him after being reminded he smelled like he slept in a barn. There wasn’t a whole lot of options, especially with the rain that was still pounding outside. Despite feeling a bit counterproductive the only option he seemed to have was going out to the barn and using one of the rain barrels and his soap to give himself a quick scrub.

He took a few buckets and filled them up, taking off his clothes and standing out in the rain to get himself wet before quickly ducking back into the stall he had utilized as a makeshift shower. Just as he was putting the soap on himself he gave himself a quick sniff, scoffing to himself. “I do not smell like I’ve been sleeping in hay all night,” he muttered to himself as he took in another breath of the scent. “I smell like… Zefrit… a dragon scent…”

He found himself inhaling deeply several more times, each one a bigger lungful then the last. It wasn’t until he felt his entire body tremble slightly that he realized he was getting into it, looking down to see his maleness starting to thicken with arousal. It was already a sizable member to begin with, at least what the few partners he had been with said upon seeing it, and if he allowed himself to get fully erect there was no way he was going to be able to hide it in his clothing. Maybe if he had his dragon knight armor he could restrain it but if he allowed himself to get fully hard he was either going to have to take care of it or wait until he cooled himself down…

As quickly as he could Ryonir took one of the buckets and splashed it over himself, practically gasping as the cold water hit his skin. Though it nearly caused him to fall to his knees it also did the trick and calmed him down, the elf sputtering slightly as he took the soap and started to wash himself. With the immediate problem over his thoughts turned to how strange it was that he was starting to get aroused from the potent scent of the dragon he had been sleeping next to all night. He had slept the entire night next to the other creature without a problem, why had it just hit him now all of a sudden as he stood in the middle of a barn stall trying to get washed up?

Ryonir couldn’t help but sigh as he realized that he had been going through a bit of a dry spell in that department. He had never taken relationships very seriously while he was training to be a dragon knight and before that it was just him and Zefrit running for their lives away from the Frostward Vale. Even those times he had slept with another it wasn’t all that satisfying… and when he thought it might be an attraction issue he found the same problem when he was with the same sex as well. It didn’t bother him too much but every once in a while, it did leave him with needs and urges, though normally he would just go back to his room and rub one out he doubt he wanted to do it anywhere around here and especially not in the stall of some barn.

In the end all he could do was shake his head and use the other buckets of cold water to continue to cool him off before he dried off and got dressed. Despite the cold of the water his impromptu shower was rather refreshing and got the last remnants of that dream out of his head. When he got back to the inn he found Zefrit and Flynn arguing over the best route to take to get to the Frostward Vale. Flynn was opting for the longer path that continued on the main road that would take them through several cities they could rest and resupply at while Zefrit was adamant on taking a straight shot through some rather rough territory that would involve a lot of setting up camp. With the storm continuing to rage it was clear at the moment though that no one was going anywhere, leaving the two to stay in the inn and continue to try and figure out how they were going to deal with Karlix when they got to him.

Eventually the entirety of the day went by and they found themselves paying for another night at the inn, and despite Ryonir’s best efforts he couldn’t find anyone that would be willing to switch with him to lay on a wet bed. This time however it was Flynn that offered to share his bed space, stating that half a bed is going to be better for him then a pile of hay. Though that meant that Zefrit would be in the room alone he said that would be alright and that he would guard their stuff for the time being. With everything settled the two elves went up the stairs and into Flynn’s room, which as expected was covered with the few books that he had brought as well as paper and ink.

“Apologies for the mess,” Flynn said as he went over and started to straighten up. “Wasn’t actually expecting to bunk with anyone tonight.”

“Yeah, this storm is really making a mess of everything,” Ryonir replied as he sat down on the bed himself. “You mind if I turn in early? I know you’re probably going to spend all night studying but I have the feeling the closer we get to the Vale the harder its going to be for me to sleep.”

“I’ll turn in too actually,” Flynn replied, heading over to the bed as well. “No need to wake you by trying to sneak in and we’re hopefully going to get an early start tomorrow anyway. I just hope you’re not a blanket hog or anything.”

Ryonir chuckled at that and shook his head, settling in after Flynn had climbed into the bed with him. They quickly found it wasn’t made for two people as they were practically touching one another and still almost hanging off the bed. Still the two found themselves getting comfortable enough to start drifting off, the sound of the storm still pounding on the walls outside surrounding them.

“Think it’s there?” Flynn asked suddenly, causing Ryonir to turn over onto his other side and face the elf.

“Do I think what’s there?” Ryonir asked.

“The answers you’re looking for,” Flynn explained. “I don’t know what you’re expecting to find up there but it’s clear that you’re looking for something.”

The dragon knight sighed and turned over onto his back, staring at the darkness on the ceiling. “At the moment I’m just expecting to find a dragon that I have to kill to save a whole bunch of people from annihilation,” he said candidly. “After that… I don’t know, maybe some reason why I was up there in the first place, or why Karlix had decided to take me away from wherever I had been and bring me there. Was he into torture? Did he need something to pass the time between the burning down of entire villages and I was just his plaything to do so?”

When there was no answer for a few seconds Ryonir started to turn over to see if Flynn was still listening, only to have an arm hit him in the chest and drape over his body followed by the sounds of snoring. Though the elf frowned deeply at the sudden intrusion of his personal space he decided to leave it be, letting his friend remain comfortable as he laid there. Even though he felt himself drifting off those questions still remained in his mind, asking themselves over and over. The worst question that appeared though is what if he got to the Frostward Vale, killed this dragon, and then found… nothing?