

THE BANE OF DRAGONS

DRAGONERA - THE DARK ONE CHRONICLES BOOK 5



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CHAPTER 1: A TENSE PEACE



One year. It had been a full year since a catalytic event could have brought the modern age to an end. They avoided it, but only because of a massive battle that prevented the end.

The Battle of Richmond.

A destructive battle left the city in near shambles. It ruined the once lively streets from intense heat erupting from the ground, destroying homes faster than people built them. Several buildings built to last, as if to defy the laws of gravity themselves, toppled, punished for daring to reach towards the sky. But the worst of all happened to the Richmond International Airport. The runways obliterated. At least several planes lost from the destruction. Because of all the destruction, the Governor of Virginia ordered it shut down to make repairs.

To the average human being, the entire catastrophe played out like a sudden violent storm. But not to Aiden Russell, his parents, and his friends. They knew the truth about what happened. Richmond's destruction came not from a sudden violent storm, but from their clash with what Aiden considered their mightiest foe yet.

The Obsidian Demon.

No creature Aiden had faced in his time with the dragons before compared to its supposed absolute power. Sometimes Aiden, left alone to think, considered the possibility that the beast might have been invincible. The very thought sent shivers down his spine.

Aiden and his friends had a hard time even talking about the Battle of Richmond. Not because they might have lost the battle, but because of the damages resulting from it. The Obsidian Demon had forced them to push their limits in battle, and even the mightiest of them all, Garrett barely contended with the

powerful fiend. The more Aiden thought about what might have happened had they not found out its weakness, the more he thanked the gods for how lucky they were.

A couple of good things came out of this total mess, though. Each one a small blessing in disguise. Thankfully the Dark Eye Cult went into hiding after the disaster. Therea theorized they had taken such a loss to their morale and fewer reports of the Dark Eye attacking innocent people or even leaving their sigil to terrify others. Aiden wanted to believe they would just give up their goals, but he understood in his bones they would not give up easily.

They had gained a new friend as well - Theresa's little sister. Erienne. The black dragoness had been adjusting to life with her actual sister and her human parents, as well as being part of a group that did not treat her like she a disposable item.

Not a straightforward path for her to walk, though. Despite Theresa's encouragement and protection, Erienne found herself being judged by the other members of their group. Garrett was the source of this mistrust. The largest of the dragons would often attempt to use The Stare on Erienne, but Aiden and Theresa would pull the younger dragoness away before she any lasting damage from Garrett.

Seamus was not as distrustful as the larger dragon. He was a bit more optimistic about Erienne's inclusion into the group. He did, however, have some concerns about letting her be a part of their group. But he would never dare argue with Theresa once she made up her mind.

A full year had passed since the climactic fight with Obsidian Demon. A very fragile peace fell over the group during that time frame. It started when The Dark Eye Cult had gone into hiding after the defeat of the Obsidian Demon. Reports of their attacks on civilians had died down in the media as well. Aiden thought he would be happier when the news broke, but no dice. They had not defeated the Dark Eye Cult. The Dark Eye Cult went underground, biding their time until the next opportunity presented itself.

Aiden and his friends knew they were going to attack again. They had to be prepared for their return. And the best place for them to hone their skills in combat? The Mage Academy.

Grand Mage Ryan happily allowed those who helped save his school train in peace and secrecy. He owed them for their battles with the Dark Eye. They spent every hour not devoted to High School at the Academy, practicing their combat skills until tired in their bones. During the full year, Aiden too learned a few more things about his friends.

First, Liza. Their encounter with Joro last year opened Aiden's eyes about her phobia. He never pegged this strong athletic girl as someone who would be

afraid of spiders. Spiders. Joro, a Prime Demon of fear, exposed something in Liza he never thought he would have seen - absolute terror. The mere presence of Joro's body shattered the walls of her normal bravado.

Aiden didn't blame her for being so terrified of such a monstrous looking demon. Even if he didn't have arachnophobia, Joro's spider form was just so sickening and fear inducing even the most stalwart of warriors would run for their lives to escape the sickening image of the Prime Demon. Garrett and their own Prime Demon ally, Kali, appeared to be the only ones who didn't seem to fear the Spider.

During their time at the Academy, Liza trained to help overcome her phobia. They tried multiple times to get her to talk about how she became so terrified of spiders, but all of them ended in the same way. She refused to talk about it. Any attempt to get her to speak about it ended with her leaving the room out of a panic response. With only Aello being able to coax her back into the room with carefully chosen words.

Despite her fear of spiders, Liza did not falter from the year long training with Aiden and the others. The fruits of her labor lead her to studying an old form of dual wielding knives from Seamus. A style called Paranza Corta. One of the oldest knife fighting styles in the world. Designed to pierce through weak spots in armor, which often ended with the death of a knight when using the style effectively. The one problem with Liza learning this form of martial arts was that it did not fit the type of weapons Liza carried. Gitanel and Oceanus were far stockier than most needle like blades normally used for Paranza Corta. Seamus made certain adjustments to the style to accommodate for Liza's weapons.

Aiden also gained some more experience in combat training during this long year. When he gained the shield, Peaceguard, from Theresa last year, he wondered if using it effectively during combat was possible. But with the lessons learned in the Academy, Aiden soon favored this form of combat over using both hands to swing Warfang. The style he learned from Theresa, called Fangs and Claws, was all about using both the sword and shield together as an effective team. Vikings and Saxons used this style of combat during their conflicts with one another.

Aiden used Peaceguard to ward off attacks, but also to cause any openings with a quick thrust or push with the mighty shield. He also learned to make use of the shield's sharp tip point whenever possible if Warfang could not get in close enough to deal a damaging blow to the target. Hence the 'Claws' part of the style's name. Like a dragon's giant claw swiping away at an opponent, and then using the sharp claw point on their toes to deal a deadly blow to their foe.

The other part of the combat style, 'Fangs', referred to the sharp teeth within a dragon's mouth. Fitting, given the name of his sword.

The Fang form of combat worked a bit differently from the style the Vikings and Saxons used. Rather than quick thrusts or slashes, the Fang form delivered fast and powerful strikes to an enemy's body. If used, he would incapacitate his opponent long enough to avoid taking a person's life if so necessary. However, should push come to shove, he would have no choice but to use the style to kill the enemy standing in his way.

Aiden had to admit he liked this style of martial arts. It prepared him for any battle waiting for him in the coming months.

Not the only style of combat he studied, however. Ever since his mother and father's revelation of being mages who once studied at the Academy themselves, Aiden learned enchantments of spells from them. Enchantments would help his weapons deal more effective blows in combat. Sure, Seamus taught him how to use magical spells, like fire magic and healing magic, but he admitted he preferred to use enchantments more. He even said it was far easier to do than 'repeating out the spell's name' over and over.

Seamus made him practice using magical arts even longer because of that smart remark.

All the training though did little to help put Aiden's mind at ease though. With the Dark Eye being quiet for sometime, it was only a matter of when they would strike out and attack. Aiden spent each day on high alert for their next strike. A group made up of the determined individuals like that wouldn't just disband after one loss. Not with Dimitri at the helm.

Aiden wasn't the only one on edge. Erienne sensed the current peace existed on borrowed time. During their training moments, the two of them had formed a bond with one another, one Aiden appreciated. During one day, the two talked about their current situation.

"I don't like it." Erienne said as watched Liza practice her stances. "I was a part of that group for a while. They would never be this quiet."

"So you think they're waiting for the right moment to strike out at us again too." Aide mused. Erienne gave a brief nod.

"I do. I don't know why they're taking this long to strike out at us, but I don't like the idea of just being wide open to them striking us at any point."

"Hey, it's not like we can't take care of ourselves. We're prepared to fight any battles with them."

"I'm not talking about being physically prepared." Erienne frowned as she rubbed her left arm. "I'm talking about how they will strike from the shadows when we least expect it... just like Joro whenever she wanted to."

Aiden frowned. Erienne might have been under the control of a strange

entity who forced her to connect to the Obsidian Demon, but she still blamed herself for the deaths the Prime Demon caused. He reached over and placed a hand on her shoulder. He gave it a gentle squeeze to give her some form of reassurance.

"The blame for what Joro did does not fall on your shoulders." He told her. "You know that, don't you?"

"But I **was** responsible for the Obsidian Demon being brought forth into this world. Again." Erienne squeezes her bicep. "I shouldn't have been given a second chance like this..."

"Bull crap, and you know it."

"Is it?"

"Yes." Aiden replied with a determined voice. "Theresa and I walked around in your psyche. We saw what happened. They used you against your own will." Erienne quietly sat for a few moments as she listened to Aiden's words. A small 'twinkle' in her eyes.

"You wanted to only help your sister, you only wanted to help protect your people. Your home. All of it. Your sister and I both know you wouldn't have let yourself go down a path of evil if you knew the offer came from... whatever the hell that thing was." Aiden reached over and removed her hand from her bicep. "The pain you suffered? It's over now. We have given you this chance to do it the right way this time."

A smile came to Erienne's lips as Aiden finished speaking. Then a tiny giggle escaped her lips.

"What's so funny?"

"Oh it's...it's just you have a very natural talent to raise some hopes back up in those who are down." Erienne admits. "I always found it to be a nice trait, for any race, it's... well its something we dragonesses like in men."

She leaned her head on his shoulder, eyes closed as she crooned. Aiden's heart raced a mile a minute. He had not forgotten the sneak kiss on the cheek she planted on his face, so his guard was up.

"You have quite the capabilities of being a leader if you had to be, Aiden." She told him. "You just don't know it yet, but you can rouse the weary spirits of those who need guidance."

"O-Oh please." Aiden stuttered. "I'm no leader. If anyone's the leader, it's your sister."

"ThesThes?" Erienne gave a short laugh. "It's true that she's a leader. A very good one. But she's a military leader."

"Not sure there's much of a difference, Eri."

"Oh there is." Erienne grinned. "But do you know how Dimitri kept his followers in loyal?"

"Through brainwashing?" Aiden asked, stretching out 'through.'

"Not even close." Erienne gave him a whack up the back of his head. A trait that she seemed to share with her big sister. "Dimitri's followers didn't follow him because he used brainwashing or dark magic to keep them in line. He could have done that, sure, but I have to give him his due credit. Dimitri is a master at using words to motivate those who the world ignores. He calls them his 'outcasts'."

"Outcasts?"

"Yes, those that society doesn't favor." Erienne frowned as she wrapped her arms around his bicep. "You know how humans are. Anything that's different from them, they ostracize and hate them. Society rejects those who aren't as fast, strong, good looking, or anything that makes them 'different' from the rest of their fellow humans... Dimitri? He accepted them."

Aiden felt the back of his hair rising up on the back of his neck. That would give him a near infinite amount of troops at any moment he wanted them. It also explained why a lot of those with Dimitri last year had gone from teenagers to young adults. Their ranks filled by those who had not found their place in the world. Those that were denied anything. Aiden pieced together just how dangerous this kind of group could be, if given the proper motivation.

"But there are a couple of differences between you and Dimitri." Erienne said as she glanced up to him. "Dimitri uses his talent to gain what he wants from those youths. To make them his slaves. You? You can use your gift for the opposite effect. To inspire people, to do the right thing. To lead better than the jokers who run the governments of the world."

"Ha, now I know you're pulling my leg." Aiden said with a slight laugh.

"Am I though?" Erienne asked as she nuzzled her face into his arm. "Or am I just being honest about what I think your potential might be?"

"Oh ha ha."

He had to admit, Erienne differed from her sister. It made her more interesting. While Theresa carried herself like she was mature and let nothing slip past her defenses, Erienne was more open with herself and her feelings in comparison.

"How are you holding up?" He asked her, trying to change the subject. "Are you avoiding Garrett's attempts to make you seem smaller?"

"A funny way to change the subject." Erienne said with flat eyes. "But yes, I have been avoiding him. I...don't know if he'll ever come around."

"I can relate." Aiden admitted, recalling the first few months with Garrett when they first met. "All too well I can relate."

Erienne giggled again before releasing his arm. The black dragoness stared

as she watched the students of the Academy practice their spells together. A soft smile came to her lips as each spell clashed with one another.

"It's nice to see things being so... calm." She put her hands together as she spoke. "It's nice and peaceful. These students here? They are happy training with one another after what they went through."

"Yeah..." Aiden frowned. "It's amazing they could reformat how their school works after what we went through to keep it from being exposed."

"Yes... but I can't help but believe they understand how tense everything is right now." Erienne frowned. "They know that eventually this peace will end."

"Eri?"

Aiden glanced over at her, confused by that statement. Erienne stood up from her spot as she let out a long drawn-out sigh before giving Aiden a serious expression.

"This peace? It won't last. I have a bad feeling in my stomach, Aiden... an attack will come soon. I know it. You know it. They know it."

Her words stabbed fear into the center of Aiden's heart. He feared Erienne's predictions were did he know how right Erienne would be.