

# Chapter 3: Never Alone

*J: Sun sets, moon rises, only for that star to return to the sky again, three times. Three days Jubia spent resting on his oversized, overly full gut. The flesh of his prey hadn't lasted, leaving him with so many stripped bones bumping together in the soup of his stomach. Brief periods of need elicited powerful belches which sent numerous pieces of dragon ivory flying out of his maw, trailing thick ropes of spit as they flew.*

*At the dawn of the fourth day the goat's stomach had finally shrunken to a degree where he could move properly once more, though his belly hangs down from his middle, threatening to conceal his knees. Thickened arms and legs, a general plumpness added to his figure, that is what such feasting gets him. In one moment he curses his gluttony, only to remind himself that he hadn't done it for himself, he had done it for his friend.*

*'Friend,' he thinks, holding his head with one hand while he stared at those two bottles, containing the rendered, fluid substance of two souls: one, blue, of Vexus, an enemy; the other green, of Draken, his only real friend. A deep sigh escapes him and he feels weary. The only thing that prevents him from giving into despair is the knowledge that the terrible events of late can be undone.*

*The ungulate hid the bottles and donned his cloak, setting off on a journey to find some important items, with sack in hand. Baking sun, heavy rain, and sinister nights haunt his travel, but with the passing hours his sack fills with those important components. Two days, it took. Still, one ingredient remained... one he questioned fetching in the first place, but with a shake of his head, he gives in to his bias.*

*From a local village he accepts a quest to rid them of the harassment and thievery from a band of kobolds, which he carries out. Finding them at a cave barely a mile from the settlement he clenched his fists and beat them, one after the other until they could no longer fight back.*

*The last does not get off so lucky, however. Jubia opens his maw and the kobold's, against its will, does the same. A brilliant blue light shone from the back of the smaller creature's gullet and began to flow in radiant wisps down the goat's throat, sucking his soul out until he went a pale, lifeless colour, and his eyes faded. But a touch to the chest indicates that the body's heart still beats, for now.*

*A merciful belch sent the kobold's soul rushing out of the ungulate's stomach before serious harm is done, still, the act is sufficiently horrifying to send the others scattering from the cave, running for their lives with the promise that they will never return.*

*He returns to the village and claims the meagre reward for the job, using it to buy more food and supplies before journeying back to his... their cave, one last time.*

*A long groan and a weary sigh escapes him, not having slept since he set out days ago, but he does not allow himself to rest while there is still work to be done. He places his pack, and the husk on the floor and clears a large area, smoothing out the dirt before wetting it with water from a nearby river.*

*Using a stick, Jubia marks concentric rings in the clay and edges it with runes and strange designs. It takes two hours, but when he wipes his brow he is confident in his work. He has to be when he fetches his dear friend's bones and places them in the centre of the magic circle, piling them up neatly with Draken's skull at the top.*

*With the green bottle in hand, the man takes a deep breath to steady himself and uncorks it, drizzling the thick, luminous fluid over the bones, which saturate them and turn them a lighter shade of green, imparting their glow, too.*

*Jubia sinks his hands into the earth beside the circle and closes his eyes, focusing his friend... on Draken, remembering his face, his laugh, his sweet nature and gratitude. That is who Draken is, and that empathy allows him to connect with the dragon's rendered soul, working towards it in his mind from bone, to organs, to muscle, hide and scales.*

*The bones vibrates and levitate, held away from each other an exact place and distance while threads of sinew and flesh weave between them. The necromancer's head throbs intensely and sweat beads on his brow, trying to pace himself to avoid collapsing while he pours his energy into the ritual.*

*Organs bloom like strange flours amidst the assembly of bones, only to be sheathed in layers of flesh, the dragon built back up, a layer at a time, until... an hour later, he may once again open his eyes and see his goat before him.*

*'Draken...' Jubia says, looking into his eyes, happily, but with such fatigue. He uses the last of his energy to lift the lariat from his neck, ill fitting as it was, and place it over Draken's neck before he collapses, exhausted.*

*R: Draken, in his caring sense, lunges forward and covers the goat's fall with his hands preventing him from hitting the ground. He carefully places the smaller but more powerful man down on the ground away from the ritual scene.*

*Draken has so many questions and things to say, but for now all he can do is prance in a circle like a dog and curl up next to his goat, placing his tail in a protective circle around them and his head next to his, as he lets loose a yawn and with a blanket of wings to cover the smaller man, closes his own eyes. Before he falls asleep he sees Jubia smiling, and that makes him smile as well, knowing he's under the proper protection of a caring person.*

*J: Jubia stirs happily in his sleep, as if the physical presence of Draken next to him, protecting him, soothes him inside his fitful dreams as well. His chest rises and falls slowly, limbs twitching now and then, almost like a dog would do when dreaming intensely. It's not until almost noon of the next day, when the sun is at its highest, and the birds their loudest that he finally wakes, with a groan. His whole body aches but in a second he forgets about all that when he looks up at his friend, whole, alive, safe again. He leans up to kiss his snout, and sighs deeply. 'Good morning... I'm glad I can say that to you again.'*

*R: The dragon flutters his eyes and face at the action, and smiles "Jubia" before licking the goat and then gently lifting him up and hugging him, with a frown he answers "I was so scared Jubia, it hurt so much..." And continues to hug the goat.*

*J: He simply shakes his head and hugs the dear dragon back, his hands stroking over his scaled hide. 'Sssh... ssshhh... it's over now, you're here, I'm here with you, the sun is shining on us, and you're safe,' he says, voice like a lullaby, as much for himself as for Draken.*

*R: Draken looks worried "How can you be so sure? I thought I was safe before that... that other dragon ate me..."*

*Draken looks like he's about to cry "Jubia, I died, didn't I?"*

*J: The goat squeezes his friend close, as tightly as he can, as if trying to wring the fear from him. 'You did... it was... horrible... but I brought you back. If only I hadn't left you in the first place, though...'*

*R: Draken hugs his goat even tighter, but to not strangle him, but to love him, he sets the goat down and walks towards the pile of remaining bones; knowing whose they are.*

*"I didn't know what to do Jubia, I was just waiting for you to come back like I always do, when I heard a powerful landing, before I knew it was I cornered by a larger dragon who mocked how tasty I looked, as I kept taking steps back. Before I knew it I was pinned to the ground unable to act or resist, and then my vision went dark as he swallowed my head..."*

*Draken walks further to the area, looking down, and noticing what happened*  
*"You killed him? Didn't you? He left you no other choice did he? I had never imagined finding another dragon, and all they viewed our kind as was more food. I wish, there was another way Jubia..."*

*Sometime catches his eye, a glowing bottle off to the side. Walking up to glowing blue object he pans his head around the bottle to get a good inspection of the flowing liquid.*  
*"What is this glowing thing Jubia?" Draken asks pointing to the bottle with his wing tip.*

*J: He slowly rights himself, his head still throbbing a little. 'Be careful with that, Draken... that's Vexus' soul. When I digested him, I had to separate yours from his, to restore you,' he explains, walking over to stand beside the green dragon.*

*'He seemed remorseful, right at the end... I couldn't get rid of him completely, it wasn't in my heart. So I bottled his soul, too.' A long pause, he glances down at the kobold's empty body, breathing automatically but doing nothing else.*

*'I have something planned for him, but I wanted to see what you thought at first. Rather than restoring him to his old self... as a punishment, I was going to place him in this smaller, wingless body. He would be shamed, unable to fly, and made smaller so that he will struggle to prey on people. Vexus would live again, spared death. But only if you can forgive him, too.'*

*R: Draken closes his eyes, still trying to battle out of the thought of what that vicious dragon did to him, he raises his hand, claws clunched, a part of him wants to smash the bottle and destroy the soul of that dragon, but he already knows a stronger choice can be made...*

*He holds his hand high for several seconds before losing his grip, lowering it and sighs "I have been given the choice, and I choose to grant you mercy Vexus, out of my good nature and my desire to spare dragonkind from being killed, evil or not."*

*J: Jubia nods his head, happy with his friend's decision. Though he understands the conflict in him, the pain he experienced at the hand of the other dragon, he thinks that killing someone would mark the green dragon and only tear him apart inside, over time.*

*'Vexus can thank you for your mercy himself... I'm still unsteady though, I'm glad this doesn't require a ritual,' he murmurs before grabbing the bottle, uncorking it and, with one hand holding open the husk's mouth, he carefully pours the contents, Vexus' soul down its throat, massaging its neck with one hand so that it swallows.*

*When the bottle is empty nothing happens for a minute, until the colour begins to gradually return to the creature, and its eyes light up with awareness once more.*

*The predatory dragon has a new body now, four feet tall so that even the goat looms over him. Black scales adorn most of the body, but his chest and front have none, simple bearing exposed, soft, smooth grey hide. The kobold's tail seems large in proportion to the rest of the body, as long as he is tall and thicker than one of his legs. And two rows of small, ivory horns run from the man's brow down to the back of his head.*

*R: Vexus seems to be waking up, at first he seems angry, then confused "I am... Alive?" he questions and then he looks around and sees the green dragon, and also notices how said dragon now towers over him. No, he digested him! How is he alive? He looks at his feet, no, his hands and tries to flap his wings, but he doesn't feel them anymore. It takes him a moment to realize he's no longer a dragon, but a creature who normally serves dragons.*

*Vexus looks at the goat with anger, but deep within in his eyes are tears "What did you do!?" he demands "Where are my wings, my size, my powerful dragon body? And what is this body?"*

*J: The goat is tired, drained from the ordeal of the past week, and has no patience with which to lecture, or argue with the dragon—the kobold. He only says two things, briefly: 'I killed you, and Draken spared you. You can cry for your old body, but we couldn't trust you as a dragon.'*

*He lets the words sink into Vexus for a few moments, giving him a chance to see the dragon bones piled at the back of the cave: his bones.*

*Then he stoops down and removes the string from his bag, removing a large strip of meat from a brown paper pack, which he offers to the kobold, placing it against his lips.*

*'I brought you back from the dead. You should eat, I don't want my work going to waste, Vexus,' he says. His words are slow, heavy, the disgraced dragon can almost feel the accumulated fatigue on each syllable, garnered over the past days of strife, all of his doing.*

*R: Vexus looks at the meat, and then looks at Draken and then Jubia, and finally back to Draken and speaks to him "Maybe I was wrong after all, after all I did, you both still show me mercy, mercy I don't deserve for what I've done."*

*He takes a bite out of the food given to him, he doesn't enjoy eating meat like this, but he doesn't have a choice, food is still food*

*He looks like to the green dragon, who is only sparing him down with a mixed expression "Draken, why would you show me mercy? I killed you, made you suffer, reduced you to what my old body has been and more. Why do I deserve life from you?"*

*Draken seems angry for a moment, but then he comes to feelings further and calmly explains why "Because Vexus, I don't wish to end lives if I can avoid it, I don't want to see my kind vanish from existence. You're the first dragon I've ever met, I wish the meeting had been different but I still would have spared you then as I have now"*

*Vexus seems surprised, then tame "Jubia was right, you are a very kind soul, one I had no right to take the body of... And now look at me, the price for my actions..."*

*He looks between the 2 as if to talk to both of them "What happens now?" he asks*

*J: Jubia suddenly reaches down and picks up Vexus, cradling in his arms. The kobold is heavy, but he doesn't mind, the discomfort from his weight is likely nothing compared to the embarrassment Vexus feels, being picked up like a child.*

*And yet... the hold of those arms around him, the gentle brushing of the goat's thick chest fur over his front. There's something nice about it, too, something soothing.*

*'Now, we try to go back to normal... I can't keep you here if you want to run off, but I think you should stay with us for a while. Get used to your new body, pay back some of your debt by helping us through the days. Maybe you'll even find we're not so bad to be around,' he murmurs, smiling.*

*He walks over in front of Draken and plants a smooch on the end of his green snout. 'The day is only half through, shall we go out and fetch more food before we run out of sunlight? The river is prosperous with fish this time of year.'*

*The question was aimed primarily at the dragon, but it included Vexus, too.*

*R: Vexus seems annoyed being lifted up by someone who was once so small, and offered help, but then he remembers what he is now, and knows he cannot live the way he once had, he must now adapt to this new body and as much as he doesn't like it, will take what help he can get.*

*"I... Thank you" he says in gratitude to his merciful new friends. "I don't know what else to say to this kindness I'm being showed" and hugs Jubia back.*

*At the same time Jubia is lifted up by Draken who joins in the hugging, swaying from side to side.*

*J: He does nothing to interrupt the cuddle, letting it last for as long as its individual members want. Three warm, loving people holding each other, for closeness and support.*

*When the hug is finally broken he nods and sets Vexus down before wandering over to the cave wall to slide his bag back onto the small hook on his waist. 'Alright then you two, enough burning daylight,' he giggles, in a much better mood than before.*

*The ungulate wanders out of the cave with the two in tow, not wanting to leave Draken by himself again, at least for now. The river isn't too far away, a half hour's walk along the plains at the most, and the sight of that stream of rushing, clear water, edged with smooth stones and grassy banks is enough to restore any vigour lost over the journey.*

*Without him even needing to mention it, fish are seen swimming vigorously through the water, dozens, even hundreds of them on a journey of their own, some even jumping out to glide gracefully through the air, splashing back into the water seconds later.*

*'Feel free to eat a few that you catch if you feel like it, we won't be able to carry them all back, anyway,' Jubia says before removing his simple cloth jacket and fetching a few sticks fallen from a nearby tree. He uses his knife to whittle the ends to points, then lays them at the river bank, picking one up.. and waiting... for just the right opportunity where he thrusts the makeshift spear into the water and pulls it out again, a pierced fish thrashing on the end. He takes it off, places it on the grass beside him where it can dry in the sun, then raises the spear and waits for the next opportunity.*

*The goat wears a big smile while he fishes. Sun shining, birds singing, Draken alive and well. And maybe, just maybe, he's made a new friend, and turned their life around as well. No better time to smile, he thinks.*

*R: Draken doesn't waste any time catching fish, much like a bear he lunges forward and snatches one out of the water, before shredding it up and swallowing it down. Vexus watches the dragon feast happily on the fish, as the dragon bares a smile the entire time. Such happiness in the young dragon, more things he stole from the dragon that he regrets doing. This dragon has a long life ahead of him and that's not all.*

*Vexus remembers, he remembers his hatchling days, the day he grew too old to live with his parents and was thrust out, how he fended for his own, how he learned to take everything that he could by force.*

*And then, the day he swallowed his first living prey whole, ever since that day, he's ended many lives the same way without remorse, many innocent lives, like Draken's. And now,*

*he's being given more love and care than even his own dragon parents did, if anything, he's feeling for the first time in his life what a real family is like, and he likes it.*

*Vexus realizes he still has claws and unsheaves them, and manages to sink them into a passing fish, lifting it up he is tempted to swallow it whole when he eyes over at Jubia, and lowers it. He walks over to the goat and places the fish next to the other one to dry out, and smiles happily at the goat.*

*J: The man smiles back down at Vexus, and rubs the kobold's head kindly. His mind wanders, with thoughts that perhaps there was more the two had in common than they thought.*

*Jubia had been on the run for so, so long for his misdeeds, only caring for himself, for his gluttony, for his pleasure. That had all changed when he'd found Draken... and in a way, he felt like the same had happened again, the way Vexus found him. He's truly glad that things have turned out the way they have.*

*'Don't be afraid to take a few for yourself. I'm not going to guilt you over your first live meal in your new body, as long as it isn't me, or Draken,' he chuckles, the fish piling up next to him gradually over the course of many minutes.*

*Two, four, eight, twelve. Fish can be smoked or cured and will keep well, so he doesn't worry about spearing more than they need today.*

*'You too, Draken! You've been through a lot, treat yourself!' he calls over the noisy rush of water over stone. The green dragon has definitely earned a decent meal after all he went through.*

*R: Draken hears his goat calling, and runs back to him like a happy dog on a sunny day, tongue sticking out and all. He reaches his goat and licks him over the face, before taking his share of the caught fish. He notices Vexus standing there, his mind wondering. Draken grabs a fish with his mouth and offers it to the smaller creature "You going to eat?"*

*Vexus glares at him for only a second before taking the fish and thanking him, then smiling, afterwards Draken lunges forward and sends his tongue over the kobold's face as well.*

*After his lick storm and meal, Draken feels energized, and spreads his wings, and with a woosh of air bursts into the sky and flies around, performing aerial tricks and maneuvers in his blissful happy state. He almost manages to roar, but comes off as a cute rawr like always*



*J: Jubia takes a break from the fishing to stare up into the sky, watching Draken fly around. His thoughts turn to dragons: strange creatures, mysterious, so very rare... not unlike birds with their love of flight and freedom, but so much more powerful. Strange, indeed.*

*'What do you think, Vexus? Is your new life so bad? Will you stay with us, share and share alike?' he asks, wrapping an arm around the smaller male's middle, and hugging him into his own soft, furred side.*

*'I have a feeling there will be more misfits out there like us. More danger. More strife. Yet, the chance for our family to grow.'*

*R: Vexus also looks up at Draken, and remembers how he used to be able to fly, and how that's a price of his actions, a punishment he may never get back. But he is reminded atleast what matters most.*

*Vexus considers the question, he knows there are others out there, others like his former self, others who would gladly consume villages and innocent people for more than just food, but he also knows there's more to them than just their lust, much like the goat.*

*"You have shown me kindness I do not deserve, I owe you my life after all" Vexus bows down. "Atleast as a kobold, Draken is not demanding I serve him, that is a shame I thankfully won't have to face. But, I will still offer what I can willingly to both of you."*

*He leans back up "As for your question, yes, there are others out there, others like you, others like me, maybe others who are not beyond redemption. But that begs a larger question" Vexus looks back to the happy flying Draken "One day Jubia, Draken is going to have to face the population of these lands, he can't keep hiding forever, how do you plan to stop people from hunting him? As I've learned from both of you, the answer is not killing them"*

*"I was a dragon, maybe it was just my actions that brought on my bounty, but I still feel that humans, they want Draken dead, his head on a wall because that's all we are to them: pests , then trophies*

*"Do you think Jubia? There's a way to convince them who Draken really is?" asks the smaller kobold.*

*J: The goat sighs deeply, suddenly weary. 'You're right... but our survival is worth fighting for. We can't spare everyone, there will be times when the only way we will get peace is to kill,' he murmurs.*

*'But...' he begins again after a pause. 'That will not work forever. No, we must find those who accept us, who understand us, and we must all rally together, protect one another. That is the only way we will get lasting peace and safety.'*

*Another pause, before Jubia leans down and plants a soft kiss on Vexus' cheek. 'Thank you,' he whispers, paradoxically. One would think that after all the ex-dragon had put them through, he'd never have to thank him. But there it was, affectionate, and sincere.*

*Before the kobold can question the gesture, the man explains. 'With you turned over to our side, our family. I have hope that we can grow, and reach for our peace, in time.'*

*R: Vexus feels true love for the first time in his life "Your welcome Jubia." He looks back to the flying Draken and wonders, "So how did you two meet, knowing how you used to be... Did you... end his life and his body as well?"*

*J: He looks downcast for a minute and nods. 'Yes. My predator instincts were still in full control, and I consumed him. But I brought him back... he wasn't like the others, he was... innocent, in some special way that forced me to revive him,' he sighs.*

*R: Vexus nods "You brought him back again a second time as well? Must take alot of energy to reform someone as big as him.*

*"You already show so much mercy by reforming former prey Jubia, it is something I would have never imagined a person who can digest souls would ever do"*

*Vexus stutters for a moment at the thought "I can't think about my soul being digested... Why did you spare mine?"*

*J: Jubia looks down at Vexus, his grey eyes made a little intimidating by the horizontal pupils his kind have.*

*'Because in you, I saw myself. Like you said, we're a lot alike... and when you were about to expire, not with a laugh or a moan but with a whimper, I knew there was something in you worth saving. That you weren't all bad, all the way through.'*

*R: "Jubia... I'm..." The kobold begins to shed tears, something the once proud dragon thought he'd never do.*

*"I'm so sorry for what I've done." He leaps foward at the goat, and attacks him with a wide armed hug, the force making the goat take a few steps back before he also hugs the redeemed former dragon.*

*I will renounce my old ways, now that I know... What kind of lives I've ended, and despite all that I have been shown mercy where I deserve none."*

*with a flutter of furling wings, Drakens lands softly next to the 2 smaller men, and walks up to them. "That felt good, I like flying" Draken looks at the wingless kobold and realizes he shouldn't have said that "Sorry, Vexus"*

*Vexus shrugs "It's fine, my wings are a price of my actions" and walks over to Draken, carefully rubbing his hands under the leathery surface. "Such smooth and soft wings, yes... You are indeed a very young one" his guilt catches up to him and he bites his tongue before continuing his hand along Draken's body, now over his torso. Draken flutters his wings and expresses comfort before Vexus moves his hand over his soft scaled face.*

*"Draken, I owe you my life, I took yours and you gave mine back... I'm sorry for what I've done."*

*Draken smiles at the kobold "We're alive, that's what matters most" Draken backs up and lays down before rolling over onto his back, Jubia grins knowing what Draken wants.*

*Vexus approaches and touches his belly, Draken pants at the contact. He moves the palm of his hand slowly over the exposed scaled belly and Draken pants more. Vexus smiles, giving the only dragon friend he's ever had a belly rub..*

*Vexus thinks to himself, to think this is the same dragon he ate when he was one himself, so innocent and young, almost nothing like a dragon but having the body of one. He smiles at the happy playful Draken "Seeing you happy makes me happy" he remarks.*

*J: The goat remains silent through the whole thing, only approaching Draken after the kobold makes that last remark. He sets his soft hands on the green dragon's softer belly, rubbing into it, stroking over it, moving them beside the smaller male's own. They both wear smiles, both so very happy with the way things have turned out.*

*'Don't get too comfortable with that, Vexus, or I'll be asking you to rub my belly next,' he quips, chuckling, his mood as sunny as the bright weather they bathe in.*

*Such a perfect day can't seem to last though, as the beat of hooves is heard in the distance. Sun gleams off of something a mile or so away, like a lump of silver on four galloping legs.*

*Jubia grits his teeth after his eyes focus to take in the stranger's detail: a hunter, and not the kind looking for deer. He spits, striking the other two as a strange gesture as he hasn't said anything yet.*

*'We have a threat coming towards us. Draken, I want you to take Vexus and to fly to safety, I'll whistle when you can return... after I've taken care of this,' he says, before growling, a bit of rage bubbling up inside him. 'Why today...' he mutters under his breath.*

*With a deep breath he puts his jacket back on and braces himself for the confrontation, making sure his long knife is sheathed, and picking up one of the wooden fishing spears. Then he waits, not willing to draw first blood. He will hear out the one in the armour, first.*

*R: Before he can really say another, Vexus is snacked up by Draken who bursts into the air. A whoosh so powerful it nearly knocks Jubia down, and makes way to fly back to the cave. The armored hunter stops for a moment and takes notice of the dragon flying off, and looks down to see the strange person, waiting for him... This person will know more of his prey, he thinks, and approaches.*

*He commands his steed to gallop once more towards the goat; the dragon is flying too fast to catch so he assumes his other options.*

*Before not long he rides up, his steed's speed reduced to a trot, and semi circles the goat with crossbow in hand. The hunter is wearing plated armor with chainmail covering his neck and joints and a sword in sheath to his side. His steed also armored in shining armor fit for the creature with bags and supplies tied to its rear. A closer look at the man's face seems to reveal a scar, a deep one. He ganders up at the dragon flying away, and then back to the goat, whom he points his crossbow at.*

*"Where is the dragon heading, answer me now." he demands in a deep voice*

*J: Jubia holds his arms up as though he means no harm. 'I don't know, I was minding my own business when the dragon landed to gorge on the plentiful fish here. I know not where its whims will take it next,' he replies, trying to sound convincingly frustrated.*

*In truth he doesn't trust his acting, nor does he trust the hunter to spare him even if he was convinced; the man intimidating in so much armour. But so much armour means encumbrance, slower reactions.*

*While he carefully calculates the odds, and all the risks involved should he have to engage the scarred man, his finger tips wiggle lightly and his lips move as though muttering something under his breath. A spell. Lacking a fervent incantation it will be lacking in power, but still.*

*The only question is whether his likely opponent has enough knowledge, or experience of wizardry to spot the beginnings of such magic.*

*R: The scarred hunter huffs under his breath "Even if you were lying, I'm not here to fight civilians. As you already likely know I'm after the dragon" He turns his steed to the side and it takes a few trots "The king is paying a mighty fortune for them, titles, gold, you name it. Nasty beasts aren't they to rack in that much infamy and such a bounty. Eating livestock, burning villages..." He eyes the goat again, intensely "Wouldn't it be a shame there's plenty of people out here hunting them, maybe getting close to them..."*

*J: He grits his teeth. This was exactly the kind of person he'd been hoping wasn't riding the horse, but alas. He opens his mouth as if to speak but instead of words, as his hand lowers and finger points at the man, there's a sudden crack like thunder rolling out of him. For a split second a needle of light shoots out from Jubia's fingertip, sliding between the links of the man's chainmail. The second it makes contact with his skin he feels an intense sharpness, then goes limp. Still conscious, but utterly paralyzed. With nothing to support the sheer weight of his armour, he falls off of his horse with a loud clatter of metal, which startles the beast and sends it running off into the distance.*

*The goat stares at the immobilised hunter for a good long minute, kicking the crossbow out of his hand and grabbing the sword, stabbing it deep into the ground beside him. He turns and, filling his lungs, sounds a loud, piercing whistle which echoes between the trees, calling back to Draken and Vexus.*

*R: 'Ugh... You little... Ugghh...' He moans, unable to move an inch, fading in and out while looking at the goat  
Draken hears the call and makes his way to return from a cliff he was perched on half a mile away*

*J: 'I hope you aren't sworn against dragons, deep down, because it is a dragon who will decide your fate, not me. I'm merely a guardian,' he says, sternly.  
His ears flick up as the beat of Draken's wings becomes louder, closer, the goat turning away from the fallen man... who begins to regain feeling. His fingers can twitch, and within seconds, he may move an arm. Jubia had overestimated the potency of a spell cast under such discretion.*

*R: He begins to regain his strength, but with sword stuck and his crossbow a good out of reach away, he seems his options are limited with the goat having the high ground.  
"guardian...? Why would you protect these foul creatures. They endanger us, hurt our lived ones, raid our cities and villages." he moans a bit as he starts to get up, but rising slowly  
"Bounty aside, these creatures are the devil's work, these fiends burn our homes and eat our children. Ridding the world of them... Is doing it a favor." The man finds his body still stiff, and the action of moving it wearing his energy thin.*

*J: The goat grabs the handle of the man's own sword and pulls it cleanly out of the ground, turning to face him again. The way he holds it, Jubia seems to be no stranger to the long bladed weapon.*

*'Would you say the same about humans? Bandits pillage, rape and kill; Sellswords burn people's homes and take no prisoners for a sum of gold. There are dragons who are a scourge on the land, yes, but there are many more humans with bloody hands. Should we rid the world of them, too?' he puts the question to the hunter, pointing the tip of the sword at him.*

*R: "Are you implying that I should treat dragons like people, and that I am one of such people who should be rid of?"*

*He shows signs of anger building up.*

*Draken lands nearby, and moves to hide his face behind the goat's body, the hunter scorns the idea of someone protecting a dragon.*

*"I refuse to believe that dragons are anything more than feral beasts who prey on the weak... What do you see in THAT creature standing behind you that I do not!?" He angrily announces.*

*Draken boops Jubia's back, who notices Draken's head "Jubia, I don't understand... I'm scared." he says with a says with a worried face*

*J: Jubia shakes his head. 'It's him who doesn't understand, Draken. I don't know what this man went through, why he hates you and your kind, but to hunt and kill these fleeting creatures for fame and money... I cannot consider him as anything but an enemy, now,' he sighs.*

*The sword stays raised, maintaining distance between the hunter, and the hunted. 'What say you two. Shall we let him go, back to tell his lord of our mercy? Or is his heart too black, would we just be endangering ourselves further,' he asks, voice weary once more. He rests a single hand on Draken's snout and rubs it, as much for his own comfort as the dragon's.*

*R: His eyes wide at the contact, is he? Putting that dragon? Is that kobold beside him?*

*"I don't know what kind of cult you are, or why you even consider mercy. But I know when I've been outmatched..."*

*He stands up, eyes the crossbow, but doesn't move for it. Then he eyes Draken, and narrows his eyes before speaking to him "You disgusting wyrm..." he insults to Draken.*

*Vexus almost seems tempted to run out and pummel him, but draken extends his arm before looking back to the hunter "Why?" Draken asks.*

*The hunter delays, then replies under his breath "I don't have to answer to you, feral beast!"*

*J: The goat steps forwards until the tip of the blade is barely an inch from the man's throat, close enough for him to feel the cold of the steel hovering above his skin.*

*'Actually, you do have to answer to him... you are not spared yet, remember. This dragon is your adjudicator, and you would do well not to spite him,' he says, voice barely divorced from a growl.*

*The entire time he keeps his eyes locked with the man's own. Those grey eyes with their horizontal pupils, may remind me of tales of savage beast men, cohorts of demons, dwellers of the darkest places in the world.*

*A beast's gaze that judges him as sternly as any equal man would.*

*R: "What... What do you want from me then" he looks the group in their eyes "you monsters?" He asks, knowing his choice is life or death. He does not fear death, but all options are options he can try in this situation.*

*J: He turns to Draken, about to ask what he wants to know... but the thought is already in his mind. Turning back to his captive, he speaks. 'We want to know who you are, why you are hunting us, and who sent you.'*

*R: "Who am I? Who I alone am is not important, the real question is who we are"*

*"We are a guild of beast hunters, skilled in the art of hunting ones like your friend. We were all hired by the king's court to seek out the green dragon in his lands. He wants the dragon's head over his throne, his bones for his court to keep, and oh course his wings for their experiments.*

*I was just ahead of the party, I will admit I was greedy, thinking I could get all the rewards for myself. But that isn't the case now."*

*He turns to Draken, then back to the goat "If not by my hands, I will say this, you better prepare for your friend's funeral. Hell maybe when the rest of the guild's party gets here you can hand him over and we'll cut you a share of the profit, how's that?"*

*Draken can hear the stampede of hooves, they are distant, but they are approaching, he leans over to Jubia "He's not lying, I hear something approaching Jubia, it doesn't sound alone like this person was"*

*J: The man grits his teeth and closes his eyes for a second, temple throbbing with rage barely held back. And it isn't held back for long. He swaps the sword to his off hand and pulls back his arm, fist clenched so hard that the bones creak, before sending his fist flying forwards into the hunter's face. There's a muffled thud and a small squirt of blood before the man drops to the ground, unconscious. Jubia grabs him and slings him over his back, climbing up onto Draken's own. When all three are assembled on the dragon's back he speaks, cursing that he has to leave the fish behind. 'We need to go back to the cave, now, before they arrive here.'*

R: "Jubia this is... Very heavy." as everyone piles onto Draken "I can't fly!" as he flaps his wings, but he however, starts to run back to the cave. "Why is this happening Jubia? He Draken asks. Meanwhile Vexus shoots a blind eye to the conversation, and remains quiet.

J: He shakes his head and simply keeps watch behind them, making sure they're not followed while they make their escape. 'Because men, deep down, are as greedy as the beasts they persecute,' he spits.

R: "But, I'm not greedy..." Draken murmurs, as they race back to the cave...

**meanwhile, back at the river 15 minutes later**

The mean arrive, some 14 armored hunters like the first, they take the fish and load it into their mount's pouches, why not let it go to waste.

"They were here" one of them announces, he steps off his mount and walks over to the scene, taking note of the trampled grass. Closer examination reveals footprints, one that matches their own, hooved prints, and most peculiarly... a dragon's.

He also notices the grass, it seems, odd, like half burn but not quite, growing brighter on the ends instead of darkened.

"And a magic user too, interesting..." the same person remarks, before standing back up and turning to the rest of his men. "Follow the tracks, lets go find our prey" and remounts his steed

J: Jubia wastes no time when they arrive at the cave, hopping off of Draken and reaching inside his pouch to take out... a chisel, of all things. He gets to work etching small symbols into the stone and earth that form the mouth of their cave, diligently working them into the soil with his finger nails, and the stone with the chisel, using a stone as a hammer. He thanks the stars the etchings don't have to be deep.

It takes just over twenty minutes to finish, with some help from Draken to reach the ceiling and higher sides. Then he dismounts for the last time and sinks his hands into the soft earth just inside the entrance and closes his eyes, much as he did with the ritual he performed to revive his friend. This is different though, and for a minute nothing happens before suddenly the air just inside the cave begins to warp, to shimmer, to wave, as though develop a very intense heat haze, or attempting to look through a curtain of swirling water. The goat beckons the two outside to look at his handiwork. From inside, the cave entrance seemed hazy, like an illusion, but the exterior... looks like it has no entrance at all, there simply being a rock face, as though it were solid.



*'I have obscured the entrance, but we must change our tracks so as not to be followed. Please Draken, help me here' he almost orders the dragon, telling him to run for a few minutes in a different direction and then to fly low to the ground, back into the cave. Jubia for his own part uses his hands to rub and to smooth out the dragon prints left in the soil, one by one, obscuring the tracks leading to the cave for the first twenty yards or so. By the time he's done he's absolutely filthy, but to any passers by, it looks like the dragon made a sharp turn after getting close to a massive, solid rock and then flying off where his tracks end.*

*Beyond weary by all of this he shambles into the cave and practically collapses. He hopes that all of that will keep them safe, at least for the rest of the day. He knows they will have to move soon but for now, at least... for now.*

*R: Draken returns to the cave, flying low, almost forgetting where the entrance was.*

*Everyone can hear the steeds gallop close, and soon they can see them, armored with sword and crossbow. Draken tries to hide but cannot, as he watches, trying not to make noise.*

*One hunter points to the rest of the group and they run off in a different direction led off by Draken's prints. The danger has passed, for now. Draken sighs and lays next to the goat.*

*"I was hoping I wouldn't have to talk about this" Vexus steps forward "But I think I know them, and this isn't good." he looks down at the unconscious man who tried to harm his friends, and glares*

*J: The spellcaster seems to struggle to open his eyes for a few seconds, but does eventually manage, his vision blurred. He's used too much magic in too short a amount of time, and it's showing its wear on him.*

*'Hmm... Vexus, if you have anything to tell us... anything that might help... please... tell me...' he says, wincing as a particularly strong throbbing flows through his head, only to thankfully fade again to a more minor ache.*

*'Take off his armour, though... we can talk while he's disarmed, and unarmoured...'*

*R: Vexus approaches the still unconscious man, and peice by peice, removes his armor, placing every bit of shiny metal off the side... Metal that used to adorn his cave of treasure...*

*"In my times" he begins "there were hunters like these that came to my old cave, for them they were likely after my hoard instead of me, I was just a roadblock.*

*For Draken however I can't say the same, if these hunters were after me, I earned it. But this man specifically said they were after Draken, not just any dragon. Maybe my cave was outside this Kingdom, I hadn't mapped the entire region."*

*He sighs "These people are dangerous Jubia, this one was likely a recruit, but I know for a fact the more experienced members can use magic, this facade might not last."*

*He finishes removing the man's armor, and stands back up "So, what do we do now?" he asks to the group.*

*J: Jubia rubs his temples, his eyes squeezed shut for a minute to focus his mind and suppress the pain.*

*'Haaaa...' he sighs, finally. 'We need to go soon. I'll pack our things, load up Draken as best I can, Vexus...' he begins, pausing for a moment as he looks at the hunter, and the kobold.*

*'Vexus, I want you to eat the hunter. I don't have the energy, and we would do well to have one less chasing after us. I'm sorry Draken, but we cannot leave him here to return to his comrades who wish us dead,' he says, disappointed that things have turned out so, after what was set to be a perfect day. His first day with Draken, after the brutality of his death days earlier.*

*The goat waits a few seconds, staring at the dirt, then rises and begins taking stock of all their possessions in the cave. Food, tools, scrolls and clothing. He begins the meticulous task of mentally cataloguing and packing away each article in bags, which he may affix not to Draken, but to himself with a harness. It would be heavy but he couldn't risk it falling off, and they have no bigger harness.*

*R: "Jubia if I may point out... This isn't going to change anything, the only way this is going to stop is if we take this to the source, to the capital..." Vexus responds, then looks at the body and sighs "Old habits die hard, as you wish".*

*Walking over to the hunter, he leans down, and picks up his feet, before shoving them into kobold mouth. Bit by slurp and glorb, the body slides in, angles, then knees, then pelvis. At this point the hunter begins to wake up and Vexus speeds up the process taking both his arms to pin the hunter's own to the ground. His resistance is silenced when he comes to, the kobold now up to his wiest, and soon his chest. Using both arms bends the hunter's own together and in place. Once he has his arms sliding down his gullet he lifts up his prey and lets them slide in, in a matter of seconds the man sinks past Vexus's teeth which shut tight, sealing him away inside his bulging gut.*

*"At Least **buuurrrppp** it's not someone innocent" he remarks before smiling "still tasty thou" as his belly gets to work to process the new meal*

*"Why do we have to run Jubia?" Draken asks as he walks over to the belly, noticing the struggles of the hunter inside against the flesh, and looks back to Jubia "Was this... really needed? Is he going to die?"*

*J: The goat nods his head and takes Draken's face in his hands, kissing his snout once before simply staring into his eyes while he talks. The dragon can feel his friend's fatigue, see the remorse in his eyes, but also determination.*

*'It was necessary, though I wish it wasn't. We are hunted, Draken, and like the wolf may be sought hunted and dead, we must sometimes use our teeth and claws against the hunters, if we want to survive,' he says, voice low and clear. This is Jubia's conviction.*

*He walks over to Vexus once everything is packed and plants a kiss on the kobold's cheek. 'I knew I could count on you,' he remarks, before using the last of his strength to lift the full predator up and onto the dragon's back, following soon after, laden with various bags and packs attached via a many hooked harness.*

*With arms held tight around his friend's neck, and Vexus' own around his waist, he gives the order.*

*'We must fly, Draken. I know there is a great weight on you now, literally, and figuratively, but we must flee if we wish to rest at all tonight. We have to find a new home, a new seclusion in which to nurture our safety. And then...' he turns to Vexus. 'Then we may think about the capital.'*