



A
Dragon's Vengeance

-Esperanza Guillermo-

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This version was published on 2020-02-10



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Firstly I'd like to thank my family and friends for their loving support, and the deviantART community for unlocking my writing potential. Without them I wouldn't have been able to break free from the chains of writer's block. I'd like to give a special thanks to two good friends of mine: Ignacio Carmona and Thomas Ferk for your creative and insightful ideas. Credits to my sister Katrina for the cover illustration.

Thanks for reading! :D

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Prologue

The Black Dragon

It all began many years ago, during the age when the great Spirit Dragons protected over our world, a time when peace and prosperity reigned. The Spirit Dragons were ethereal beings revered as the gods and goddesses of our Dragonian World. Nothing could ever compare to their mystical and otherworldly powers. From the lands of the Dragoons, to the vast seas of the Leviathans, to the deep forests of the pack-hunting Wolvenkind, the Spirit Dragons brought peace to them all. Life was beautiful. Life was peaceful.

But even amidst these years, dawned an era of terror and dread. An era of war. From deep within the hellish depths of the Netherrealm, a terrible beast had arisen along with his army of dark forces, the Scourge. For years they terrorized and enslaved our world. And so we summoned the might of the great Spirit Dragons to bring an end to the war. Countless casualties amassed on both ends. Ultimately, only a few Spirit Dragons remained, but The Scourge was no more. The battle was finally over... or so we thought.

The battleground was left with a mighty wound that had never begun to heal. Cracks beneath the earth began to fester with darkness. In the wake of the destruction, amongst these lands broken by war a creature emerged, manifested from the shadows... a Black Dragon. He came onto our realm with only the darkest ambition to shatter our world more than we could ever know. Many feared to whisper his name, and thus they referred to him as, "the Black Spirit". They say every night, the beast would scour the lands on his black wings of fate, only to leave death and destruction in his wake. Forthcoming, is his tale of conquest...

And revenge.

Scant beams of moonlight glittered through a sea of trees. Large groups of deer and rabbits bounded along the forest floor, while flocks of birds soared high among the clouds. But these weren't the only creatures travelling that night.

Under the midnight sky flew creatures of grey, black and brown. These winged beasts crossed between wolf and dragon— the *Wolvenkind*— were powerful hunters of both land and sky. Soaring high they unleashed a terrifying chorus of howls. Down on the forest floor, smaller wingless variations of *Wolvenkind* raced across the land, giving chase to a large group of deer. Together long living in unbroken peace, these creatures have cut themselves off of the outside world and chose the Great Forest as their home and hunting ground.

“Hmm... it fled here, but I can't catch its scent anymore,” a grey *Wolvenkind* said as he sniffed the ground. The young hunter's eyes were filled with determination. “And I was so looking forward to roasting that deer,” he whined.

“It may have died already for all you know,” replied a female *Wolvenkind*, who led a group of three others. She was a gorgeous creature. Unlike most of her kin whose forms were stocky and muscular, her build was sleek and graceful. With her long snout, tufted black ears and auburn-brown fur, one could have easily mistaken her for a vixen. Most striking were her eyes. Framed by flowing black locks, her eyes were the color of the deepest violet. Her wings were as white as snow.

“You never were a good hunter *Hairon*,” she chided. The other three followers started to laugh and taunt him. There were the *Wolvenkind* sisters, *Luna* and *Cress*, and a burly, wingless *Wolvenkind* named *Fenrir* who all made up *Niele*'s hunting pack. And then there was *Hairon*, the weakest of the group, the straggler.

“Shut it *Niele*!” *Hairon* snapped. “I was so close too.”

“Sure you were,” *Niele* chuckled. *Hairon*'s lips curled to a vicious snarl. “One of these days I'm gonna get you, got it?!”

“Spare me the complaints,” *Niele* said as she ran a paw through her hair. “Now if you'll excuse us, we're gonna look for some real

prey. We don't need you slowing us down." She and her pack then fled into the night.

Alone but far from afraid the lone Wolvenkind set out on his own quest. "Heh, I don't need them. I'll show her I can hunt just fine," he muttered to himself. "I'll show them all!"

"*You won't get anywhere with those words...*" responded a dark and demonic voice. Hairon froze. Everywhere the atmosphere plunged into momentary blackness, and all there was to disturb the silence was a quick chill of wind which raced down Hairon's back. He shuddered.

"W-W-WHO'S T-THERE?!"

A pair of nightmarish eyes shone within the darkness. The mysterious creature slithered forward, its body cloaked in shadows.

"*Now now friend, is that prey really what you want?*" the creature spoke with a sinister yet almost seductive tone.

"W-w-what do you mean?" Hairon questioned, his eyes bulging. The ghostly serpent coiled himself around Hairon with a gaze that tore him from reality. "*I can offer you all the power necessary to show everyone that you are superior to them.*"

"I'm listening," the Wolvenkind curiously replied.

"*All I want is for you to wear this.*" In the serpent's hands was a silver pendant necklace. A large purple jewel was embedded in its center.

"*This Nether's Amulet will bestow you with powers far beyond that of your own.*"

"Hmm, I like the offer," Hairon replied. The serpent whirled around once more, grinning as the Wolvenkind had already fallen under the amulet's mesmerizing embrace.

"*Will you accept?*"

Without giving it a second thought, Hairon put on a smile of content.

"Gladly."

"*Good, I'll be leaving now.*"

"Wait," Hairon said abruptly, suddenly snapping back reality. "Just who are you?"

The creature simply replied with a sinister smile. *“My friend, it will all be known in due time.”* With that said, he disappeared into the shadows.

The darkness faded, and Hairon was left to ponder that thought as he stared at the peculiar necklace in wonder. A strange charm it was, a jewel of ethereal beauty. The moment he donned the necklace, nothing happened for a brief moment. Until suddenly, the jewel began to shine with an ominous purple light.

“AAAAaaaagggghhhh!!!” Hairon screamed.

He was forced to his knees, arms quivering violently as they threatened to give out beneath him. He struggled to catch his breath; his heart pounded so forcefully that he feared it would burst from his chest. A sickening sound reached his ears as he heard his very bones crack and shift beneath his skin. A massive jolt of energy surged through his veins like fire. Hairon was left lying on his back reeling, screaming, unable to hold back the excruciating pain any longer. Minutes that seemed to last forever had passed before Hairon’s episode had subsided and was finally able to get back on his feet. He flexed his arms and felt strength unlike any he had ever possessed. He then opened his wings, their feathery membranes stronger than ever before, as if he could soar through the skies for days without rest. His reflexes had increased tenfold. “Amazing, this power is incredible!” he said with a joyous laugh, in awe of his newfound power. Just as those words escaped him, he felt a hot breath upon his shoulders. Hairon turned his head to see a huge bearlike beast towering over him. The bear roared, chunks of flesh and splinters of bone still clinging to its teeth. Rather than cowering in fear, Hairon chuckled with a newfound sense of pride. “Now to show Niele who truly deserves to be called the better hunter.”

Back at the nesting ground, a large crowd stood in silence, gawking in awe at the fallen beast that lay before Hairon. Its eyes were glazed over, body disemboweled and riddled with claw marks. Truly the work of a lethal hunter.

“Hahaha! Look at you all, shocked by this mighty beast that fell to my paw!” The wolf dragon chuckled boastfully. “I told you I’d prove you all wrong.” The hushed crowd suddenly began cheering. Hairon felt their satisfaction, and for once in his life he felt like he belonged with them, no longer as an outcast, but as a hunter. Niele stood off behind the brush, unimpressed by Hairon’s feat.

“And you call yourself a true hunter?” Her cold amethyst eyes were full of suspicion as she regarded the mysterious necklace around his neck. “Enjoy your so-called glory while you still can.” She fled and returned to her den.

Several nights passed without unrest, when suddenly...

“AAAAAaaaahhh!!!” A terrifying shriek awoke the forest. “Somebody help me!” the voice screamed.

It was the voice of Cress.

“Cress?” Luna shouted. “Cress where are you?!” Her cries were then drowned out by a macabre of screams. Luna rushed through the forest, trying not to lose her nerves. The screams were suddenly cut to a sickening halt, and Luna had stopped dead in her tracks. Her jaws hung open upon discovering a horrific scene; a horde of black wolf-like creatures, none like which she had ever seen before, greedily feasting upon helpless innocents.

Bloodfangs.

The beasts were haggardly thin. Their bloodied pelts drooped heavily from their frail forms, exposing flesh and jutting spikes of bone along their backs. Their eyes shone with a hellish gleam. They swarmed over their victims— pups and adults alike— tearing them to pieces.

Luna stood wide-eyed. There she saw her sister Cress, her body torn apart by the savage creatures. Among the carnage she also witnessed one unfortunate Wolvenkind mother, who could barely let out a shriek before her skull was crushed into a bloody pulp by the one of the creature’s powerful jaws. The Bloodfangs immediately turned their eyes from their half-eaten prey and lunged at Luna’s petrified body, and she was quickly brought down and killed.

Eventually the horde had spread throughout the entire forest,

and the masses ran rampant in fright of the ravenous bloodthirsty beasts. Soon enough, the Great Forest was left in ruins.

Beyond the smoldering trees, a shape cut itself away from the flames, a Wolvenkind standing as the proud leader of the pack. Its amethyst eyes held a dark and terrible glee. Its great wings splayed open, once white as snow, now ebony black and bathed in the blood of those so unfortunate to cross paths.

What happened during the following years was but another tale. The Wolvenkind were driven to extinction, and the murderer was never seen or heard from again. The Black Dragon looked proudly upon his work, but even then he wasn't completely satisfied... His dark soul hungered something more. Something stronger.

The powers of a Spirit Dragon.

Thus, a new war between the two had begun. Their fateful battle became the stuff of legends, the ultimate clash between yin and yang. In the end, it was the Spirit Dragon who reigned victorious.

...But the Black Dragon wouldn't let her get the last word.

"So, you think you've won? Soon you'll be in for a very rude awakening. And when that time comes, the world will be ours..."

I Part One

The New Warring Age

1. Chapter One

The Storm of Battle

Torra: a bustling commercial town of splendor and tranquility. Beneath its clear crystal-blue skies lies a vast ocean, its sparkling beauty stretching far beyond what the eye can see. A town known for its spectacular sights, Torra was lavished with buildings of polished white stone and dazzling crystal towers, but the true spectacle and crown jewel lay at the very heart of the town: a gorgeous fountain mounted with a statue of its great and beloved guardian. Among the splendor of Torra came the rush of everyday commerce. Humans, along with their wingless draconic counterparts—the Dragoons, shared their lives in peace. Children were tucked away in their homes under the caring protection of their mothers, while many of the males stood vigil to keep out any intruders. Traders and merchants, human and Dragoon alike, lined the streets shouting their wares to the citizens passing by. Lives flourished.

That is, until the war had reached their land...

Garlant's face glowed in the light of the fire, turning his deep blue scales a brilliant orange in the open flame. Beads of sweat rolled down his face. With steady hands firmly gripped upon the sliding anvil, he slowly pulled out the scalding-hot plates of armor from the furnace. From there he thoroughly examined each piece, measuring them with delicate precision. He became so focused on his work that he failed to notice the brown-scaled figure watching him from across the room.

“That’s quite the impressive armor set you have there,” the spectator said with a beaming smile. The voice startled Garlant almost enough to make him jump and nearly drop the armor from

his hands. His head snapped around and his eyes locked to see the features of a very familiar face. Sharp and angular, sporting a pair of twisted black horns.

“Oh Valdir, it’s you,” Garlant said with a fluster. “Don’t go scaring me like that.”

“My apologies,” Valdir chuckled. “I just happened to notice you here.” Valdir continued to watch as Garlant then took his newly forged armor piece by piece and submerged them into a bucket of cool water.

“Well, it’s done,” he said as he wiped the sweat from his forehead. He sat back and admired his work.

“You truly have a gift in the art of smithing,” Valdir commented.

“Thanks,” Garlant replied.

Valdir was one of Garlant’s closest friends, an excellent sparring partner and a noble warrior for whom he admired for his great courage. His rough barklike scales were adorned with shining black armor from head to tail. He belonged to a group of battle-hardened Dragoon soldiers known as the Juggernauts. Together led by a powerful militant figure they fought long and hard, and to this day they have never lost a single battle. Valdir was among the best of the best, for he was one of four elite members of the Juggernauts who’s shown exceptional skill and prowess from the others. He and his brother Eridor, also a Juggernaut elite, were known for their tactical use of a spear in the field of battle.

“Who knows, with all those sparring sessions you could very well be leading us into battle someday,” the elite said to the blacksmith. Garlant couldn’t help but smile at his comment. Garlant was a young Dragoon, only seventeen years of age. Though still in adolescence, he spent his early years immersed in weaponsmithing and martial arts style combat, holding on to that lifelong dream of going out on the battlefield, fighting alongside the best warriors. When he wasn’t sparring he would often isolate himself and spend his time meditating and honing his skills in secret. Through the years he had been told wondrous stories from the great elites, of their unbreakable valor and their numerous victories, all of

which only made the curious young Dragoon more eager to reach that goal. And the greatest warrior of them all, was none other than his father Ziggurat, the founder and proud leader of the Juggernauts. A huge bull of a dragon, Ziggurat was as intimidating in his appearance as he was powerful. His brutish form bore scales of the deepest red, cracked and heavily scarred by the forge of war. His enlarged features were a testament to his fearsome demeanor, from the curled black horns that dominated his head, to the huge muscles that bulged from his chest and forearms. His lower half slowly tapered into a winding, spike-studded coil. A brilliant military commander, he was a dragon who combined both immense physical strength and intellect to achieve victory.

The smithy doors opened, spilling forth cool ocean air and streaming light into the room as three more Juggernaut elites marched into the blacksmith shop, each of them clad in battle armor. One of them was a slender-built, silver-scaled Dragoon. Slyph was his name, a skilled strategist and excellent tank sniper. Another was Eridor, a golden-scaled Dragoon whose eyes shone with a driving force. Leading the two was the second in command, a maroon-scaled Dragoon named Sieg.

“Ah, we’ve been expecting you guys,” Valdir said.

“Attention!” Ziggurat commanded. His voice boomed like thunder. “I believe you all know why you’re here,” he warned. Fierce yellow eyes glared at his comrades. “The age of war is still upon us, and though our ancient enemies have vanished, there is a new one lurking amongst us. We don’t know what it is exactly that we’re up against, but heed my words. He is one, but we are many. This is the time of victory. We will stand and fight!” The crowd jeered. And then he closed the meeting with the Juggernaut motto: “If fate conspires us to die today, let us do so with honor!” After a celebratory meal most of them had soon left the room for final preparations. Ziggurat and the four elites stayed behind and continued their discussion. Garlant couldn’t help but listen in on their conversation.

“So it seems we’ll be fighting on forbidden grounds,” Eridor

said. "They say anyone who's ever set foot on that land has never returned."

"Yeah, and our enemy Shadowflare is said to assume various forms," Sieg added. He always seemed to have a certain look in his eyes that conveyed a sense of long experience in war. He was no stranger to the battlefield as he sported countless battlescars; one of which rendered him near blind in his left eye. "They call him a harbinger of death," he continued. "I've heard that he even corrupts his victims' bodies with his life force." He crossed his arms in concern. "Clearly we're in for one hell of a fight." Everyone nodded in agreement.

"Slyph, ready the tanks," Ziggurat commanded. "We'll be leaving shortly."

"They're already set and ready to go sir," Slyph replied.

"Excellent."

As the room was being cleared, Garlant walked up towards his father. With a deep breath he asked, "Hey Dad, could I come with you?"

"I'm sorry son, not this time," Ziggurat sighed, almost regretting those very words. "I know how much you want to fight, but Shadowflare may be an even bigger threat than we thought. I still wonder though, Zalaria has yet to return. I hope for our sake she's okay." He gave a long sigh and placed a hand on Garlant's shoulder. "Listen it's just that, I don't want to lose you."

"I understand," Garlant replied. Despite Ziggurat's powerful demeanor, something deep in his mind always seemed to be bothering him. Often times Garlant would find him isolated in a state of worry, afraid even. Ziggurat, afraid? Garlant always wondered. Perhaps it was his beloved wife Midna. Poor Midna. A beautiful young Dragoon she was with a will like iron. A few years after giving birth to her son, she fell severely ill. Day by day she grew increasingly weaker, and no amount of healing could save her from meeting death's embrace. It was only a few nights later she had finally perished. And Ziggurat, he wept in silence.

As Ziggurat spoke those words to his son, he was reminded of

his dear Midna. He could see her iron will develop inside Garlant's young heart. He reassured his son with a smile, a smile that said "you are the pride and joy in my life." His eyes were kind and his heart filled with warmth. It was for that reason where Garlant truly felt that Ziggurat was a father figure. "You have indeed grown strong my son," Ziggurat spoke. "I'm sure your mother would be proud of what you've become. But now, it's time we head off, but rest assured we will return victorious. Make that a promise." And with that, Garlant watched his father depart.

Garlant met with the others outside in the center of the town. Some of the soldiers, like Slyph, rode atop the massive Armagons; lumbering biomechanical behemoths, each one equipped with various artillery weapons from powerful plasma cannons to rapid-firing gatling guns. Crowds of townsfolk bid their farewells to the Juggernauts. The masses then began to part as a grey figure among them had stepped forward.

"Make way for Elder Sohryu!"

The elderly Dragoon was dressed in a lavish blue robe wrought with gold trimming. He approached the soldiers and knelt before them. His beady eyes met with theirs.

"We all wish you a victorious battle and a safe return." he said softly.

"Thank you, Elder Sohryu," Ziggurat nodded. "Let's move out!"

With that said, the Juggernauts bravely marched off into the horizon. Garlant looked up towards the skies, a single question on his mind.

"Zalaria, where are you?"

2. Chapter Two

Blood-red Shadow

The Juggernauts cautiously trekked the war-ravaged and desolate lands of the Forbidden Battleground. An apocalyptic sky of crimson watched over them with the fury of a storm. All around them great mountains of flame bellowed with an earth-shattering force, sending a raging vortex of fire into the skies. As the Armagons surveyed the area, they began muttering low unearthly growls and hesitantly moved forward. The scent of battle was thick in the air. “Commander, the Armagons are acting strangely. They may be sensing his presence,” Slyph voiced over on his intercom.

“Well, can they track his exact location?” Ziggurat asked.

“That’s a negative. They’re not picking up any signals on him. I’m not getting any traces either.” The red tracking device over his eye began to malfunction.

“What’s going on back there?” Ziggurat shouted.

“I-I don’t know. Sir this doesn’t look go-” Static cut off the transmission.

Ziggurat cursed. Beads of sweat rolled down his face and fizzled into the ground. Suddenly, a series of small tremors shook the land.

The earth gave one final, violent shudder as a massive entity cloaked in shadows erupted from beneath the surface. Slowly the dark aura began to dissipate, and a pair of malevolent eyes gleamed from within, cruel eyes more terrifying than the devil’s own. From out of the darkness emerged the great beast, its scales as black as the night. Along the creature’s sinuous and skeletal form was a mane of blazing fire and twisting spikes which surged down its back and tail. A deadly crown of horns grew from its skull. The serpent crept towards them, a terrible bloodlust in its eyes.

“Heh, so you finally decided to show yourself Shadowflare,” Ziggurat smirked. The black dragon began to speak, his voice

smooth and deep.

“So, do you really think that you and your army can withstand my power?” he taunted.

“Heh, guess we’ll find out,” was Ziggurat’s reply. The Juggernauts drew their weapons and took their battle positions. Ziggurat drew in a mighty breath and let out a war cry.

“ATTACK!”

The mass of soldiers surged forward, battle cries resounding. The black dragon almost seemed to be smiling. His body tensed as he began to coil and tremble, as if a great power were emerging. And then, with his head lifted high and wings splayed, the dragon unleashed a nightmarish scream so powerful that it cracked the molten earth beneath his feet. Immediately the Juggernauts were left paralyzed with their hands clamped to their ears, trembling and cringing at the mercy of the beast’s agonizing shriek. Soon enough, Shadowflare proved to them that sheer numbers served them no benefit. Like a huge snake, the black dragon slithered in and out of the shadows, weaving through the army’s attacks with ease. Black claws turned to red as they ripped through the Dragoons’ armor-plated exteriors. Blood splashed into the air, raining down on the limp bodies that soon scattered the field. Ziggurat growled as he saw his soldiers one after another become decimated. The elites kept on their toes, though barely avoiding certain death. They retaliated without mercy. Sieg’s twin battleaxes sliced off several scales from the dragon’s hide. Valdir and Eridor’s spears stabbed at his wings. A sudden smirk drew upon Ziggurat’s lips. It seemed the dragon was preoccupied with the others in constant onslaught. He slinked behind the wall of the army and tightened the massive coils of his tail. The others were fully aware of Ziggurat’s strategy and prepared to split apart as they simply awaited the commander’s signal.

“Now!”

Like a coiled spring Ziggurat then launched himself forward and slammed his mighty fist into the black dragon’s skull. Shadowflare recoiled violently as another agonizing shriek tore from

his maw; the force of the blow had shattered one of his horns. It was then that the dragon drew up his massive wings, the veinous membrane glowing like lava. With a single stroke, he took to the skies.

“Prepare for open fire!” Slyph commanded the Armagons. Barrels lit up from the Armagons’ backs. Soon the air was filled with the scream of cannon and missile fire as they whizzed through the sky. The barrage of shots had grazed Shadowflare’s wings and tail, but he continued to spiral upward until he disappeared among the clouds.

“Hold your fire. We’ve lost him,” Slyph confirmed, signaling the others. The sky was suddenly pierced by a black ball of fire. Dropping like a bolt of lightning it struck one of the many tanks below, and it was obliterated in a matter of seconds. Then another fireball came, and another. The rain of hellfire bombarded the tanks below, putting most out of commission. One of the fireballs then came hurtling towards Slyph’s tank.

“Slyph, look out!” Eridor exclaimed, but it was too late. The fireball had already made its impact, and the massive armored beast had violently burst into flames.

“SLYPH!” they all cried out. There was no response. They then saw the Dragoon’s body, as his silver arm fell limply from the burning remains. With that, the beloved Juggernaut elite who had aided them for years, leading them to numerous victories, was no more.

Shadowflare descended from the skies like a great, winged cloud serpent streaked with fire. “Is that all your pathetic army can do?” he laughed. Sieg cursed under his breath.

“Everyone fall back immediately!” Ziggurat commanded. “I repeat, everyone fall back immediately! It seems our tactics won’t hold him off for much longer.”

“What do you suggest that we do then?!” Eridor shouted, anger boiling in his voice. “We’ve already lost over half of our men!”

The truth was, Ziggurat didn’t know what to say. He could see the defeat on their faces, and he knew it was only a matter of time

before they too would perish. A dark wave of hopelessness fell over him as he looked to the blood-red skies, a color that would soon cover the land.

“If only she were here...”

Just as those words left his thoughts, an unusual icy wind swept through the area. All action had ceased.

The cold winds began to stir, carrying with it a strangely familiar cry that resonated through the clouds. It was a sound so haunting, yet so melodious. The Juggernauts turned their attention to the skies, and their eyes widened in wonder.

There, soaring down from the heavens, was the most beautiful creature they had ever seen.

There, was their great guardian...

Zalaria.

3. Chapter Three

Of Broken Promises

Zalaria was a magnificent creature. From head to tail her long, sinuous body shimmered with gemlike white and cerulean scales. Between a pair of crescent-shaped horns was a mane of flowing sapphire hair that traveled down her back, ending in a large tuft on her tail. Most striking were her enormous wings, their crystal membranes like gossamer. With those massive sails she danced and whirled across the skies almost as if she were swimming through the air. But most mysterious, were the rows of sapphire gemstones embedded along her body, each one glowing with its own inner light.

The Juggernauts almost couldn't believe their eyes, but at the same time they couldn't help but marvel at Zalaria's presence. She was so beautiful.

"The Guardian Spirit, at long last she's returned!" Eridor cried with joy.

Shadowflare chuckled under his breath. "Zalaria, I knew you'd show up. Now, finish off these fools."

Zalaria perched herself atop an earthen spire. Ziggurat smiled. "Heh, well Shadowflare, looks like this battle's all over."

The black dragon smirked once more. "We'll soon see."

The grueling battle raged on. Steel and fire clashed. Cries of death filled the air as the Juggernauts' numbers were decreasing drastically. Ziggurat noticed Zalaria hadn't moved from her perch; in fact she seemed to be staring right at him. She flew down and suddenly started homing in on the Juggernauts. Catching Ziggurat off guard, she then snatched him in her claws and soared high into the clouds.

“Zal, what are you doing?!” Ziggurat shouted, trying to pry himself from her grasp. Zalaria ignored his cries as her claws dug deeper into his skin. She then tossed him head over shoulders into the ground.

“What the hell?!” Sieg exclaimed.

“Commander Ziggurat!” Eridor called out as he ran towards him. “Are you alright?” He then turned sharply towards the white dragon. “Zal, what has gotten into you?”

“Don’t waste your breath. Zalaria can’t hear you,” Shadowflare replied with a most sinister grin on his face.

“What do you mean? What have you done to her?!” Ziggurat roared. His eyes met with Zalaria’s. In contrast with her scales, Zalaria’s eyes were a stunningly deep shade of gold. Those eyes once so captivating, yet so profound and mysterious. But now, they were nothing but an emotionless void.

“Zal...” Ziggurat whispered, now realizing the terrible truth.

Tiny ice crystals fell from Zalaria’s wings. With a violent flutter, she turned them into sharpened ice crystals as they pinned Ziggurat to the ground. Shadowflare slowly crept over him, eyes eager for the final tantilizing assault. Ziggurat roared, pounding and thrashing against the ground as he struggled desperately to break free, but to no avail. He was trapped. His immobilized comrades could only watch in horror as his life was about to abruptly come to an end; all of them, but Sieg.

His hands shook with rage. He refused to let Ziggurat die in vain, and as his anger overcame him he rushed at Shadowflare with his twin axes ready.

“YOU BASTARD!” he roared.

His efforts were cut short however. A long black tail lashed out, slamming Sieg in the chest and knocking him down hard. At the instance he collided with the ground, blood splashed into the air. Sieg screamed.

One of his battleaxes had buried itself deep into his left arm, nearly severing it completely.

“Sieg!” the others cried out.

“Pathetic,” the black dragon mocked. As he turned back towards Ziggurat, a terrible grin crept on his face. He lifted a black claw with a cruel, sadistic glee in his eyes. Ziggurat stared at Shadowflare as if he were staring death in the face. A single tear fell from his eyes.

“Forgive me, my son. I’m sorry...”

It was with those final words that Ziggurat gave his last breath; a dark claw had ripped his chest open and rendered his beating heart to shreds. Crimson blood pooled beneath his prone and now lifeless body as he lay before his comrades, their faces pale as they drew away in horror.

“Oh my god...” Eridor whispered.

“Come on, let’s get outta here before he decides to kill us too,” Sieg said, almost unable to look away from the sight. A hard lump formed in his throat and he swallowed. “How are we gonna tell the kid...”

They started to limp away, overwhelmed that they managed to escape with their lives. As they left, they could still hear the ominous laugh of the black dragon in the distance.

Meanwhile, Zalaria was hovering over the battlefield. Her eyes held no remorse, until suddenly...

They widened, and absolute horror was stilled upon her face. Everywhere she saw, fallen soldiers and their mounts, their bodies mercilessly ripped apart. Refusing to witness the horrendous sight any longer, she brought her hands to her face, only to see that her claws were also covered in blood. Shadowflare however relished at the sight.

“Well done Zalaria,” he grinned. “Now no one is left to save them from their most, inglorious fate...”