Chapter 4:

When Ryonir opened his eyes once more he found himself not in his bed, instead as he looked around he was in the increasingly familiar setting of the cave that was likely home to the dread dragon Karlix. Once again it was night, the wind howling near the cave entrance and bringing in a cold win that the elf could feel despite this just being a dream. By far it was the most vivid vision that he had encountered yet… and as he stood there in his usual spot he could see movement on the plateau of rock just above him. The form of a dragon shifted on it as it and it appeared that he could see the general shape of the creature’s huge head.

“The winds howl…” the deep, booming voice said, Ryonir able to see the almost glowing blue eyes of the creature as its head turned towards the exit of the cave. “I’ve never seen it so bad, like the mountains themselves have unleashed thousands of demons upon the land. One could almost sleep to it if they tried…”

For a second the elf thought that perhaps that Karlix was speaking to the second dragon once more and was eager to hopefully learn more about it, including its identity, but to his surprise the black-scaled creature once more bent its neck to stare directly at him. “Such turmoil in the lands,” Karlix said, his lips curling back slightly to give him a fangy grin. “Tell me, have you found what you seek yet?”

“You’re… talking to me?” Ryonir stated in slight shock. “You can see me?”

“As much as I can see my own paw,” the dragon replied, the massive bulk of the creature shifting as Karlix brought up his paw and wiggled the heavily clawed fingers as though to prove a point. “Not that I can see much of anything in this cursed cave.”

Cursed cave… the words rang through Ryonir’s mind as it quickly put the pieces together of what the dragon was saying. “That’s why you haven’t been wreaking havoc on the land,” the elf said in a breathy gasp. “You’re not waiting here, you’re trapped here…”

“For now,” Karlix stated simply. “No prison is made to last forever and I am eternal, soon the bonds that hold me in this place will weaken enough that I will break through and when it does… the destruction on this land will be apocalyptic. They will see the fires burning all the way to your precious Gildeon, and perhaps if I have time I’ll fly over and give it a visit as well.”

“You aren’t going anywhere!” Ryonir shouted in defiance. “By the order of the dragon knights I will vanquish you and make the skies safe for man and dragon alike! Right now this place might be your prison, but soon it’s going to be your tomb.”

To Ryonir’s surprise the dragon let out a laugh so loud that it caused the entirety of the cave to shake from the reverberation. “Bold words coming from an… elf,” the dragon stated once he had finished, his head laying back down against his huge forepaws. “Of course if you do somehow manage to defeat me then I’m afraid all those hopes and dreams of you finding out about your precious past die with me. Imagine climbing all this way, confronting me, winning, and then still having nothing to show for it but a blank slate…”

At this point Ryonir wanted to say something, anything to try and refute the dragon and what he said, but he found himself unable to think of the words to come to mind. It did confirm what he had suspected all along, that Karlix was the one that had stolen his memories somehow. “Even if I never know who I was I can’t let you rampage through the kingdom,” the elf finally said resolutely. “I won’t let you.”

“That’s easy to say when you’re all tucked in safe and sound in your bed…” the dragon replied, once more shocking the elf slightly at his knowledge. “Perhaps you can find comfort in the arms of the dragon once this is over. But I grow weary of our exchange and wish to rest, but before I do I want to ask you this… can a dragon change the color of his scales?”

“Uh…” Ryonir uttered, the question taking the elf by surprise once again as his mind actually worked to come up with the right answer. “No, I don’t think they can.”

“You know what,” the dragon replied, his head leaning in until the only thing the elf could see was those glowing blue eyes. “You are… absolutely right…”

The dragon closed his eyes and Ryonir was suddenly confronted with a wall of blackness, but instead of seeing the huge eyes once more he found himself opening his own and being confronted with the light of day. Unlike the last few times he didn’t find himself jumping up or having to catch his breath, in fact his mind felt quite calm as he slowly sat up and got out of the bed. It was a welcome change to his usual wake-up call, but at the same time his mind was troubled with what he had just discovered. Not only had he just had a conversation with their enemy but he found out that it wasn’t of his own free will that Karlix had remained in that cave.

While his first instinct after getting dressed and packed up was to go and tell Flynn, but as he got to the door he stopped with his hand on the handle. The last time he told the two about what he had seen they almost pulled the plug on this entire mission… and while he appreciated the concern for his safety he didn’t want to give them any more reason to doubt his ability to complete the task given to him by the dragon knight. Slowly his hand went off the door handle as he began to think of how to relay the information to Flynn and Zefrit without them knowing where it came from…

About an hour later Ryonir came down and met up with Flynn, who once more had been eating and combing through a book that looked significantly different from the last one he had previously studied out of. When the dragon knight asked him if he found anything new the left just frowned and shook his head before closing the tome and putting it away. They finished their breakfast quickly and set out on the road before a lot of people were on it as well, joining up with Zefrit when they were out of sight of the city. Though they got a dirty look from the occasional passerby no one dared bother with a dragon that was under the protection of a dragon knight as they made their way to the border town of the Arborrna kingdom.

The weather was quite clear during their travels, which made it an even greater shame that they couldn’t fly, and they managed to make it to the border before sundown. As they reached one of the last hills before the town however they saw something ahead of them that caused them to pause, a black column of smoke marking an otherwise blue sky. This caused the three to rush forward and when finally got in sight of the town it looked like it had just been under an attack. The first thought Ryonir had was this was Karlix, but as they got closer they saw that almost all the buildings were intact and that it was mostly a few hay piles and carts that were aflame… something that made it clear this wasn’t the work of a dragon.

Once they got down to the western gate of the town they carefully went over to the guards that were in the area putting out fires and scouting the area, making sure not to startle them and accidently catch an arrow. When they finally did get one of their attention they could see the momentary look of fear in his eyes before his brain processed what he was looking at, then immediately went over to the one that appeared to be in charge. “Well if this isn’t a fine sight,” the man in full plate said as he walked over to the three, his eyes carefully scanning all of them before putting up his helmet. “A dragon knight and his mount, could have used you a few hours ago you know.”

“What attacked here?” Flynn asked. “A dragon?”

The knight let out a laugh before putting a hand against his chest plate. “Doubt any of us or this town would be here if it was a dragon,” he exclaimed. “No, just your typical band of goblin scum coming out from the same woods you did. Tried attacking during the night, must have thought we would be an easy target if my men weren’t train to set these bales alight to allow them to see on the battlefield. “

“That’s clever,” Zefrit commented.

“Why thank you, my young drake,” the knight responded. “Speaking of such things I don’t believe we’ve been properly introduced to one another, you may call me Sir Artemis Franchesco, Captain of the eighteenth Arborrna border battalion.”

“I’m Ryonir of the dragon knights,” Ryonir introduced before pointing to the dragon next to him. “This is Zefrit, and next to him is Flynn the Archivist. We’re actually here on a mission to stop the dread dragon Karlix from awakening up in the Frostward Vale.”

“Well then I’m glad you’re doing it,” Artemis stated. “You won’t see me hauling my rear end up over those mountains just to tussle with some dragon, have enough trouble with the goblins that try to attack our border cities. This one was a big one too, if we hadn’t blinded them with our fires we’d probably still be fighting when you three showed up.”

“I’m happy to hear of your victory,” Ryonir said as he looked around. “I don’t see a lot of goblin bodies, did you push them back into the woods?”

“Managed to deflect them northward,” Artemis said as he pointed to a large gorge in the distance. “Got them in such a panic they probably didn’t know whether they were foot or horseback.”

Just as Ryonir was about to ask Artemis another question he felt a hand press against his shoulder, pulling him back slightly so Flynn could whisper into his ear. “The pack was coming from the north,” he said in worried tone. “If they run into a goblin horde they are going to have a lot more trouble then knights standing behind a wall raining arrows down on them.”

Ryonir’s eyes widened from the situation and thanked Artemis for the information before hurrying northward themselves, leaving the guards to clean up their battle. While werewolves were known as a formidable bunch there have been entire regiments of trained soldiers that had been wiped out by a sufficiently sized goblin horde, the greedy creatures not one to take prisoners or grant mercy. They were a real problem back when the kingdoms were first being established but eventually several of the kings led a war against them that pushed their kind all the way back to the thickest of the forests. Even with their decimated numbers they still caused problems, and Ryonir was worried that they were about to experience one of them as the two elves hopped on Zefrit and risked the sky to try and catch up to the pack sooner.

It didn’t take long for the three to find what they were looking for, even with the sun setting they could see the fires of a camp burning in the distance. Zefrit quickly dived down and landed near the site, Flynn hanging back since he wasn’t a fighter as dragon and dragon knight took the point. It was clear they were too late however; as they moved into the camp proper they could see bodies of goblin and werewolf alike scattered about. Though they put up quite the fight and slaughtered many of them the goblins had just overwhelmed them with sheer numbers.

“Damn…” Ryonir said as one of the tents that had been set-up collapsed next to them from the fire engulfing it. “This blood looks fresh, we must have missed the battle by an hour, maybe even minutes…” Flynn nodded as he sighed and scratched his head while Zefrit attempted to try and put out some of the fires by stamping on them. “I guess we should see if maybe the werewolf Archivist left anything we could find?”

Just as they started to search the area however a loud roar caused all three of them to stop and look at one another. It had come from north of the camp and it was quickly followed by a second that echoed through the night. Ryonir told Flynn to stay in the camp and keep trying to find the Archivist’s work while he and Zefrit tried to save whomever was still fighting. The two crashed their way through the underbrush towards the source of the fighting, Ryonir summoning his weapons to his hands as they both ran in unison.

It turned out they didn’t have to go for as they saw ahead of them a werewolf attempting to fight off three of the goblins that had latched onto his back and were stabbing him with their swords. Ryonir didn’t even stop running and when he got close enough he leapt into the air, the blade of his gauntlet extending out just as he came back down on top of the werewolf. His blade sailed past the lycanthropic creature and buried itself deep into the body of the goblin stabbing at his neck, causing it to fall down to the ground with a gurgle. The other two saw their companion get downed and immediately hopped off to engage in the new threat, the dragon knight slashing at them both while the Zefrit barreled passed him and into the group of goblins that had given the werewolf chase.

With Zefrit tearing through the ones that were trying to flank him it gave Ryonir enough space to engage the two in front of him. Though the goblins had crude swords and shields they were no match for the training and weapons of a dragon knight, the elf cleanly slicing through the chest of the first one before swinging his other arm around and taking off the sword arm of the other. Both goblins fell in a bloody heap, gurgling slightly as the elf looked up at the heavily bleeding werewolf. He suddenly felt a flood of adrenaline in his system as he wondered if the creature was going to recognize him as friendly, or was in such a blood lust that it saw him as another enemy as it roared at him.

As Ryonir fixed his stance he suddenly heard another roar, but this time it was from Zefrit. “Ryonir!” the dragon shouted. “Ogre!” The elf turned just in time to see the yellow-skinned giant come up from his side and swing his club straight at him, and though he dodged the blow meant to crush his skull the hit still landed square in his chest armor and sent him crumpling to the ground.

There was a burning hot pain in the elf’s chest as he struggled to catch his breath, rolling to the side in order to avoid another brutal blow that would have ended his life. Zefrit attempted to come over to help but the number of goblins on him continued to grow and he soon found himself thrashing about to shake them off. The dragon knight got to his feet and once more got out of the way of another swing, then a second, but every time he attempted to get far enough away to engage with his blades the ogre continued to close the distance. Finally Ryonir turned his pain to anger and with a shout of rage retracted the blades on his gauntlets and went straight forward.

The ogre was definitely not expecting the elf he had been fighting to dig metal claws into his portly stomach, rending open his thick flesh as Ryonir used the leverage climb his way further up. When it tried to punch him off the dragon knight kicked away and dug in, the first sailing underneath him as he caused more damage. Blood was pouring down his arms as he reached his goal, finally reaching up and catapulting his body until he was hanging from the back of the ogre’s head. Ryonir’s real target however was the throat that he had just bared, with both hands he pushed his claws in deep and in the next second the body of the creature came crashing to the ground with the elf hopping off the second before impact.

Seeing their leader nearly get decapitated caused the rest of the goblins that were still alive to flee in a panic, Zefrit getting in one last tail swipe to send several of them flying before turning back to Ryonir. “Are you okay?!” the dragon asked as he watched the elf attempt to slough the dark blue ichor off his armor. “I thought that orge had gotten you for sure!”

“They don’t give this to us just because it looks good,” Ryonir replied as he tapped the deep dent in his chest plate. “Self-healing too, give it a day or so and it should be right as rain. Can’t say the same for my ribs though… that’s going to hurt for a lot… longer…”

Both Zefrit and Ryonir realized that a shadow had fallen upon them, the two looking up to see the massive furry frame of the werewolf growling down with blood dripping from his jaws. As the silver dragon tensed to attack the elf moved his hand slightly to tell him to stand down, then slowly held up his hands and retracted the weapons back into his body. “You… saved my life…” the creature growled. “Thank… you…”

In the next second the werewolf fell backwards, landing on the ground with a loud thud. Both dragon and dragon knight looked at one another before they looked back at the nearly seven-foot-tall muscular male. Though such creatures were renowned for their fast healing they didn’t know exactly how much damage the goblins had done and decided they would attempt to take him back. Ryonir continued to wheeze slightly as he gathered up sticks and branches to form a makeshift drag gurney, then rolled the werewolf onto it as gently as he could before attaching the other end to Zefrit. Once they made sure that everything was secured they moved as gently as they could back to the destroyed werewolf encampment.

It took more than a few minutes for them to come back and when Flynn saw the state they were in his jaw practically hit the ground. At first he wanted to make sure that Ryonir was alright but the dragon knight quickly dismissed him and said to take care of the werewolf first. Though the other elf gave him a look he glanced down at the bloody creature and nodded, asking Zefrit for some help. This gave Ryonir a chance to survey all the damage that the goblins had done, shaking his head as he was met with death and destruction. If there were any other survivors they hadn’t made themselves known and most of the tents were either burned or destroyed even with Flynn attempting to put out as much of the fire as possible.

With the entire area looking like a total loss Ryonir took his damaged chest plate and popped it off, groaning slightly as the effort caused his pain to return two-fold as the adrenaline keeping it at bay qas wearing off. When he finally got it off completely he pulled off his shirt and saw that most of his chest from the neck down was covered in a quickly forming deep black bruise. As he gently pushed at his chest to see where the damage was most extensive he considered himself lucky, another few inches higher with his much force and he would probably be on the ground with a broken neck. Instead he was just going to have to take it easy for a few days as he leaned back and attempted to get his breathing to the point where it no longer hurt to do so.

“That looks quite painful,” Zefrit said, the dragon’s silver eyes staring at the extensive bruising covering the elf’s skin. “Are you sure you don’t want Flynn to look at it for you?”

“Not until he gets done with the werewolf,” Ryonir replied as he grunted in pain while shifting to a relaxed sitting position and putting his shirt back on. “While I doubt are luck is good enough that we found the werewolf Archivist he might now something that will help us, plus he is definitely in worse shape then me. I just hope those rumors about werewolf healing are true for his sake.”

With the threat of the goblins gone Ryonir and Zefrit attempted to set up the camp once more, stoking the fire and attempting to cook on it while the elf attempted to wash the ogre blood off of him. That was the first time he had used his weapon of the dragon knight and even though it wasn’t against a draconic target he admitted that it really got his blood pumping to be in the fray. He could only imagine pulling a similar move on Xarlix, seeing that black dragon collapse at the clawed hands of the elf he had led down that path in the first place…

By the time Flynn had finished administering first aid to the werewolf the sun had completely set and the moon was starting to rise high in the sky. When the elf reported back he said the goblins had done a number on him and by all accounts if the werewolf wasn’t such he would have likely succumbed to his wounds. It appeared the moon was also having a bit of a restorative effect too, one of the lacerations he was attempting to close up was starting to do so even without his help. Whether or not he was going to pull through, Flynn stated as he grabbed some of the food from the pot, was anyone’s guess however.

“So much for this…” Flynn sighed as he looked around at the tents, some of them still smoldering. “If the werewolves did have an Archivist I didn’t find anything around here. Looks like we’re back to square one.”

“Well at least we’re closer to the Frostward Vale,” Zefrit chimed in. “Not to mention the capital too, and it appears that the dragon we’re trying to stop hasn’t gone on a rampage yet otherwise they would have closed the border town.”

“Always the optimist,” Ryonir stated with a chuckle before looking down at his plate. “But he’s right too, we’ve made it this far already and we are much closer to our goal than before. I say we take the werewolf to the border town, drop him off at the apocathery, and then continue on to the capital.”

“I… don’t think that’s such a good idea,” Flynn said as he glanced back at the sleeping creature. “Even with his advanced healing I don’t think he’s going to be ready to move for at least a few days. Why don’t we stick around here for at least a day or so and maybe see if there are any other survivors? Maybe some of the others of his pack fled and will be coming back… or at the very least we should bury the bodies, they don’t deserve to rot up here alongside goblins.”

Ryonir could feel his teeth grit slightly at the mention of another delay, but his anger was quickly tempered when he realized his friend was right. Attempting to move the werewolf at this point probably would be worse then what the goblins did to him, plus they could stand to give the others a proper burial and burn the goblin bodies. “I suppose we could stay here for an extra day…” the dragon knight said, both Flynn and Zefrit smiling and nodding. “Also it might at least give me a chance to for my chest to stop feeling like that ogre is dancing on it.”

The smile on the other elf’s face quickly turned to a frown as he moved over to him, pulling up his shirt as Ryonir grunted in both pain and protest. “By the gods Ryonir!” Flynn nearly shouted as he ran a finger over the black and blue markings. “Why didn’t you tell me you had a wound like that? It looks like a giant punched you with a boulder!”

“Ogre with a club actually,” Zefrit clarified.

“Well whatever caused it you need to lay down immediately,” Flynn said as he practically scooped up the injured elf and brought him over to one of their tents that was neither destroyed nor on fire. Despite Ryonir’s protesting Flynn rubbed all manner of creams and salves on it, causing the elf’s chest to strongly tingle and, strangely enough, his tongue to go numb. “You really need to tell me when you’re hurt like this, I know I’m not technically a healer but I can certainly help you more then just you living through the pain.”

Ryonir attempted to say something but the medicine’s effects also seemed to include dragging him down into the realm of sleep, his entire body feeling like lead as the other elf covered him up. Flynn said something else but it was too fuzzy for him to hear, instead he felt his eyes close and his head tilt to the side. Though the dragon knight didn’t appreciate being knocked out in case there was any danger the last thing he thought of before drifting into unconsciousness was at least he was going to get a good night’s sleep…