

## **The Thread Of Dawn Act 4 - No Parallels**

By Bartan Tirix & Tissthalliss

The dragon's large red body felt tense as his surroundings gave signals of unfamiliarity, yet a comforting warmth in front of him. Holding onto it tightly as the echoing voice chuckled, detecting the strong paws study the snake-like form. "You must relax, dear. No need to be so tense."

"A-Alkardoc!?" The western dragon whispered in surprise, his eyes still adjusting to the darkness in the void. The slight brushes of those whiskers causing his large scales to click loudly down his stern body, making Zarj's heart flutter immensely as he squeezed the serpent with all his might. "It is you-!"

"E-easy, easy!" Some laughter as that long body coiled around the wyrm's, soon getting those large walls of membranes to shelter the two in a large embrace. Still as ticklish as ever as the red beast nearly whimpered in both longing and excitement. "It's barely been a day, are you okay?"

"I-I know, I'm just... I missed you so much already-" Zarj suddenly yelped as his sense of balance shifted, feeling like he was trapped in water; half floating. Causing his body to shift to correct, including spreading those wings as he attempted to scan through the darkness.

"Relax dear-"

"W-where are we-?" A calm shhh from that bearded muzzle as it bunted against his armored neck, taking a moment before putting his trust in the eastern one as those wings returned to shelter him again. Though still finding the lack of gravity very strange.

"This is but a dream, sadly. But it really is me."

"A dream?" Zarj asked under his breath.

"Yes. I planted more than one seed within you, I hope you do not mind." The red head looked around again, now being able to clearly see the golden thread in his arms. "It was the only way I could think of to keep in contact without being in person."

"I welcome it." Another tight squeeze, to the point of making the serpent yelp. "Oh, do you feel pain here?"

"The warnings still go off and you may wake up thinking you're sore or hurt, however nothing carries over. I'm still not used to your strength, I'm afraid." The serpent nuzzled noses in a small tease, nearly tickling that red chin with the whiskers which lead to a surprise kiss from Zarj. Another tight hold as their tongues slid against one another and embraced, making the Thread blush heavily at such

affection. While the wyrm, lost in some instincts, could not believe that such a 'dream' felt so real.

Yet, something felt off. Detecting a sort of disturbance that wasn't from his own body. Causing the red one to slow down his movements and gently disengage without any resistance, catching the slightly guilty look of the golden thread before him. "You feel it, do you not?" Alkardoc softly asked him, getting Zarj to faintly nod while puzzled. "I wasn't sure if you were going to be able to or not, honestly. Since Westerners were unable to..."

"Is...? That what you feel when you touch me? It kind of feels like guilt, but the source isn't from... Me?" A heavy sigh as the serpent closed his eyes. "Alkar?"

"I... Wasn't completely opened to you during that night we spent together, dear. It's something I am still attempting to process myself-" A sudden jerk from the larger dragon as he felt like he was being dragged backwards from his shoulderblades. Causing a strange discomfort akin to that of falling into icy waters. "Zarj? Don't panic. You're just being woken up-" Within a moment the eastern serpent felt so far away as if the wyrm fell from the sky...

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Day 2: West

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Struggles of limbs against his large body brought his mind to, what felt like, the surface of consciousness. "Zarj-!" A whimper shocked the red wyrm more awake as his eyes opened, and noticed someone struggling in his grapple. Taking a moment to process what was happening before letting go and watching the smaller western dragon scamper away from him and towards the exit of his cave. Allowing the green one to catch his breath and giving time to the larger to reclaim his surroundings; back in his own cave even though he swore his body was elsewhere.

"Tix...?" The red beast yawned, allowing his body to stretch and noticing his muscles slightly sore from... Straining? "What's wrong?"

"Other than you attempting to crush me into pieces?" The smaller one snorted. "I guess last night gave you a stress dream of sorts."

"Last night...?" Zarj shook the fog from his mind and recalled nearly seeing Alkardoc in the dark skies above the treeline... Then blush as he overlooked the smaller male for a moment. "D-did we sleep...?"

"J-just in the same location for protection, is all." Tix admitted, trying to shake off the same blush while trying to... Hide his front from the larger one's view. "You're... Stronger than you look."

"Adrenaline, I suppose." He got up to stretch, shaking his larger form a bit as the coins underneath him shifted. Double taking at the curious stare from those cyan eyes. "Adrenaline; the gland in your system." A pair of green ears perked. "It's what gives you energy for your Fight Or Flight moments."

"Oh..." Tix mumbled as if understanding, but the red one could tell he didn't follow. Taking a breath before gently approaching the green one's back, not quite getting noticed on his position until the red beast was directly behind him and placing paws on his lower back. Causing Tix to nearly yelp as the paws connected. "W-wha-?"

"Relax. It's located around here." A rub closer to the middle of the green back; where the tarps of his wings stopped connecting to his body. "When your senses see that you are in danger and when your heartrate is up, there's a pair of little nuggets of sorts that... It doesn't give you energy directly, I suppose, but it tells certain parts of your body to function differently so they can produce more energy-" A shy look from those cyan discs, clearly lost and confused. Making Zarj lightly sigh but smile. "In times of stress, it pushes your body beyond its limits. That's what I'm trying to explain."

"O-oh." Tix mumbled again, but at least seemed to understand that part. "You... Seem to know a lot."

"I've listened to those who know a lot more about this stuff than I do." The larger one stated softly, walking around Tix and pretending not to see the green wing cover his lower body up as Zarj moved to the telescope.

"I'm... guessing the Children?"

"Yes. Many of which have spent generations learning how their bodies work. Though I do admit it is very hard to follow what they're saying. How they named such things and fuctions literally sounds like gibberish."

"Everything they say sounds like gibberish, how can you even understand them?" Tix snorted, getting a chuckle from the red one.

"It took a while for me to understand Conway's accent and learn what he was actually saying. Not to mention he, like us, tends to have his own version of slang and madeup words." He took a few notes, not noticing the green one stare at him and gaze upon the many objects around that were from the 'Lesser Beings'. "That isn't even including their own outside languages. Some of them speak so fast..." A breath of disbelief from Zarj as he took a few more notes.

"What...?" A noise in question from the red one. "What happened to your flower? I don't see it anywhere."

"Apparently they need sunlight in order to survive, so I cannot keep it within my hoard."

"What? Swear I see plants growing inside of caves all the time." The green one half grumbled.

"That's what I thought as well, but if there are different kinds of dragons around, then there must be different kinds of plants too. Ones who have specific needs and others that can go without." Zarj calmly explained. "That Flower, unfortunately, requires sunlight. So I left it in a place where I can give it the care it deserves." A motion for the smaller wyrm to come closer to the telescope. "Come take a look at this." The red one took a step to the side, making sure everything on the device was focused while Tix nervously shuffled closer to the pipe the larger dragon was looking through. Spotting a mountain and a strange ring of light in the sky over it.

"What is this?"

"It's called a Halo, if I remember correctly. Something to do with the light hitting ice in the air just right."

"Ice in the air? But ice doesn't float...?" A sharp whimper from the small one as he felt Zarj get really close and whisper in his ear.

"Do not tell anyone about what we seen last night, *Understood?*" A shakey nod from Tix in response as that fear returned. "*Anyone*. We were never there, and never speak of it out loud where ears can hear."

"B-but-?" A calm 'shhh' from the red one as he pretended to adjust a few nobs on the device and look through it. Making the green wyrm lower his voice to a faint whisper. "But why were you...?" A sudden gasp from Tix as he put things together. "T-the flower-!?" Another shhh, this time more assertive. "T-that's where it came from!? On the Eastern-!?"

"It was growing near the river and on *our* side of it. It's likely that the flower originated from the east, but I need to make sure it is safe."

"And not some ruse from the vipers?" Those red ears flicked back as some tension was felt irradiating from the larger dragon, making the smaller one whine a little and lower his head. "That's why you've been so protective of it."

"Yes. But I do not want to raise tensions between the two sides. If one begins to think that the other side is preparing for a war or conflict..." A deep exhale through that red muzzle.

"G-got it. I won't say anything, Zarj."

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Day 2: East

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The bright sunlight ventured through the glass windows of the room, warming up the smooth blankets that hid a good amount of the serpent within. Having the occasional paw and tail sticking out while the golden head was buried under the pillows. Soon taking a slow inhale and stretching his long body upwards as Alkardoc woke with a smile.

His body was sore, so very sore from the storm clean up. Either that, or the red wyrm was squeezing him so hard that the thread's body physically felt it. The thought made him chuckle, knowing which one he would rather have caused it as his heart fluttered.

Alkar could not believe it actually worked. He actually made a mental connection with a westerner! To the point where they could communicate within their dreams, unless the noodle dreamed it himself. But... It felt the same as all the others he's tried. Does that mean the Western Wyrms also had some connection to magics as well? Zarj didn't seem to know about it...

Still, it was a very happy day and was going to make this week away from the red titan so much better. Allowing the serpent to wake up with a bright smile on his face- though not quite as bright as the sun in his eyes. Needing to retreat back into the comfort of Fort Pillow for a minute until his body was ready to get up. This time prepared for the blinding attack.

The golden thread felt so much lighter now that he had a way to communicate, invigorating him to find a way to remove this invisible boarder between the East and West. He just wished his form felt the same way as he started to move, feeling dozens upon dozens of warning signs from sore muscles and aching limbs. Attempting to paralyze the serpent into staying in bed for recovery, causing a few audioable gasps and grunts to leave that bearded muzzle as he moved to make sure nothing was specifically damaged. "Is everything okay, my lord?"

The voice made his ears perk up; possibly the only muscles in his body that were not complaining. "I am, Mira." The golden one chuckled as the woman entered the door. "Just... More sore than I expected." Another gasp from him as he attempted to move his body. "A lot more."

"I'd believe it, Lord Kar. All dragons outdid themselves with cleaning up yesterday, what was estimated to be a four day job was done in one." The golden one started straightening up the bed sheets and blankets.

"Everyone outdid themselves, my dear. Not just dragons, though I do hope I did enough to show my worth."

"Nonsense, my lord. Where did such a thought come from?" A long exhale came from the golden one as the young woman made her way around the circular bed to his side. Only about 1/3rd of the size of the dragon herself, she placed a hand on the metallic forearm. Getting the attention of those cyan eyes and they shared a smile. "Let's get some fresh air in here, shall we? That'll make you feel better." A nod as she moved to the window and let the warm breeze entire the room.

Mira motioned the dragon to come with onto the balcony, stepping into the sun and the fresh air combined made all the difference as the world seemed to open up. A city mixed with both plantlife and buildings; thick roofs that held trees with apartment homes made of smooth stone. Many of which had unique designs and colors onto them along with windows installed. Though several were still damaged by some fallen trees from the storm, they were being repaired by both eastern dragon-kind and people alike.

The streets were also filled with them, some serpents acting as transportation for a few or the occasional one wearing a certain type of bell. Acting as an emergency 'vehicle' of sorts as several dozen watched as the flying noodle flew by, carefully carrying a couple of stretchers. Though the sight may have been a little worrisky, one of the patients crying out in excitement of the ride definitely lightened the mood. Making the two on the balcony chuckle.

It was all a wonderous sight indeed, making Alkardoc feel a little better but perhaps overwhelmed at the same time. At least, that's what the woman read from his expressional ears. Giving one of those whiskers a few pets until that muzzle returned to Mira's torso. Getting a hug from the woman, putting as she stroked his beard and chin. "It's been... A rough few weeks for you, my Lord. I know that." She cooed. "But things will get better soon."

"I suppose... I am just wishing things played out a little different lately."

"Dear, time spent wishing is time wasted." The dragon chuckled at the woman's statement.

"That's exactly what your mother would say." He smiled brightly, those whiskers wrapping around her in a very soft embrace.

"Would you like to talk to her? I know you confided in her before I took over." Those cyan eyes looked a little worried at first, but that muzzle took a deep breath. Lightly blowing the work dress she was wearing.

"Actually, I think so. That may help, but... I should start confiding in you soon too. I am just..."

"Do not worry about my feelings, my Lord. I'm just happy to help you however I can." Those whiskers unwrapped as the noodle changed position to hug the young woman with his forearms; properly. Getting her to yelp a little bit and giggle. "Y-you are too kind, my Lord-"

"Alkardoc." The dragon playfully teased. "I've dealt with your insistant titles for the past year, you are too close to me now to keep using it Mira." He snorted overdramatically, making her chuckle. "Now, say it back to me."

"Lord Alkardoc." She teased back, getting a chuckle from the golden thread. "Would you like another bath this morning?"

"No thanks, my dear. I'd like to get out for the day and relax in the sun for a bit. I've got a lot to mentally prepare, as it where."

"Might I suggest stopping in for a coffee at the corner then?" Those fluffy ears spaded, making her chuckle as the woman went back to cleaning up. "You keep saying you'll try it."

"The location for it's *Tea*, yes. But I do not like coffee, Mira."

"You only had my mother's coffee that one time, and *nobody* blames you." The two chuckled. "She grew up at a different time; when it was super strong and no one ever thought of heavy cream. But Alika was working there when I went in, tell her to make you one of my preferred coffees. I guarentee you'll love it." The serpent just lightly grumbled at her, but sighed.

"I'll think about it."

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Day 2: West  
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Wood. Is. **Heavy**. That's all the red wyrm could think of as he panted loudly and focused on flying in... Not even straight, just in a general direction. Trying to see past the blockade of roots and dirt as he dug those claws into a few entire trees, spotting the smoke from the civet's flu when he occasionally looked at the forest below. Realigning his direction accordingly.

The dragon's arms were whailing for him to stop and release the tension, his wings grew severely tired. And his pouch... Was growing tired of being 'tapped' on occasion, while a certain small branch was prodding a little too close under his tail. Giving that muzzle a few too many mixed signals to release; pants, huffs, heaves of exhaustion. A terrible symphony of bad Jazz.

One more look down and that was close enough. Taking a few deep breaths before releasing a low growled call, something he at least thought of ahead of time. Slowly starting to descend into the more opened area and hoping the feline remembered what such a thing meant, because the beast could NOT see below him. Getting into a relatively close area to the house- but most importantly: Not on the damn house, before dropping the three trees the ground. Shaking the ground a little as they were dropped easily a story high onto the flat grass, making the beige female yelp at such an impact and reveal her whereabouts; a safer location than 'under the trees'.

The load off was a relief for the dragon, but his wings wanted to collapse just as his cargo did. Spotting the feline and drifting to a more opened space where he flopped into the grass and panted loudly. Not even noticing Neetu rush towards him but still very cautious about approaching the house-sized creature. "A-are you okay?"

"Trees...! Heavy...!" The wyrm half hissed and whimpered at the same time, his position far from elegant. But the feline didn't waste any time, grabbing a bucket and filling it with water before bringing it over to Zarj. "Tha...nk-"

"I-it's fine, my lord. Just rest for now." She waited as he lapped at the waters and eventually caught his breath, though his large body still sprawled over the grass. Covering a surprising amount of her yard's space with those wings alone and really showing the size difference. But she tried not to look at it too much, already starting to feel intimidated by the creature's mass.

Instead, she looked over at the three trees; derooted from the ground. Branches, leaves, and all. Leaving her a bit stunned as how she would deal with cutting them off. "Phew..." Zarj spoke, getting her attention as he started to stand up and collect himself. "That was... Much harder than I ever expected."

"Y-yes. You can see why I could not do it myself."

"I did consider dragging them, the path we took yesterday was a bit cluttered so I thought I would skip it and go for the arial route." Another deep heave from the red one. "I'm glad I only stopped at four."

"F-four?"

"I dropped one early on but didn't want to pick it up." The wyrm lightly grumbled, looking over the now horizontal trees with the civet. "I don't think it landed on anything important at least, it may even be stuck in with the other tree branchess. Regardless, I may have to think of a new method in bringing them here if I'm to keep my side of the barter." Zarj pondered for a moment, not even noticing the rumble in his throat while doing so. But while looking over the tree, the corner of his eye spotted the beige feline looking very... Uncomfortable? "Hmm? What is wrong Natla?"

"I-it's nothing, Sir." Neetu answered. "This is enough payment."

"But we marked at least a dozen trees yesterday. Will three really get you through the cold winter?" No response, and the giant adjusted himself to gently nudge her with that snout. Not quite knowing his own strength, but he released a curious purr. "What is it?"

"It's-" A playful snort interrupted her, knowing she was doing to dismiss it. "...I'm afraid it brought up a new problem that I didn't think of until now."

"Oh?"

"I... Lack the strength to chop wood, you see." Her blinded side missed the dragon's ears perk up. "Nevermind, I'll figure that out later-"

"Neetha." The red one said a bit sternly, making her whimper and step back, but the dragon didn't move. Keeping himself closer to her own height the best he could. "Our barter was to get you firewood. Not to deliver three trees to occupy your land."

"But...?" A noise in question almost came off as a grunt to her, taking a moment to identify it as she looked over his rather curious face. "I don't want to be a bother to you. You've-"

"A bother?" Zarj's head tilted a bit, then looked over the trees and gestured to them. "Latla, this is the most fun I've had in a while."

"F-fun?"

"Yes!" He nearly chirped. "I love solving problems, coming up with solutions and pondering such situations. I don't get this at home, and that's not to mention I also get to see and understand how your kind lives. How they solve such tasks with such limited strength..." He looked over the path from afar; the one they took to get some water. "You said yesterday that they normally used horses to drag the logs while on land, yes?"

"As far as I know, yes. But...?"

"Nevan, I'm here not only because I required your assistance, but also because you give me purpose." His snout moved closer to the feline again, being a bit more gentle with the nudge as she placed a hand on the warm red scales. "I'm more than happy to be here. Do not be afraid to ask me to do something specific or tell me that something will not work for your lifestyle. Okay?"

"But I'm not..." A noise in question, urging her to continue. Then another touch to get the attention of that single yellow eye. "I'm not worth it, Sire-"

"You're worth it to me." And that did it; causing her head to turn sharply in near shock as the small anthro looked at the beast a dozen times her size. "And a dragon knows what's valuable."

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Day 2: East  
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The morning rush hour seemed to have passed, making it much easier to fly through the streets with little risk of collision. Still being cautious as the golden serpent made his way to that tea shop, recalling the time where he and another friend attempted a little flying stunt a few years ago; flying in barrel rolls 'through' each other's space. Only for the two males to get tangled somehow, and also getting his own whiskers caught in another dragon's accessories. One passing by completely oblivious of such a stunt.

It made the present Alkardoc still flinch remembering such pain and nearly tearing up as it happened in his mind. To this day, he swore that whisker got a little longer than the other due to that. At least it didn't disturb anyone nor cost any damages, but it was a life lesson for the two: don't do stunts in the streets.

He missed those days of practicing such things when he was a snakelet. Spending hours in the parks after learning to fly for the first time. Hovering in the air, exercising their flexibility, seeing who could coil the tightest around a pole or streetlight. Being makeshift ropes and swings for the human children as they all played together until the sun went down. Letting imaginations run wild as they told silly stories and reenacted legends they were all told...

Did Zarj'annan have none such experiences when he was younger? What exactly did the west have while they grew up? To live a life without co-existence wasn't unheard of in Alkar's lands, but it was definitely rare. Some believed that mingling with the humans and other species would provoke disasters, while others were too frightful of a dragon's power... Much like they all were of Westerns.

It made the golden one's heart sink a little, really feeling the weight of Alkar's own suggestion to convince the elders on both sides to rethink such a divide. A neigh impossible task but he knew that this... Feud could not last forever. But first he needed to find the source of it; simply walking up to the

council and pleading them to reconsider having a restriction was beyond naive.

Reaching his destination and taking a deep breath before going inside, putting on a friendly smile as the cashier at the front gestured him to come forwards. Even though the line for the anthros was still a few people in. It was less about a dragon's importance and more that they were so large it made it difficult for his kind to reserve a spot in line. Even with the higher ceilings. "Welcome." The young cow greeted the golden one. "What would you like?"

"Are you Alika, by any chance?" A slightly awkward expression as she looked and lightly pointed at the puma attending the others. "My maiden Mira suggested that I tried one of your coffees, and said that Alika would know how to make it."

"Oh, that I can do, don't worry." The cattle smiled. "Would this be for taking out?"

"I think I'll relax here for a bit first, now that the rush has subsided." Alkar smiled at her.

"Feel free to take a hammock anywhere you'd like, I'll bring it over when I have it made."

"Thank you, my dear." The two lightly nodded in a bow and the serpent floated to the seating area. Looking at the many empty booths and moving into a suspended hammock several feet above the seats the anthros would use; a rather clever idea to solve the space issue that dragons take up. Not to mention the material the blankets were made of was super soft and durable, just like how they were when the golden thread was a snakelet.

Memories of his father talking and teaching about such a design, and having a small say in supporting such an idea. Before these, the dragons were just forced to remain outside of restaurants; a solution that only really helped in the warmer months while the weather was nice. Creating quite a divide between the serpent-kind and the smaller people, literally having a wall between them and only so much space for seating arrangements to allow mingling.

Now, the flying noodles could just rest above while the anthros sat below; still at the same table, still able to talk freely and some even having an upper table above where the dragon's food could be within better reach. Balance was a concern, but unless intoxicated, most serpents could easily control or catch their own weight. It was about as rare for them to fall out of a hammock as it was for an anthro to trip over their own feet.

Speaking of which, the waitress was spotted bringing the large cup, signaling that it was Alkar's and causing him to lean over his hammock to meet her. Graciously accepting the fine smelling beverage with a thank you and a smile, getting one in return. "Be careful, it's very hot."

"I will." The golden one nodded, pulling his upper body back into the hammock and giving it a curious, but adoring sniff that lasted until he purred. But yes, it was still too hot for his tongue so he placed it on the upper table; suspended to the ceiling and nearby wall by chains. Even doubling as some support for ceiling decor and lighting.

Did they have such things in the West? Heavily doubtful due to how Zarj talked about his encounters with the people there. But that didn't stop his curious mind from trying to think about how it could be added. The wyrm was indeed significantly heavier than even the largest of serpents in Alkardoc's land, and by the sounds of it, the Western species of dragon could get even bigger! So Hammocks would be out of the question. Would they have to resort to the old ways of keeping the draconics outside? It was such a depressing thought, especially since a single wyrm took up so much space. For the serpents that did not learn how to fly (some did exist), they could at still squeeze into the booth for seating. Not so much the case for something easily four times the volume of one.

He thought for a few moments before taking his first sip of the coffee, immediately detecting the heated warning of the drink, but also flipping his negative opinion of coffee to a positive one with that first sip. Taking a second as he closed his eyes and enjoyed the liquids in his maw for several moments, not realizing he was recognized by a red serpent through the glass outside. Not until she entered that is, floating up and resting into the hammock directly across from him. "You drink coffee?" Valla'sha asked.

"I do now." The male replied, setting his warm drink down on the table to give his forepaws a break from the heat. Greeting his fiancée with a whisker while she did the same, lightly surprising him a bit at the gesture. But for now he just accepted it. "How are you this morning?"

"Busy as usual, I was the only one handling the nearby forests cleanups yesterday and directing the evening groups to the severely damaged trees. They'll be working on them today."

"And you as well, I imagine?" Watching the female shake her head no but begin to lean down when a waitress came around. Taking Valla's order for a coffee as well before returning back to Alkar's conversation.

"Sorry about that. But they 'refused' me to work today due to the amount of ground I covered yesterday. Probably thinking I was exhausted, but I'm perfectly fine. Maybe a little tired."

"I mean, you were doing the work of dozens of people by yourself, dear. It's a wonder you're even able to fly today." The red one tilted her head in a shrug.

"I was using proper techniques to reduce the need for musclepower. Something that could not easily be accessed within the city's damaged areas. Where a tree fell around my area, there were a dozen more surrounding it that could be used to my advantage. That's all."

"But, say, trying to get a tree off a roof or out of the park pond?"

"It's much more difficult due to the lack of advantageous surroundings. Leaving you to 'roll around in the mud'." The golden thread chuckled at that description. "Besides, I feel more comfortable working in a smaller group. Even if that means working alone."

"I would've... Helped if I knew sooner." The waitress returned with the female's coffee, letting Valla'sha give thanks for the drink and taking a sip while it was still very hot. Yet, it didn't phase her, as she waited until the cow was out of earshot.

"Appreciated, but it is fine, Alkardoc. By the sounds of it, you already had quite the night before." Another sip, leaving the male to look a little nervous into space. "...I didn't sleep well last night. I kept thinking about that."

"You mean...?" A faint nod from the red one. "How so?"

"Worrying about you. Worrying about what it might do to our land. Worrying that it may start something..." She put her coffee cup down on the suspended table while a golden paw rested on her forearm. Causing the two to lock eyes for a few moments and gaze into those cyan discs; mirroring some of those exact same worries, yet having a sort of confidence behind it. Conviction even. "...At the same time, I admit it. It is exciting to think about. I've just..."

"We've been told otherwise. Convinced that they were-" A couple of people walking nearby got him to pause. "That they were..." A nod from her, letting the golden dragon know that he didn't need to say it. Knowing it probably hurt Alkar to describe the westerners in such a negative way. Leading to a slightly awkward moment were their eyes drifted, but both taking notice of a human standing in line staring at them.

"I believe you've been recognized..." The red one took a sip of her drink, making the male double take at her. Nearly going to ask what she meant by that, but couldn't shake off the feeling of being gawked at. Curiosity got the better of Alkar as he once again made eye contact with the young human... Male? It was a bit hard to tell.

Only for a moment, however, as the barista called upon their attention. Giving the golden serpent some time to study his poncho clothing from afar, recalling the style of such a thing from years back. Yet, the name of the exact area was on the tip of his tongue...

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Day 2: West  
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The red wyrm remained lost in thought as he stared at the three trees on the ground, swearing he could still feel his body straining while carrying them. Half dreading the idea of going back for that fourth one he dropped on the transport here. Another day maybe, for now he needed to figure out a way to make it more manageable for his friend.

However, another question did come to mind; how did *His* kind do it? Some of the stronger ones in his nest brought over piles of wood for their own winters. Everyone taking what they needed and

creating a few fires to keep themselves warm through the night. But how did they break them? And would it be small enough for the civet to do by herself?

That was a difficult thing for Zarj to understand or even view in his mind, due to how little studying he's made of the feline. Making him wonder if she was going to return; excusing herself into her shelter for quite some time now. Listening in closer to hear... Faint breaths and sniffs? Suddenly worry filled his chest. "Natla?" The red beast called, as gentle as his voice could be and hearing a bit of a whimper. "...Did I say something to upset you?"

"N-no... No, sire you..." It definitely sounded like she was, making the red one feel even more awkward. Not really knowing what to do about such a situation and finding himself looking around for ideas. Dragons rarely ever became upset like this- or was it just Western ones? If that were the case... What would Alkardoc do in this situation? What did he do when Zarj felt down? 'Let Him Talk', that's what he did.

With a deep breath the red wyrm called to her again. "Neetu. Return to me. Please." It was a bit demanding, he detected after saying it, but it at least got the door opened a little more. "Talk to me. What has upset you?" He attempted to look inside, but it was difficult to get a proper angle of her face. Spotting the end of her shaggy dress; as if sitting down on something but still hidden in the shadows of the shelter.

"I..." The feline started, getting an encouraged noise of pondering from the beast outside. "I am not worth it, Sire." As much as Zarj wanted to interrupt, he swore it was like the golden thread was right there beside him; guiding his mind. ("Let her speak.") A strain on that red jaw to keep it shut, until it was clear she wasn't going to respond further.

"Where has such a thought taken root?" Definitely a line the Eastern one would say, and after no response, the wyrm spoke again. "Neetu?" No response besides a few breaths, and once again those orange eyes began to wander. Along the house, recalling something... "You said you did not build this shelter of yours, yes? Do you know who did?"

"I... Do not, no."

"Did you claim it on your own?" A very western dragon thing to say, but it was just a slip of his tongue. Almost cursing at himself for such phrasing.

"C-claim? N-no Sire, I... I..." A heavy breath from her, then a loud swallow was heard. "I was... Given."

"You were gifted the home?"

"I was given to the man who lives here." The civet swore she could feel the puzzled gaze of the dragon through the wall.

"But you said you live alone...?"

"He was drafted."

"Drafted?"

"To the Kingdom's army, well over a year ago." A noise in question. "They needed able soldiers, so they force people to join once in to serve their Kingdom."

"To fight their wars..." Zarj could faintly hear the feline's confirmation. "And you were left alone, not drafted because of your eye?"

"...Maybe." Some silence. "Probably not." She nearly whimpered, hearing the beast sigh through that large muzzle as he attempted to rest the thing in the doorway. Feeling her at least place a paw on it, which made Zarj smile a little.

"Do you miss him?"

"Sire..."

"Keep talking. I want to help." A heavy breath was heard from the small one as she continued to rub the red snout a little. Almost battling with herself within the silence, Zarj could feel that. When she didn't speak up on her own, he tried again. "I don't know much about your way of life, nor have dragons ever been good at... Empathy. But I feel like something's off, and it's got something to do about what I said-"

"It really wasn't, Sire. Please... Please don't think that."

"Then what is it?" Silence again. "I cannot help you if you don't let me." With no response, the red one was losing some patience. "If you don't talk, then I'm going to start approaching this problem more like a dragon." He lightly teased, hearing a whimper from her.

"M-meaning what?"

"Oh, what were the stories I've heard from the child- erm... Smaller people? That we kidnap dames that we find attractive~?" Another whine from the civet. "Take them back into our caves in the summets? Get them to sing for us as we gaze upon their beauty like a prize-?"

"I-is that what you do!?" The sudden yelp from her actually made the dragon chuckle. "I was told something more barbaric-" She suddenly covered her muzzle, thinking she may have insulted the beast but he playfully laughed it off.

"Oh yes, I have heard such tales before too; that we eat people and their livestock? Steal their possessions for our own? Set fire to villages that build too close to our territories? Do not worry yourself."

"Because they are untrue?"

"Oh, some of them are. Especially for other tribes of dragons." That made the feline release a

noise in dread. "But you're not talking to one of them. I tend to barter for my own possessions like a unique currency. Though... Some I have to admit; I did take from those who were unaware. Especially when I was younger."

"I-I see..." That large red muzzle attempted to move closer to her.

"Sometimes... We do not realize our faults and errors until much later in life, Neetu. Hindsight is... A skew in our own reflections when it comes to judgement. The best we can do is correct or make the best of it in the present and the future, yes?"

"Is that why... You're trying to help me?"

"I'm helping you because you are helping me." It was strange how the wyrm could almost feel her heart sink. "It's... Common for dragons to just take, but I've been doing my best to grow out of such a habit. Even if it does make me less of a dragon."

"It's hardly the same, my lord."

"What do you mean?" A bit of silence.

"You asked me to take care of a single flower... And I'm asking you for warmth so I can survive the winter. I can't..." A nod from that red snout as it couldn't reach any closer.

"Perhaps to you the importance is very lacking, but... Maybe I need that flower in order to live." Zarj mumbled a little sadly. "Perhaps my physical self and deal without it, yes. However... My mental and social self? It helps more than you think. Not to mention it has led me to another friend, yes?"

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Day 2: East

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"I just can't remember..." The golden noddle muttered to himself, still staring into space within the coffee shop and stroking his blue beard. "It's right there, but I can't grasp it-"

"I know the feeling quite well," Valla added. "But I'm not very fluent in my geography, I'm afraid."

So I can't specifically help you remember. However..." A noise in question from the male. "I could always ask them."

"W-what?" It made Alkardoc double take.

"You seem to have troubles engaging in conversations with others. Would you like me to ask them?"

"No no no, that's quite alright." The golden thread took a breath and a sip of his coffee, closing his eyes for a moment to enjoy it. "I'm certain it will return to me later on. Besides, I think they're-"

"Excuse me." A sharp whimper from the metallic serpent as the red one's vocals came from underneath the table. Actually surprising her that the man nearly startled back a few steps, instantly easing her engagement. "Sorry, but my mate here believes he recognizes your clothing. What region are you from?" The young man nearly whimpered as he looked around at the others; surprisingly calm that a dragon addressed a human so casually.

Alkar's head joined hers underneath the table, whispering to hear. "No, no, I was going to say that I believe he is an Ela Brise." Her ears perked in question as she looked at the golden one. "It's a religion that strictly limits the interaction with dragons, specifically from the eastern lands." A sudden whimper from Valla as she covered her snout with a paw in shock, instantly returning her head to the stunned human and bowing.

"My apologies. I didn't know."

"It's..." The young man started, looking around one more time as he spoke lowly. "It is alright. I'm actually here on my Nuthra'laa." The golden one's ears perked up. "So I suppose it isn't against my religion for the time being to interact with them- erm, your kind. But..."

"I imagine it's quite surprising." A shakey nod from the human. "Could I ask where you're from? Valla here was correct; I do recognize your clothing style from the northeast, but I can't quite tack it." The strange expression got the man to studder for a moment before answering.

"I'm from... Urra-bacca-" He spotted a spark in Alkardoc's eyes as it connected, getting a reaction of discovery immediately and actually making the man chuckle a little bit.

"Yes! Yes, yes, yes. I'm not sure how that didn't come to mind. But as soon as you said Urra..." The golden one bowed in thanks. "Thank you, and feel free to carry on, sir. However, it would be lovely if you join us." A rather surprised look from the young one, as he once again looked around.

"You mean... We're allowed to...?"

"Yes, of course." Valla agreed, gesturing the booth directly below their hammocks. Then moving her attention to the golden one. "But what was that thing before? Nura-something?"

"Nuthra'laa?" The two males answered in question, but the serpent gestured the man to answer.

"It's... A small visit to the outside world, usually during ambasadar pilgrims that allows us to see the world for what it is. Allowing our youth to really decide for ourselves if we would rather continue our religion, or..."

"Or what?"

"Abandon it." Alkardoc stated a bit sadly. "They will no longer be allowed back into their community if they do take that route, including by their own family."

"I see... I can understand why this was such a sensitive subject then. Let alone your reaction, again: I do apologize."

"It is quite alright, erm...?"

"Valla'sha. This is my future mate Alkardoc." She gestured to the other dragon.

"Erlando. It is... Surreal to meet even one of your kind up close, or at all." The who serpents chuckled at that.

"You'd be surprised how often we hear that, specifically from outsiders of the city." Alkardoc smiled at him. "There are not too many that live cooperatively with dragons, but they are quite far apart."

"You've been to the other cities, like the capital?" The golden one nodded when Valla asked, studying him while Alkar took a sip out of his cup. "What for?" A bit of a shocked look that he attempted to hide.

"Oh... Visiting family." The red one's eyes studied her mate for a few moments, as if putting some puzzle pieces together while the golden one leaned down towards the human again. "How many places have you been to so far, Erlando? Urra Bacca is quite a ways to travel from here."

"I've been to several villages along the way, many of which have their own opinions of... Your kind, I'm afraid."

"Rather mixed ones, I'm sure." Alkar smiled a bit sadly. "I'm certain I've heard them all, do not worry yourself. But I am curious about what you've heard."

"O-oh, I'm not sure if I should..." A chuckle at least made the young man feel a bit more at ease.

"Do you understand why they think of us this way?" The golden one asked, getting a head shake in response. "We have a form of craftsmanship that they do not seem to possess, and some... Most feel like it is unnaturally given."

"Unnaturally?"

"It does require great skill and study to use," Valla joined in as well. "but it is often labled as 'Magic' to those who misunderstand it. But it is more manipulation than creation." Elan took a moment

to look out at the window, easily spotting many of the buildings that look like they're made out of smooth stone or rock; not by bricks or such he was used to. But smooth, uninterrupted stone. "We have made those buildings and streets with it, yes."

"That's why they look so strange, let alone so tall here. They're made by dragons?" The two nodded.

"Many of us have the power to manipulate parts of nature; the dirt and rock of the earth, able to cut and shape it as we require." Alkardoc started. "The growth and direction of plantlife. The winds and waters of the seas."

"But it is a skill that takes great discipline." Valla added in. "Many of us cannot easily tune into such power without guidance. Some dens of dragons even refuse to learn or use such abilities, but here we do what we can to help others."

"I can see that. Especially after that great hurricane that passed through. So much of the roads were blocked, I'm glad I didn't travel on a wagon." The human took a sip out of his drink. "But everything here looks much clearer. Did the storm not pass over here?" Making the two serpents chuckle.

"It did, quite harshly too. We just spent most of yesterday cleaning it up." Alkar shook his head at a memory. "Many of us getting quite dirty, like snakelets playing in the mud."

"It looked like an entirely different location with all the debris in the streets and damage to the buildings." Valla smiled. "But with our combined efforts; both dragon and smaller kind, we were able to restore most of the city before nightfall."

"There is still work to be done, I'm sure. Especially on the outskirts, farmlands, and the forests. But our 'magics' do have their limits and can feel the effects of fatigue much like any sort of energy."

"I see. I imagine it's the same for the west as well?" With the two dragon's heads in view of the man, he noticed they shared a concerning look. "Is something wrong?"

"We... Cannot socialize with the western dragons. The big wyrms." The red one explained, getting a puzzled look from Erlando. "It is taboo for us to make contact with them."

"Why is that?" They shared another look, more worried about what to say aloud. "A very... Sensitive subject, I apologize."

"It is for our kind, yes. Not insulting, though. Please don't think you've offended us." A nervous nod from the young man as Alkardoc continued to speak in near whispers. "There are consequences for us to talk about the western dragons, both in public and in private."

"Can I ask why...?" Erlan spoke softly, watching them share a look.

"There has been... A ban on contact when it comes to dragons for centuries, only our eldest really know the details of it all." The female explained, giving Alkar time to retreat up for another drink of

his coffee. Staying there for the time being as an idea came into his mind. "We're told that both our kinds nearly went to war with one another, and warned how disastrous it would be. Not just for us, but for nature and the people within the crossfire. So our elders met with the western ones to create an agreement. Using the river as a division between our lands, no dragon will ever cross it into the other lands. If one ever does, it will bring disaster to our way of life."

"I see..." The young man lightly pondered while she took a drink as well. Meeting the worried gaze of the golden one over the suspended table and sharing a quiet, empathetic sigh. "So that must mean that the Western dragons have this magic as well?" Valla moved back down to speak to him again, letting Alkardoc to stop and listen.

"Yes. And as we're told, both from our own stories and the tales of travelers to and from there... They are vicious with such power. Often use it in violent forms and in offensive ways... It's possible that's where your own religion gets its experience."

They didn't see the saddened expression from the golden serpent above them, trying to hide it regardless and just taking sips out of his coffee. Alkar recalled Zarj informing him that they had no such abilities like the Eastern ones did, but theirs was more organic. Mostly just a form of breath weapon from what the serpent could tell... But where did such lore come from then?

*That's it for now, Happy Holidays all <3*