# RETURN OF THE DRAGON KING

DRAGONERA: THE DARK ONES CHRONICLES BOOK 6

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# PROLOGUE

Prologue

His name is Kenneth T. Burke. A stocky man at fifty-seven, with brown hair teetering on becoming fully gray, while also having a widow's peak. A side effect of male pattern baldness had been rearing its ugly head since about the age of thirty-five. His pale blue eyes weren't as bright as they had been, but they still displayed vigor and passion. Passion to protect what he knew to be truth, justice, and what his profession required.

A consummate politician, Ken Burke's beliefs came from being born and raised, Dallas Texas, which made him affiliate and become intimately connected to the Republican party.

In fact, he wasn't just a regular Republican;  he headed the party. In fact, you led the entire U.S. government.

Yes, Kenneth T. Burke was the President of the United States. A country that he loved fiercely. A country that he believed in stronger than any of his other politicians, be they Democratic or Republican, was just, fair, and gave everyone equal opportunities regardless of their social standings. He protected that America, and the America his supporters wanted to create.

Despite his love for the country, though, there was one truth about President Kenneth Burke he deliberately pretended wasn't true. He was extremely unpopular with the American citizens for several reasons. The first was that they knew him for being a deliberate liar. At one interview, he would say one thing, but then completely backtrack that statement and lie about even saying it. And whenever any interviewer who had the unfortunate task of interviewing him called him out on it? He would throw a tantrum and claim that they were trying to spin a false narrative to make him look bad.

Now no one truly knows if news outlets or even social media truly had it out for the then candidate of the Presidency, but that didn't change the fact that he had a record of this habit.

To make matters feel worse for President Burke was that despite being voted into office by some miracle chance, which many even still question how he even won the job, he was gathering more hatred for him than he had ever had in the past. Despite claiming that he wanted equal opportunities for Americans all over, Ken Burke would often raise taxes on the lower and middle-class citizens. This made their lives even harder than it already was for them by doing such an action. He tore families apart by trying to send people who were born legally in America to countries they had never been to before. He also caused a social divide between Americans of all ages, sex, and religion by making extremely controversial statements.

To say he was not a popular President, if not the most unpopular President, would have been the understatement of the century with how many heinous actions he caused to happen during his first term.

Despite his critics, though, he had a margin of popularity with a group of people so radical no political group wanted to associate themselves with. Some said it was how he even ended up winning the Presidency in the first place was because of those extremely radical individuals bringing him out of the jaws of defeat when he ran for office. A fact his rivals, and even members of his own party, would often use against him whenever he tried to state he was popular with everyone.

Regardless of how either side of the game of politics felt about the man, though, he had found himself in a situation  he did not believe in when he first saw it. A situation where no President before, and most likely after him, had ever had the unfortunate 'pleasure' of dealing with. One so farfetched and so ridiculous in concept it sounded like a TV show his son watched when he was young.

Adding to his resume as President of the United States, Kenneth Burke considered himself a realist. The world had to work a specific way. No exceptions. Every fact had to be confirmed. Every proven possibility had to be one hundred percent confirmed. There was no room for anything outside of the realm of reality.

Absolutely nothing fantastical or mythical. Those kinds of things only existed in childish story books, or those fake ass Hollywood movies trying to force their agenda down people's throats. Not in reality. Or rather, not in his reality.

But like it or not, Kenneth Burke had to accept the reality he knew and believed to be real was, in fact, a lie. And oh, how he hated to admit it. He

hated to admit and acknowledge there was indisputable evidence lifeforms close to those stupid fantasy stories people obsessed over existed.

It was all over the news these days. Reports of dragons, harpies, elves, dwarves, and even people who performed magic. MAGIC. The very notion of the idea being real made him almost want to vomit. As if it that wasn't bad enough, the country was dealing with an epidemic of this Dark Eye Cult, now he had to calm the nation down about these… fantasy terrorists?

Yes. He used the word terrorists here.

About a year ago, a horrible incident occurred where over two hundred innocent people lost their lives in a terrible battle that survivors could only describe as 'something out of a movie' by what they were seeing happen before their very eyes. What made it even more shocking to these eyewitness reports a girl with long white hair transformed into, and he denied it the first time he saw it, a white dragon? But she grabbed a human in her mouth and flung them into a metal rebar.

When he first saw this information, which became even stronger after seeing cell phone footage recorded from those able to escape with their lives, he viewed it as some sort of elaborate prank - just a stunt by some overly rebellious teenagers and young adults lashing out at HIS America. A last ditch effort to gain sympathy from the American public so they could finally turn on him.

He was so certain that was it. Nothing more, nothing less. Until his staff and several other members of the Republican and the Democratic party came to him with information they had long withheld from him about the truth.

Mythical creatures had always been real. Dating back to even the historic days of the American Revolution with sightings of elves, harpies, and even those who cast real magic to defend their homes. All of it, hidden away from the public eye, in order to keep them calm and not worrying so much about other beings, might, at any given time, attack.

What made it more infuriating for him was the secrecy. Apparently, every single President from George Washington to his predecessor learned this information once they became president. He even received a special magic briefing. The president needed to know of their existence, and there were government agencies prepared to move in on them should the need arise. When he asked why he was not told about this information when he became President, the answer they gave him enraged him. He was told he was too radical and would have gone after every single one of them. And both parties were worried that would have caused even more uneasy tensions within the citizens of their great country.

Well now, the fools, on both parties were paying the price for their incompetence. Because of their secrecy, their lives, and their deceit, over two

hundred people lost their lives. And now, every state in the country hunted these mythical beings with all their resources.

The top targets, though? The five beings they were calling 'the dragons.'

He cared little for their names, as apparently only three of them had full names, but he committed each of them to his brain so that he knew what to say once we captured them.

Seamus, Garrett, Theresa and Erienne Goldwin. Those four were 'leaders' of the other races that dared to fight back at being brought into custody. But their primary target, or rather the target of the President himself, was the group's leader.

Aiden Russell.

He was there at ground zero when it all happened. As far as President Kenneth Burke was concerned? He was the biggest threat to the country. Not the rising crime rates of the Dark Eye cult. They weren't even important to him or his primary mission. He had a simple mission. Arrest every single being that was a mage, dragon, elf, harpy, or even a goddamn dwarf, and lock them into a special prison where they would be tried and held accountable for the crimes they had committed.

So far, though, his mission wasn't going as well as he hoped it would. The elves are crafty little bastards, and they have proven that they can dodge any gunfire fired at them, or even use some strange form of magic to make his soldiers collapse immediately. The harpies? They were the vicious ones that pecked and clawed at any human that tried to capture them. Because of this, his special forces were working on unique ways to capture the bitches and cripple them before they could take off.

The mages proved to be the second most challenging for the lot to apprehend, as they were the most powerful. Any being that could throw a giant fireball at your face and then make you feel cold to the depths of your soul could not be taken lightly. Several of the soldiers that volunteered to capture these mages have never returned. But what made finding the mages more difficult, though, was that despite all their information on the ways of magic, and how mages use it, they could not locate their base of operations. Just when they thought they had found them and could take down their leaders, no doubt where Aiden Russell hid, they would lament the fact that the mages had fooled them once more.

And then there were the dragons. The nastiest of the bunch.

Though there were only five of them, each one was strong enough to take down one hundred fully trained soldiers in combat. One of these battles, The Battle of Los Angeles, displayed various examples of their terrible power. There was video footage of a giant brown dragon grabbing several tanks with his jaws and claws, easily tossing them aside, or just smashing them together.

The second one, the green dragon, froze soldiers in place with ice spells. Or, even worse, used his magic to erect a gust of wind to prevent them from advancing. The sister pair, the white and black dragons, would take to the sky and unleash flames down on his soldiers, destroying the helicopters that were sent in to deal with the dragons from above.

But their leader, Aiden Russell, never took on a true dragon form. All he ever displayed were his two draconic wings whenever the President's troops were able to locate them. But despite that, he was still just as fearsome as the other four were. Though Kenneth Burke didn't want to believe it, this young man could summon a great firestorm of death and destruction that could blow away even their most advanced tanks. This was why he believed that out of all of them, he was the most dangerous.

What frustrated the President though, was that while he expected an outcry of support from the American people, and even the world, for going after these races and trying to put them in their place, instead, he was ridiculed for attempting to defeat. Everywhere he looked, it was the same. Talk shows, new shows, independent news shows online, and even members of his own party called for him to stop wasting the tax dollars of the American people that went to fund the biggest witch hunt in the history of humanity itself.

This did nothing but fuel the fire within the President though. As far as he was concerned? All of those who dared to criticize him for hunting these beings weren't truly Americans and were nothing but a traitor to HIS America. Traitors to HIS ideals. Traitors to HIS beliefs. He cared little for those who dared provide counter arguments, and he certainly didn't give a damn for the groups that were making movements to stand up to him and his men. The bastards who were born as elf, harpy, dragon, whatever? They were all wrong. And they had to be taken care of as soon as possible.

Nothing in the world could change his mind about it.

Until today day, when he would finally confront the truth about what had been going on.

It was just an average Monday morning. June 18th. Everyone in the White House had gone about doing their daily tasks set to them by each of their departments. The Chief of Staff worked diligently to make certain that each staff member didn't waste time. Once again, the primary focus for this White House was finding the leader of the movement against Kenneth Burke's America. Even though there were plenty of other problems running rampant in America, and though several governors pleaded with him to give up this witch hunt, the President would not falter or sway from his task.

He would find them. His targets. His enemies. The enemies of the American people. The ones that he called "The Mythicals."

To say that he overworked his staff would have been an understatement. He exhausted almost all of them trying to accomplish what he demanded. Countless hours they had spent staying up trying to locate The Mythicals. They pushed each member of his staff to their absolute breaking point every single day. And even though they were all loyal to their President? They were slowly but surely finding their own breaking points.

His Chief of Staff would try his best to negotiate with other members of his political party, as well as Democratic ones, to get their support to fund finding the Mythicals. His Press Secretary did her best to answer every single question that the news media would ask. Whenever they asked her about why the President would waste money on trying to find The Mythicals instead of trying to give people who work ordinary jobs their tax returns, or even respond to other crises, she had to give them the same answer every time.

"The American people's safety is the primary concern. We can deal with the other problems with after The Mythicals are captured."

This answer was getting both tiresome and annoying for the press, who experienced it every day, even more so for the American public. While many people who had supported Ken Burke during his Presidential Bid had initially believed in everything that he said, they too were getting annoyed by his actions and wasteful spending of money.

There were those who were also afraid of The Mythicals, that much is certain, but when a Witch Hunt becomes too much for the public, it makes them upset.

Today, though, things would change. One way or another, they would change.

Ken Burke sat in the Oval Office with his Vice President, Reginald Routson, while the rest of their collective staff would be busy handling other duties. The two most powerful men in the country, and both sat in an uncomfortable silence.

The Vice President looked very different from the Commander-in-chief. Unlike Ken, Reginald was a younger man, in his late 30s, with a full head of hair, a five o'clock shadow beard, and dark blue eyes that gave off the impression that he was always in deep thought. The President chose him as his running mate to appeal to the younger demographic of America, a demographic that still proved to be elusive for the President to capture as supporters. But what made him so valuable as a Vice President though was that he was smart. Smart enough to trick anyone into believing anything that he, or the President, had to say.

Not that it helped matters now, though. Both he and Kenneth Burke were getting destroyed online and in public media for their actions.

"Goddamn idiots." Kenneth said out loud, venting his frustrations out to

his Vice President. "They don't know what I'm doing to keep their ungrateful asses safe. How dare they question me?"

"You have been spending a lot of their money on this witch hunt, sir." Reginald responded. "It's understandable that they're frustrated with you right now."

"Frustrated? They should be grateful!" The President barked back. "I've been doing my best to keep this country safe from something that humanity hasn't had to deal with since apparently the Dark Ages. Magic. Dragons. elves. It sounds like one of those goddamn story books that a mother would read her child before bedtime. And now they want to question and judge ME for trying to find The Mythicals and put them to death for what they've done?"

"What happened in Virginia was not your fault."

"Wasn't it?" Kenneth asked, with a bit of bile nearly escaping his throat. "Under my watch, my presidency, over two hundred people lost their lives that day. And the bodies continued to pile up more as it caught innocent people in the crossfires between them, this Dark Eye Cult throughout various battles, and the Battle of Columbus, which resulted in half the damn city being destroyed."

The President sat up in his chair, staring down at his Vice President. The latter didn't flinch from his boss' gaze. If one had to guess, he was used to seeing the President being upset.

"More Americans fear these bastards every single day. And we haven't been able to capture their leaders!"

"You've done more than any President before you have, sir." The Vice President responded. He almost sounded bored and aloof in response to Burke's anger.

"Have I?" Kenneth retorted with a bit of a snarl. "Every goddamn day, the Press and American people drag my name through the mud. They blame ME for what The Mythicals have done. They accuse me of not giving a damn about our people when it matters most. Every cent we spend to find and kill these bastards is for the betterment of the American people! And they dare to criticize me!"

The President threw a pen off his desk at the wall. The 'clank' it made was the only sound that rang out in the Oval Office. If it was any of the President's personal staff, they would have reacted by flinching in fear at the tyrannical temper from Kenneth Burke. However, the Vice President didn't react out of fear. Instead, he just sat there in his chair.

"They criticize you, or rather us, because they don't get what we have to deal with." he said calmly. "They don't understand how severe the whole situ-

ation is. How their safety truly matters to us. After all, we love our fellow Americans, don't we, sir?"

"More than you can know." Kenneth replied, still seething with anger. "They're like little children who think they know more about how the world works than you."

"That they are, sir." Reginald said as he stood up, approaching the desk of the President before placing a hand on his shoulder. "All they do is question your efforts. Perhaps you should let them know you are not to be questioned, or doubted?"

"And be called a tyrant some more?" Kenneth asked. "Have you seen what they've been calling me online? They're comparing me to the worst dictators in history, Reginald! ME! Of all people!"

"They don't understand what they're talking about." Reginald responded. "If anything, you should ignore those fools and continue pushing your efforts to contain The Mythicals. Weaken them so that they will eventually crumble at your feet."

"... Do you truly believe that such a course of action will get me back into the good graces of the American people?"

"Of course, Sir." The Vice President flashed an almost evil-like smile. "You have the best interests of the people in mind. You're doing this for them. For your country. For your family."

Kenneth made a deep sigh before closing his eyes. His Vice President had said this before, but it always seemed to have a calming effect on the President's mind. Out of all the members of his staff, his Vice President seemed the most competent and dedicated of them all. It was nice to know he was still in his corner.

"Thank you, Reginald." He said. "I keep worrying that every time we're about to lose the public's support. But you? You somehow get me back onto our goal once more."

"Think nothing of it, Sir." Reginald responded. "Besides. No one here in America wants you to succeed more than I."

The two men nodded their heads at one another in understanding. The mission would continue as planned. The Mythicals would be defeated, their leader would be captured.

"The main question, though," Reginald continued. "Is how do you lure out their leader and make him answer for the crimes that he has committed?"

Before Kenneth could retort, the surrounding lights suddenly dimmed. The outside sunlight seemed to vanish, and in an instant, the two men found themselves confused and looking about. Just when Kenneth was about to call out to his guards outside, a flash of light blinded him. The President let out a

pained cry at the intense light before trying to shield his eyes from the bright light.

"Who the hell are-" Reginald's voice shouted. "Wait… YOU!"

Before Kenneth could ask what was going on, a loud 'slashing' sound echoed throughout the room, followed by the sound of a falling body. The gasps of the Vice President as he struggled to breathe resonated in the office. Burke heard loud metal footsteps as the attacker approached the dying man. He might have been temporarily blinded, but The President understood someone had entered the Oval Office and was trying to kill him and his Vice President!

"You… bastard." He could see Reginald sputtering. "How… dare you-"

Those were the last words the Vice President ever spoke. A loud 'thud 'like sound reverberated, followed by the dying gasp of Reginald. Kenneth's heart nearly stopped as he picked out the metal boots move closer to him. His vision still blurry, the President called out in a vain hope that his Vice President could still understand him.

"Reginald!" He shouted. "Reginald! Are you still there?! Dammit, answer me, man!"

As expected, nothing but silence greeted him. Whoever was in the Oval Office had accomplished one goal. Kill his Vice President. And now? Now he was next.

The President's vision slowly came back. As it did, his eyes darted towards where his phone was. If he could grab it and send a message out to his security, they would capture and kill this assassin on the spot. He didn't care. All that mattered to him was survival.

Just as his hand was about to reach over and grab the phone, he felt something cold, wet, and sharp pressed against his throat. Fear took hold of him as his entire body froze right in that spot. As his vision returned, he noticed what it was.

A long golden and silver sword, with the sharp edge right against his skin, pressed right near his throat.

Kenneth felt his heart stop as he stared at the sword that was against his throat. He had seen pictures of it before. Had seen video footage of it being used in battle against his soldiers. It had sliced through tanks, bullets, and had unleashed firestorms that burnt away at anything that was in its path. He recognized who this sword belonged to.

His enemy, Aiden Russell, was standing behind him.

The young leader of The Mythicals was fully armored in his crimson and golden armor. Though Kenneth Burke couldn't see his face at the moment, the eyes of the young warrior displayed an intense dislike for the man he held

back with his blade. Aiden watched the President shake in fear at the sudden appearance of his sword against his throat.

It was pathetic. This was the Leader of the American people? What a joke.

"Mr. President." He said with disdain in his voice. "It's about time that you and I had a chat."

"A… a chat?" Kenneth replied. "Then why did you put your sword by my throat? And why did you kill my Vice President!?"

"That bastard?" Aiden asked. "He's been on our shit list for months."

"What?"

"Don't tell me you didn't notice." Aiden retorted, pressing Warfang ever closer into the President's throat. Not enough to cut skin, but enough to get the man's attention. "Reginald Routson was a sleeper agent for the enemy that you should be hunting, you idiot."

"... What do you mean?"

"Oh, my, God. Do I have to spell it out for you?" Aiden asked as he grabbed the back of Kenneth's head with his left hand. "Your Vice President? He's a sleeper agent for The Dark Eye cult. He always has been. You've been lied to and manipulated by someone that was never, ever truly loyal to you, you stupid son of a bitch."

"You… you lie!" Kenneth retorted back to the leader of The Mythicals. "You lie, you damn dragon bastard! You murdered one of the most loyal Americans ever! The country will want you dead for this!"

"Oh, will they really?" Aiden asked, forcing the President to look at the now deceased body of the former Vice President. "Then why don't you tell me, sir, what he has in his left hand there?"

Kenneth blinked a bit at the question. But ultimately he did what Aiden told him to and stared directly at the left hand of his Vice President. His eyes shrunk in shock at the mark that he was holding onto. The Dark Eye symbol.

"He was a member of the very cult that you said was 'not the true enemy' the entire time." Aiden said, his voice calm and cool. "We've been after him for months."

"We?"

"Yes. My people and I." Aiden answered, still keeping his sword close to The President's throat. "And you, President Burke, I've been waiting for this moment as well."

"So this is it, then?" Kenneth asked, regaining some of his composure. "You plan to kill me? Become the enemy of all of America by this one act? You would take the leader away from his people?"

"Oh, spare me the melodramatic self righteous attitude." Aiden retorted. "People are sick of your ass, and they're sure as hell wouldn't mourn you if I ended your life right here and now."

The tension in the room rose as beads of sweat rolled down Kenneth's head. Was this really it? Was this really the end of his life? At the hands of a Mythical?

"... As tempting as that is, though, no. That is not why I am here." Aiden went on. "Instead, I came here because I have to speak with you, President."

"You… what?"

"You understood me."

Kenneth swallowed a lump in his throat as he glanced all around him. Where were his guards? Where were the alarms? Why had nobody said anything about the White House being breached?

"How did you get in?" He asked.

"Do I really need to explain that?" Aiden responded in kind. "You've been fighting a pointless war against me and my friends for nearly a damn year now. Surely you had to have known that we have magic spells that could let us get around you if we wanted."

"You could have come in here and killed me any time then." Kenneth realized. "If… if you wanted to do it."

"Yes." Aiden confirmed, Warfang pressing ever so slightly more into the throat of the President. "And believe me. Sometimes I wanted nothing more than to cut your head off for your stupidity."

"And my security?"

"All tricked by magic as well." Aiden answered. "As far as everyone in the White House is aware of right now? You are busy doing paperwork, and you asked to not be bothered by anyone."

"You son of a bitch." Kenneth growled.

"Don't worry. This won't take long." Aiden said, his left hand's grasp on Kenneth's head tightening as well. "In fact, I think you'll be more than willing to listen to me right now."

"And why's that?"

"You are dangerously close to the edge of my sword." Aiden reminded him. "If I wanted to, I could take your head right now. So you have two choices. Listen to me, or die like that bastard there."

The President stared down at the dead body of his former Vice President, before staring back at the gold and silver sword that was against his throat. He hated having his feet held to the fire like this. Absolutely hated it. But if it would give him enough time to survive, and hope that his staff would try to come into the office during this moment, he would take it.

"Fine, then." He answered. "What is it you want to say to me, Dragon?"

Aiden snorted somewhat at the word. He realized he was technically one because of what Theresa had done to save his life, but he also appreciated that the bastard had said the word like it was an insult.

"You're going to hear everything that me, my friends, and the rest of The Mythicals went through. What we've been doing, while you've been wasting time hunting us instead of the actual target."

"Is that right?"

"Yes. It is." Aiden responded. "So you might as well get comfortable, Mr. President, because there is a lot of shit that you do not know about."

"Then enlighten me." Kenneth responded. "What do I not truly know, Aiden Russell?"

Aiden took a deep breath. He felt an urger to kill him rising in his blood, but he doing America the favor of killing someone wasting money wouldn't do him or his cause any good. So for the time being, he would have to hope that the President would listen, actually listen, to what had happened. To what was at stake.

"You'll need to appreciate the full story. And it all began on that horrible day… six months ago."

# CHAPTER ONE: SIX MONTHS AGO

Long before his eventual feud with the President of the United States, for exactly six months, life was looking pretty okay for Aiden Russell and his friends. About one year ago, the attack on Theresa's life transpired, and everyone rejoiced when the Cultists failed to take their beloved leader from them - Aiden most of all. He actually won out in the end, becoming her boyfriend after the event.

Although they were friends long before admitting their love for one another, they painted the perfect picture of a happy couple together. Everyone in their group, particularly Garrett, questioned how much time they spent alone together. It was even worse when the group got together. Kali described the pair of them as "love sick puppies, ", and made fun of how they held on to each other so tightly, constantly flirting. Garrett claimed it was like eating sugar straight from the bowl.

This wasn't on purpose, though. As the result of their almost intoxicating lovey dovey relationship came from Theresa saving Aiden's life through an action unperformed for eons, not since the times of the Great Kingdoms, known as The Soul Merge. Although a lot of time passed since the day Aiden nearly died, he still remembered it. The sensation flowing through his body. How his veins became lit with flame. It was different and alien for them both. The merging of their souls allowed Theresa to save his life, but in doing so, she turned him into something he never thought he would become.

A half dragon.

His half dragon status was the most difficult thing to overcome, and not because of the painful aches he and Theresa experiences when apart. He knew how to deal with those now. It was learning how to master his

newfound power as a half dragon. Each part of Aiden's blood felt like each part of his body was now completely different to him. Simple tasks he performed in the past, like picking up a glass from the table. His new status required him to approach them carefully, without breaking something because of his increased strength.

The ability to fly also came clumsily to him as he adjusted to his new dragon wings when he brought them out. He realized flying wasn't everything it was cracked up to be. At first, he thought it was one of the coolest things he did. Much like the rest of humanity, Aiden had always dreamed about flying through the sky above. But if the rest of his fellow humans understood how difficult it was to maintain balance and speed while flying, they probably would have second thoughts about being able to do so. Aiden found out the hard way during some of his training at the academy.

Despite the difficulties of adjusting to his new powers, or rather what seemed like a new body to him, Aiden found solace in the arms of his beloved Theresa. Though it took time to get used to being apart from each other, they were able to make it work… to an extent. There were moments in the day where both of them pined for the other's affection and touch. Those were the days that truly became a form of exquisite torture for the young couple.

Aiden constantly reminded himself this was just a side effect of her sharing part of her soul with him to allow him to become a half-dragon. Even after the Soul Merge happened, they still needed to get used to not being near the other all the time.

The side-effect didn't make it particularly easy for the couple, though. Throughout the past year of training, they and the rest of their friends engaged in small skirmishes with The Dark Eye Cult members in various parts of the country. Initially, the battles were conducted without raising the public's awareness of the destruction caused. But as each skirmish occurred, the stakes became larger and ever more ferocious.

Not long after the trek, Aiden and his friends traversed The Labyrinth, he told the elder of the elves, Lorelei, everything they saw, including the mural with the images carved into it which had strange markings on the walls. He almost told her how he was able to understand ancient Elvish, but whenever he tried to bring the topic up, he received a curt response from the Elven Leader about how he needed to 'worry about other things.'

One of those things was the Crimson Armor he now accessed. Aiden didn't even try to hide it from the dragons anymore. The moment he and Theresa got through their time apart, he confessed to them about finding each of the armor pieces in certain locations. The armor's existence shocked the dragons, confusing them, filling them with uncertainty when. he

described in detail how the armor gave him the power needed to kill The Prisoner.

He could see the impact his armor had on the Trinity. This was something they never expected to happen. Much like Warfang, something blessed Aiden with the Armor of The King. A set of armor meant for the King of All Dragons. Meant only to be worn by him, and him alone - yet Aiden clearly possessed it now.

This made them uncertain why the armor of their beloved King passed to him. Warfang was a different story entirely. The blade practically chose Aiden to keep him safe, and because of his heritage of strong magical abilities, because of his parents being mages. But this? This made them uncertain and confused about why their King's ancient armor chose him to be its new bearer. They just doubted what it all meant.

It also put a bit of a dent in his relationship with his girlfriend. Theresa had deep feelings for the fallen King of Dragonera. Those feelings were so strong she might have become his Queen after The Great War ended. But that was a different time. Before The Dark One rose and destroyed the ancient kingdoms.

Despite that small dent in their relationship, Aiden and Theresa still found themselves close to one another on days where they weren't training or fighting off the small pockets of the Dark Eye cultists. The latter became more frequent, and each skirmish had become far larger than past battles.

But for now? They were on a bit of a slight break. One that Aiden felt he owed his girlfriend after so many battles. While they had done their best to keep their 'sickening romance', as Kayli put it, from being shown publicly to the rest of their friends, the two of them craved being near each other at all times.

A trip to their local mall was a great chance to be together.

They started off like any other day. It was spring break in their final year of high school. Aiden had just gotten his driver's license, after finding time to learn how to drive, and had picked Theresa up from her house in his car. Although both of them traveled way faster with their wings, being able to just drive around brought a sort of solace to the couple. A moment to take things slow.

As Aiden drove down the street, his eyes glanced over to his girlfriend at each stoplight. A smile came to his lips at her beauty. That day she was wearing a pink sleeveless tank top and short blue denim jean shorts. Her long white hair had grown even longer since the day they became a couple and it shined like a true diamond in the sunlight. At least, that's how it looked to Aiden.

Twice, she would spot him looking over her and would playfully smack him on his shoulder a bit.

"Focus." She said when she caught him doing it a third time. "You're gonna wreck this thing if you keep staring at me."

"How can I not stare?" He asked her with a chuckle. "My girlfriend is the most beautiful woman in the whole damn world?"

"You're just saying that." She replied, flicking his forehead despite the blush on her cheeks. "You shouldn't always stare at me, you know. It might make you look like a stalker."

"Aw come on, Thes." He said with a grin. "We do things that other couples do."

"Hey, with the way people are these days, who knows?" She replied, smiling as she felt him reach over and kiss her cheek. "Babe, come on, at least wait till we get to the movie theater."

"And ruin the movie for everyone else with how sickeningly cute we are?"

"Oh, you stop that."

"Can't." Aiden replied. "I can't keep my hands to myself."

Theresa rolled her eyes as he drove down the street once more towards the mall. A laugh escaped her lips as she glanced over at him.

"You're lucky that you're cute and that I love you so much. You know that, right?"

"And here I thought it was my devilish charm." Aiden retorted with a laugh.

He laughed as she punched his arm. She smiled in response. Aiden felt his heart flutter at the sight of her smile. Ever since they merged their souls together, anything that she did brought him great joy.

"So how long is this movie?" She asked as she returned her attention back to the road.

"About two hours." Aiden answered, turning right towards the mall. "Now what we do afterwards is all up to you, babe."

"Good." Theresa grinned. "I know my boyfriend will try to drag me to The Griffon again."

"Aw come on, you love The Griffon."

"No. I love YOU. I put up with The Griffon because you like it." She flicked his nose. "Though I don't know why. I've filled your life with what you wanted it to be."

Aiden frowned a bit at that as he glanced over to her as they pulled into the parking lot of the mall.

"I wanted a lot of things then, didn't I?" He asked. "I thought the stories I liked, and the worlds sounded like a much more exciting place than my life then. Now? Now I'm not too sure."

"Aiden. While your life differs from what you imagined in those books and stories, it doesn't mean it isn't fantastical on its own."

"You sure about that?"

"Positive." Theresa said with a smile before leaning over and kissing his cheek. "Let's get this date started. The movie will not watch itself, and you will want to visit The Griffon after we're done. Right?"

Aiden chuckled at his girlfriend's remark before reaching over and leaning his forehead against hers.

"You know me so well it hurts, Thes."

"Comes with the territory of being your girlfriend."

The two shared a quick kiss before leaving the car. Aiden smiled at the idea of just going to see a movie. A normal relaxing date. While it was commonplace for most couples, regardless of their gender, to go out on dates like this with, it was rare for them. They spent most of their dates either practicing at Arcana Academy or learning how to fly in the sky with Aello and her keepers.

Aiden loved how his life had changed over the past few years, but he longed for the earlier years of his life where he was simply reading fantasy stories, rather than living in one in which he spent every day fighting for his life. He was more than capable of defending himself, now more than ever, with both the armor and power of a dragon, but he wondered how things would be if his father had never gifted him Warfang.

Despite the thoughts of what might have been, Theresa was right: his life may not be what he imagined when younger, but it had become fantastic. Few people had not only met, but actually knew elves, harpies, mages, and dragons.

Those new perspectives had helped to shape him into the young man he'd become. He still kept his child-like wonder about the ancient world, but he had matured just. Aiden laughed at himself, thinking about his first sword lesson. It may have been five short years ago, but it seemed like a lifetime. Things were much simpler back then.

As he and Theresa made their way into the mall, they walked past the newest addition. It was one that Aiden hated - a local sports bar had opened up in the mall. People from all over town would gather within it to drink, watch the sports teams they cheered for, and occasionally scream at one another or anyone that walked past the bar. Aiden wouldn't have minded had it not been that some incredibly rude and downright dirty looking people frequented this indoor bar. It made the young man sick to his stomach whenever he saw it.

"That stupid place." Aiden grumbled under his breath as he walked with

Theresa. "What kind of mall puts a damn bar in it when there're kids and families walking about?"

"The same mall that might try to stay alive." Theresa simply answered. "Like it or not, Aiden, this place is losing customers. And I think they know that."

"Don't remind me. The movie theater and The Griffon are still popular."

Theresa smiled before taking his hand in her own.

"Come on. We should get to the theater before we miss our show. Then we can stop by The Griffon afterwards. Okay?"

The white dragoness gently reached over and kissed his cheek once more, slightly whispering in his ear while doing so.

"Ignore them. For me. Please?"

He nodded at her request, smiling.

He absolutely hated the local bar addition in the mall, but he would put up with it for her. Besides, she mattered more to him than his own ranting about a stupid bar.

Despite the waning popularity of the mall, a good amount of people were still walking about and having a good time. All kinds. There were families walking into and out of different stores, teenagers and young adults buying their video games from the nearby electronic game store, and groups of women who went into different clothing stores together to find new outfits for whatever event that they were planning to go to next.

Aiden laughed to see so many people in the mall. It might not be as popular as it once was, but for at least a moment, the mall was still alive and well.

It only took a few moments to get to the theater. Aiden's eyes lit up.

The couple didn't have to spend too long walking about to find the indoor movie theater of the mall. A smile came to Aiden's lips as he saw it. He had been looking forward to this date forever. The movie was probably going to be something he would enjoy a lot, but just being out and about with his girlfriend was more than enough to get his mind off their troubles for a few hours. Time to enjoy her company and feel completely separated from the world. After the movie, they would go to the Griffon and see how it was doing, and check in on Mr. Ken.

At least. That's what SHOULD have happened.

As they were about to step into the theater, a prickly sensation slid up the back of Aiden's neck. A new sensation since he became a half dragon. He hated the feeling. Whenever he got it, something was extremely wrong. His brow furrowed before he turned back to Theresa.

"Hey." He whispered. "Did you feel that?"

"I did." She replied, a frown replacing her smile. "Something's here in the mall."

"You don't think it's them, do you?" He asked her.

"I don't want to, but we both know they're here."

Every muscle in Aiden's body became tight. Only one group could upset this one particular moment. The one group that had been raising hell over the entire country. The Dark Eye Cult.

Why today? This day? A pleasant time out was about to be ripped from his hand. An audible snarl escaped his lips, but thankfully Theresa had placed a hand over his mouth to stop it from getting out.

"Shh. Don't let anyone hear you snarl." She told him. "The last thing we want is to draw unnecessary attention to ourselves."

Despite the growing anger he had for the Dark Eye Cult ruining their date night, Aiden reluctantly nodded his head. She was right. Too many people in the mall to cause a scene right now. It would draw way too much attention.

"Why now?" He whispered. "Why here, of all places?"

"I don't know." Theresa scowled. "But whatever it is, we both know it isn't good."

She glanced around her for a few seconds, then grabbed Aiden's wrist before pulling him away from the movie theater as quickly as she could in human form. Aiden d no attempts to fight back against her, allowing her to pull him as he quickly followed after her. Both of them made hurried footsteps away from the crowds as much as they could.

Despite what she told him about letting out a snarl though, Aiden couldn't exactly control the dragon blood that was now flowing in his veins from raging within him. His lungs felt like a raging inferno had been stirring within it, wanting to escape and blast out at anyone that looked even remotely like a member of the Dark Eye Cult. The more he thought about doing that, the stronger that fire inside wanted to escape.

He had every right to absolutely hate the cult after what happened last year. What they did nearly cost his beloved Theresa's life. The hell that they had put her through, the image of Theresa having been overcome by the immense amount of pain that they inflicted on her was still oh so fresh in his mind. The poison, the Bane of Dragons. It was a means to be an effective threat to the dragons, and by his own dragonblood himself, that had long thought to have been locked away with its creator in the prison known as The Labyrinth.

A terrifying place that still brought nightmares to Aiden just thinking about what they had encountered within its dark walls.

"Goddammit." He muttered in a way that only Theresa could hear,

"They've been hiding for what seems like months. Why the hell are they out here now?"

"I don't know. But you and I both know that this might get messy, fast."

"So what do we do? Cause a wide spread panic and tell everyone to get out of the mall?"

"No. That'll only cause chaos and confusion. More people will end up getting hurt from that way rather than actually helping."

"Thes, we don't exactly have a choice in this case. We both know that if they're here then people are either going to get badly hurt or could end up being killed if we don't find out where they are right now. We've got to stop them and beat them NOW!"

"I know that, hon." She reached over and stroked his cheek in a soothing manner. For a brief moment of rest, the dragon blood in him was soothed by her soft touch. "Don't let the rage in your veins overcome your thoughts. Focus on my voice, my touch, right now. Breathe in. Slowly. Clear your mind."

Aiden's eyelids closed quietly at her words before he began to take deep breaths in and out. That raging inferno in his chest from earlier was now slowly being calmed by her kind words and touch. If anyone in the mall knew how he felt right then and there emotionally, or knew how hard it was to control being new to effectively being a dragon, it was her.

"That's it." Her soft voice echoed in his mind. "Calm, collected, and relaxed. Don't let the fire inside you cloud your thoughts."

Her soft words were enough to get Aiden to find some inner peace, at least for a brief moment, before he simply nodded his head. A faint smile came to her lips after she saw that he had regained control of himself.

"There he is. There's my silly nerdy boyfriend."

"Heh, yeah. I'm here…thanks hon."

Theresa gently stepped on her tiptoes before kissing his forehead affectionately. A small laugh escaped his lips.

"Okay, I'm focused now. Where would they most likely attack here if they wanted to make a statement?"

"That's assuming that they're here to start an attack right now, which they probably are." Theresa frowned. "As for a place that they would most likely attack if they wanted to cause an uproar?"

"One of the giant clothing stores perhaps?"

"Too obvious." Theresa replied. "Sure there's a lot of people in those stores, but if they wanted to make a scene they wouldn't do it where only a few people, in this case let's say fifty of them in that one store, would notice. If they really wanted to put fear into the masses they would do it in a place where everyone can see it with no walls blocking their view…"

In that moment both Theresa and Aiden stared at each other in horror and shock as the sudden realization came to them both.

"The food court!" They exclaimed together before rushing off towards it.

Both of them ran as fast as their legs, at least without revealing their true strength, would allow them. As they ran, several people shouted at them to watch where they were going, or to 'slow the hell down' from one particular person. Aiden paid no attention to every single one of them. They had reason to be moving that fast, and if they were lucky, they could possibly avoid a horrible scenario. Outside of the giant JcPenny's their mall had, the food court was the perfect spot for a large crowd of people to gather. It was the prime target for any massive attack.

Aiden just prayed to whatever god was listening that they were able to get there before anything catastrophic could happen. If both of them could get people moving before the Dark Eye made their move, they might have a chance of saving a lot of lives. At least, that's what he was hoping would happen.

Soon the food court began to come into view. Aiden felt his stomach turn into a knot when he saw just how many people were all gathered at the food court. Just going by a pure mathematical guess by how many families, groups of friends, and dates that were happening, Aiden saw at least maybe seventy five, possibly a hundred, people all gathered together. The loud noise that came from the food court was to be expected, but it was almost to the point of deafening.

"Dammit dammit dammit!" Aiden cursed out loudly. "There's so many people here!"

"Calm down." Theresa quickly said. "We need to focus on finding the cult members here, now."

"Not exactly something that's easy to do, Thes!"

"Oh shut up and focus!"

He nodded his head at her before the two of them turned back to the very large crowd of people in the food court. Though in the back of his mind Aiden almost scoffed at his girlfriend telling him to focus on this kind of task. Even with all the focus the two of them could muster, it was like looking for a needle in a haystack with how many people were in the food court.

"Thes, quick, let's split up. We might be able to cover more ground if we're apart from one another for a bit."

"Are you sure you can handle that?" She asked. "I know we've been working on trying to make sure we don't go crazy when we're apart but this is a whole different situation, Aiden."

"We don't have a choice." Aiden seemed a bit more mature at that point. "Not doing this would put more lives at risk if we don't split up. Whatever

mental pain apart from one another that I feel I can deal with. We have to find them!"

Theresa blinked for a few seconds at Aiden's words, before nodding her head once in reluctance at this suggestion.

"Okay. But only for a few minutes. I don't want us to be outnumbered."

"Babe, you're a dragoness and I'm a half dragon. I think we can take on a few punks."

"It's not THEM I'm worrying about." Theresa frowned. "Remember, their demons."

Aiden felt a shiver run down his spine when she reminded him about their ability to summon and control demons in combat. But his resolve wouldn't falter as his eyebrows furrowed.

"Right. Let's try to make this as quick as possible."

The couple, with some hesitation from Theresa, headed off into different directions from one another. Immediately Aiden felt a small headache forming in his head from that separation that he was beginning to feel from being apart from her. One of the side effects of being half dragon, and still adjusting to being one, was feeling that headache forming whenever the two were apart. But for now, he would just have to deal with it as best as he could. Lives were at stake.

As he glanced around for any signs of members from the Dark Cult, Aiden began to feel incredibly anxious for some reason. Something was off here. Normally the cult was known for making grandiose giant explosions or attacks out of the middle of nowhere. Not the most effective means of keeping something like a cult hidden from the world, but they weren't exactly an ordinary cult to begin with. Aiden and his friends had gotten into far too many scraps with the Dark Eye to not know how they would work.

That still it didn't put his mind at ease seeing how many people were gathered in the food court. If the Dark Eye truly were going to do their usual gimmick of causing an explosion to go off suddenly, they had the perfect moment and time to do it. With how many people were gathered it was practically throwing a grenade into a lake for them. Why were they waiting? The more Aiden thought about it, the more tense he became.

He grunted in pain somewhat as he placed his hand on his forehead. The headache became a bit stronger now as he felt the strain from being apart from Theresa start to take effect on him. Usually he was able to overcome the headaches because of how often he and Theresa would spend apart during training sessions to hone that ability to overcome it, but the added stress of the Dark Eye being nearby only seemed to amp up the painful headache on the poor half dragon.

"You look like you're in pain." A familiar voice rang out behind him. One that made Aiden's spine shiver.

He glanced over his shoulder to spot the one person that he had learned to utterly hate with all his being every time he saw him.

Raven, the protege of the Dark Cult's leader, Dimitri, stood behind him with his hands in his pockets. A large sneering grin on his lips.

Before he even knew what was happening, a loud 'bang' went off in the center of the food court. And from that bang, a portal opened up…

And demons came rushing out from within it, attacking everyone and everything that they could see.