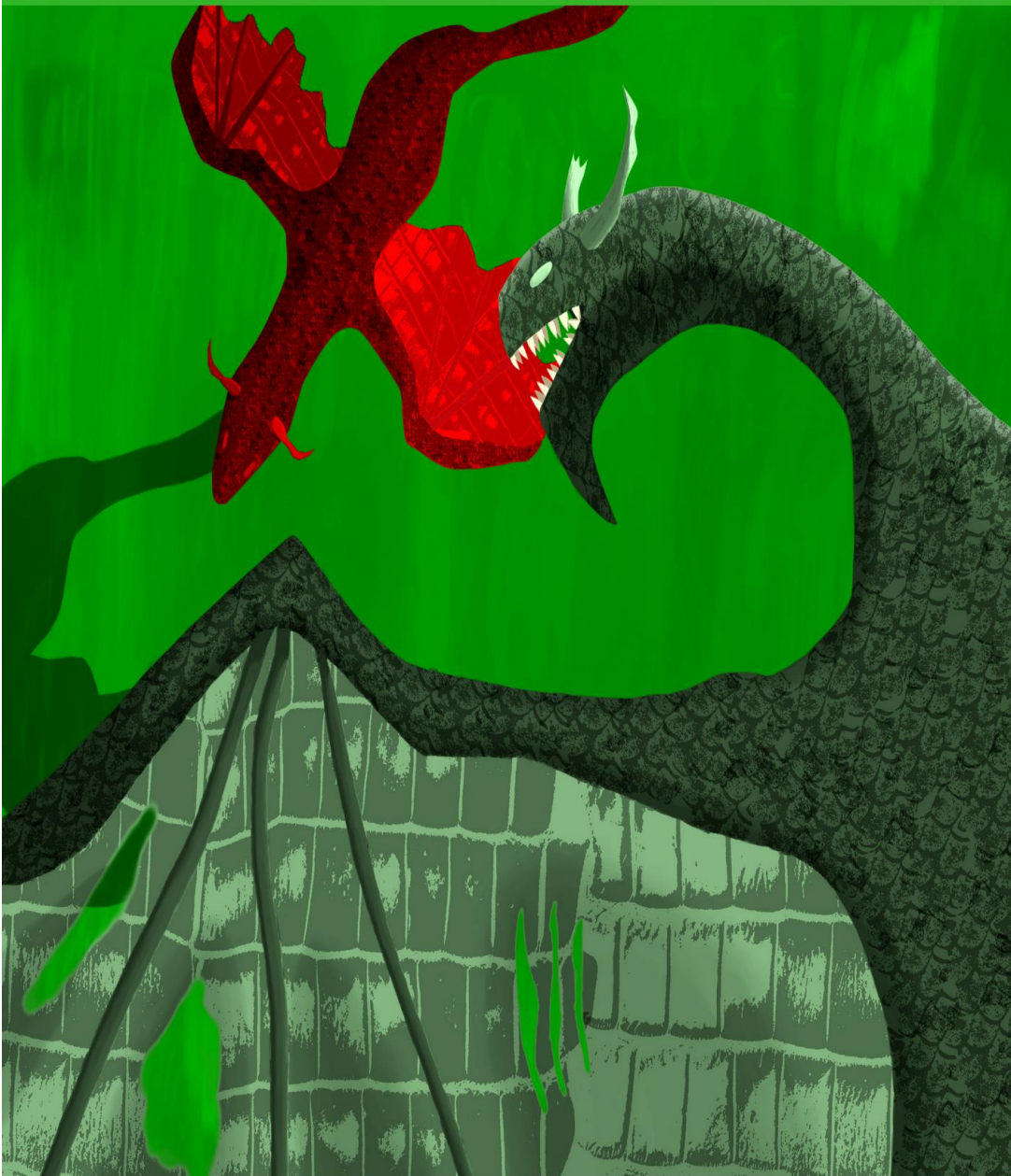


DRAGON RAID

"One woman and her dragon against a raid.
Easy, right?"

SEAN FRANCIS



I

The attack came upon them suddenly and without warning.

Shadows blocked the sun's light high above the city of Farreach and fire from multiple mouths rained down on the stone buildings. Men and women burned as they tried to run. Structures that were supposed to stand against the worst weather the world created fell without much effort.

The guards of the town were called into action by the horns and bells that rang throughout the town. Men and women wearing the gold and red emblem of Valia ran up and down the walls preparing the ballista and magic cannons.

Yet, for the eastern wall, it was too late.

As soon as they got into their positions, fire crashed against the enhanced wall and burned anyone under it to a crisp. None of them had a chance to alter their fate and any who miraculously survived would not be able to fight again.

Their sacrifice, though, gave the other three walls of Farreach time to turn their massive siege weapons around toward the shadows and open fire. Massive arrows as thick as two men's wrists and even wider blasts of arcane energy shot up toward the shadows at a speed that was hard to track. The barrage slammed into the shadows and a couple fell. Which gave the soldiers the sight of even more shadows above them.

Finally, someone, either too scared or too battle-fueled, yelled out, "Dragons!"

Except for the sound of siege weapons firing, the walls went silent. Dragons were the most dangerous and lethal creatures one could fight against. Scales thick enough to deflect most footmen's weapons, breath as hot as the sun and claws and fangs the size of humans. Very few people survive fighting these beasts.

And now dozens of them descended upon Farreach.

“Keep alert you idiots!” Yelled the wall commander of the west wall, “No matter the enemy, we must keep them from the capital! Fight!”

To enforce his words, he walked up to each soldier still gawking at the dragons a swift but harmless strike to the pauldron with his baton.

“Do not let the legends of these animals cower you to uselessness! Fight!”

As if fueled by the man’s words and baton, the men started working faster to keep the siege weapons pumping out round after round. With each volley, dragons fell from the sky with roars of pain. But with each one that fell it seemed like three more appeared from behind them.

They wheeled down and started burning the walls methodically. First, the northern wall fell under fire and the corpses of dragons that died from desperate last minute volley rounds. They then moved on to the western wall, taking the lives of a hundred soldiers as easy as a store owner checks off their list of supplies.

Without hesitation, and ignoring the rounds that still crashed into them, they moved on to the last wall. The soldiers did not have any hope of survival and so they continued to blast round after round into the dragon’s ranks until their dying breath.

With that done, the dragons then descended onto the town itself and started creating havoc. The walls lasted all of ten minutes which was hardly enough time for people to retreat. A few did, and were ignored as the creatures went for the better source of food. They landed on the buildings that still stood upright and burned and chomped at their leisure.

The town survived for only fifteen minutes.

When the beasts were done with their meal, they launched themselves into the air again and soared west toward their next destination:

The Capital of Valia.

II

Lothra walked among the less-than-normally crowded market and everyone who was there seemed to be in a hurry trying to buy supplies and gear. The stories of the attack on Farreach two days ago had spooked most people. She had overheard multiple conversations of citizens of Valia asking each other if they were going to leave the capital.

It was surprising to hear that many people were staying, but preparing for the worst. Lothra would have expected everyone to rush out of the capital as soon as they could. Yet, they were going to be stubborn and stay. She was glad that she did not have to really make that choice. All she needed to do was get some supplies herself and meet up with her friend waiting outside the city. They would then fly to the north and investigate the sites of attack.

About half an hour later, she finally found a vendor that had what she needed in stock and purchased everything she could. The man took three fourths of her hard earned money, but Lothra understood why. She was sure that once he sold everything he had, he was going to head out.

With a bag full to the brim of food, repair materials and herbs slung over her shoulder she headed back toward the gate where her friend agreed to wait. As she walked back to the gate, she could feel the air around her become more and more tense. At this point, she would have been able to cut it with her two blades.

It was as if they could tell when the dragons would attack.

The city went dark. Lothra looked up along with every single person around her and found a shape blocking out the sun. Then two shapes and then three. More and more shapes appeared in the air and all of them let out roars that gave everyone below one clear message: We Are Here!

The citizens of Valia started screaming. They all ran in various directions, trampling over each other and generally blind to anything other than their destination. Lothra could feel the fear controlling

them and she was tempted to let it control her as well. However, she shook it off, raised her now glowing hand, and let loose with a comet like blast that shot into the air with a blinding red light.

Seconds later, another creature roared, its voice deeper and more ferocious than the dragon's roars of confidence. To the south, a large dragon form sailed into the air and crashed into one of the dragons blocking out the sun. It then flashed down toward the city, grabbed Lothra in its humongous paw, and curved right back up.

As it ascended into the air, Lothra climbed the dark green scales to the beast's neck. When she got there, she patted the neck and said, "Hello, Veilcrath."

Veilcrath let out a roar of defiance against the mass of dragons at the other side of the city from him. In Lothra's thoughts, she could hear, "Greetings, Veilcra."

"Ready to fight?"

As if answering her, Veilcrath let out another roar and charged right for the mass.

III

The mass immediately separated into individuals and Lothra immediately regretted going at them alone. If she was counting right, she was about to face twelve-to-one odds. And, as she and Veilcrath openly challenged them, something akin to a duel among the dragons, they were all going to fight and kill them both.

She gritted her teeth. They had already made their bed. Time to lie in it.

After the years upon years of being together, Veilcrath and Lothra had a special connection that they did not really understand. It was as if they were directly connected to each other's mind when Lothra was mounted. So, when Veilcrath had chosen her first target, a bright red adult dragon straight ahead and a bit above them, Lothra immediately focused on it as well.

Her friend rushed forward, claws ready to rake, and aimed for the red dragon's belly. Either that dragon was the slowest of the bunch, or he was surprised by the attack, as he did not avoid the attack to his weakest point. Lothra felt Veilcrath's claws sink into the soft skin and tear from front to back. Blood flowed and the dragon roared in agony. Lothra watched as it spun in a spiral toward the ground and crashed hard into the city's park.

Veilcrath immediately flipped herself vertical and launched up into the sky. She then curved right back around and fell like a comet onto another dragon, this one a smaller blue beast. Once on top of her opponent, she tore at the scales protecting its body.

While Veilcrath was fast, one of the fastest dragons in the world, she was not strong. It was easy to tell as all she really did was start bearing the dragon to the ground and pull out a relatively few scales. The dragon roared out a cry of help, and Veilcrath soon found herself being flung off of the blue beast.

Dragon and rider tumbled end over end while Veilcrath struggled to stabilize themselves. When she did, they were immediately faced with two dragons barreling toward them. Veilcrath leaned into a left spiraling dive and then flattened herself again. Lothra looked behind them and confirmed that the two dragons were now chasing them. They mirrored Veilcrath as they descended as well, and they were joined by three more dragons.

Cursing, Lothra unsheathed her two blades and started calculating numbers in her head. Veilcrath noticed her line of thought and said, "Get ready."

She then ascended as sharply and swiftly as she could. Lothra kept her eyes behind her and watched as the dragons followed as best as they could. They could not match Veilcrath's maneuverability, but they made up for it with creative determination. Within seconds, they were right back on Veilcrath's tail.

Without needing to warn her friend, Lothra unclenched herself from the dragon's neck and let gravity decide her course. She fell down and flipped herself in the air.

This was going to be tough. She had to be precise. There were numerous chances to get this right, but if she missed all of them, only the ground awaited her.

Within seconds of her descent, she was faced with the scaly back of the dragon in front of the chase. Lothra took in a breath to calm herself, flipped one of her blades backhanded, and thrust forward.

Normally, the blade would have bounced right off. Dragon scales were thick as well as durable. Regular steel and iron do not have the power to cut through that material. It was why Dragonlords, a group she used to belong to, used Dragonscale to make their armor. Dragon scales were the ultimate armor making material.

Yet, what she held in her hands were not normal blades. They have been enhanced with a special oil and spell that only Dragonlords knew how to make. And when the blade touched the scales of the dragon in front of her, the scales parted as if she was cutting paper.

The dragon roared in pain.

Momentum caused her to slide down the dragon's back until she finally stopped herself about halfway down. She slowly worked her way back up to the dragon's neck, and while she did, the beast broke from the rest and started working to fling her off. It tried to spin her off by spiraling down to earth, it flew upside down to try and let gravity do the work, and it tried to get the other dragons to get her off. Each time a dragon tried to grab her or attack her, Lothra used her other blade to fend them off. The pain that the oil caused prevented them from getting a good grasp.

She finally made it to the neck, near the dragon's jaw after ten minutes of climbing and fighting for her life. Using her blades, she planted herself so she would not fall off after what she was about to do. Once she was confident that she would be relatively safe, she lifted one of her blades up, and slammed it into the jaw of the dragon. It roared and the movement of its mouth threatened to fling her off, but she was planted in tight and would not let go easily. She then concentrated on the blade and sent energy through it. When ready, she unleashed the concentrated energy into a lance of arcane power that stabbed through the dragon's mouth and into its brain.

The dragon's roar gradually grew quiet as its life faded and it started falling toward the ground. Lothra pulled the blade out, sheathed it, and sent out another red comet-like flare. Within seconds, Veilcrath was under the falling dragon, and Lothra pulled out her other blade. She fell, flipped in the air, and landed hard on her friend's neck.

She turned around and found that the chase was still on. There were two dragons less, not counting the one that she just killed, but the ones that were still alive added two more to the mix and they all kept coming.

"I can't do that again." Lothra panted, "That took more work than I thought it would."

"Don't worry." Veilcrath said, "The city's guards are helping."

As if to confirm her statement, she curved around and aimed straight for the city. She then flattened out above the city and flew by. Lothra

heard the sound of ballista and magic cannons firing behind them, and turned to see that two more dragons started falling from the sky with wounds caused by the siege weapons.

Veilcrath curved in a u-shape to pass over the city again. This time, though, the chasing dragons continued on their way over the city and to the other side. They then circled outside of the siege weapon's effective range and returned to fight Veilcrath.

As they shot right back toward her, Lothra's friend opened her jaws wide and let loose with a powerful spray of golden fire. The enhancements the Dragonlords made during her hatching intermingled with the fire in a dark blue mist. The blast engulfed the group of dragons and halted their progress. Multiple roars of anger rose up from the group. They were not damaged significantly yet this gave the guards on the walls of Valia a chance to aim their weapons to maximize their accuracy, despite their range, and open fire.

More than half of the arrows and arcane blasts missed their mark completely. Another quarter of the shots only grazed the massive beasts. But the few shots that did hit managed to hit hard. Two of the four dragons engaged with Veilcrath fell to the earth and a third staggered but remained in flight. Veilcrath, using Lothra's interpretation of the shot's effect, closed her jaws and lanced forward toward the injured dragon. Still recovering from the fire, the dragon had not a prayer of survival as Veilcrath spiraled under the dragon, so her claws faced the creature's belly and raked at the soft flesh. Roars of anger turned to death breaths as the dragon fell to the ground.

Veilcrath immediately shot forward to avoid an attack from the fourth dragon. Lothra's leg flashed in pain as her connection with her friend sensed the claws ripping into Veilcrath's flank. This time, it was her friend that roared in agony, yet she kept flying. She curved up into the air, flipped around, and dived down upon the dragon. Lothra jerked around as her friend landed on and bit down upon the dragon's neck.

Their opponent flipped out of her grip and launched forward. Veilcrath struggled to right herself but could not do it before their opponent crashed into them and bore them toward the ground at a suicidal rate.

The pair only had seconds to let go or else they would crash into the ground. Veilcrath spiraled around, allowing their opponent's claws to sink into scales and flesh, and practically tossed the dragon into the ground.

Veilcrath struggled to right herself and barely managed to before she landed running then stumbling to her side. Lothra felt every wound and the exhaustion on Veilcrath. She jumped off of her friend when the dragon fell to her side and patted her head. Looking up, she could see that the remaining dragons, who were watching the fight the whole time, turned around and flew off.

"Damnit." She muttered, "I knew they had lost their way. But to attack cities? What is going on?"

Horse hooves pounded. Lothra turned around and found six mounted guards riding to her. The lead rider, obviously the guard captain, dismounted, "Greetings, Dragonlord."

She bowed to him, "I am Dragonlord no more."

He quirked an eyebrow at her, "Really?" He shrugged, "No matter. We have you to thank for defending our capital."

"Yes," she said as she started healing Veilcrath with golden-runed hands, "but I am afraid the fight is not done yet."

"What do you mean?"

"Dragons do not normally retreat." She said, "They are aggressive beasts. When they fight, they fight to the bitter end. And they also do not strategize by focusing on the one person that has a great chance of killing them."

"Why have they done so then?"

She sighed in relief as she felt the injuries in Veilcrath start to fade, "They are being led. By a Dragonlord."

The guard captain froze while his men and women behind him started muttering to themselves. Lothra used the moment of non-distraction to continue her work. The golden light from her hands flowed in lines

along Veilcrath's scales. They shot towards each wound on her body and the wounds started closing as if on their own.

"A Dragonlord leads them?" The guard captain finally sputtered, "Why?"

Lothra shook her head, "I do not know. I feared corruption among the group. That is why I left. But I did not think that it would go this far."

"What do we do about this?" He asked in a stunned voice.

"For now?" She said as she finished what she could, "Defend the capital. We can ask questions later."

"They will be back?"

"I am sure of it. No matter what their end goal is they will be back. At this point, they cannot allow failure."

"We must return to the capital then." He turned to his guards and started rambling off orders. Lothra was surprised. Despite the fact that he had just led the defense against one of the most nightmarish foes of humans, he was calm and collected. His men all saluted and rode off toward the barely open gate of Valia.

When they were out of earshot, the guard captain returned his gaze toward Lothra, "As of right now, you have everything the capital has to help you fight off the attack. What do you need?"

She blinked at him, "You trust me?"

"You have shown that you have the interest of Valia in mind. You've risked your life, and the life of your dragon, to defend us. I have no doubt that you are what we need to survive."

She nodded, "Alright. Well, first and foremost, I need food and drink for both of us. That fight exhausted us."

The man nodded, "I'll have some brought out to you. What else?"

"I do not know what defenses you have, but anything you can use to help immobilize dragons would be a great benefit. Also, be prepared for dragons to attack the city rather than us. If I am right and a

Dragonlord is indeed at the head of this attack, then they may try to use the city against me or just attack to get what they want.”

“We have artificer shields, but they will not hold back an attack for long. We have to use it as a last resort.”

“Do not be afraid to throw it up. Especially if we fall.”

“Alright. We will go prepare. Good luck to you.”

IV

Two hours later, Lothra found herself sitting down on the ground. Her back leaned against Veilcrath's neck which was wrapped around her as if protecting her. The dragon was asleep, her head near the stretcher of raw meat. Lothra had a long forgotten tray of soldier's rations next to her as well, and she sipped at the second mug of water.

During their meal and afterward, she had been thinking about the dragon attack. Mainly, why was it happening? When she was exiled from the Dragonlord faction, the Dragonmaster was speaking of being the ultimate power of the world. That he would prove it. In fact, that was the last line he said to her before he literally threw her off of the floating city of Drakya. She would have died if it was not for Veilcrath's quick thinking.

Was this a statement then? A statement saying that the Dragonlords would become the rulers of the world? It would be potent, especially since they started with the strongest nation. If they managed to take Valia, then it would only be a matter of time before the other nations either surrendered or were destroyed. Survivors would be running for the hills and most likely would be hunted down. The only hope they would have would be a resistance force within the Dragonlord faction.

Unfortunately, that was not likely to happen. The Dragonmaster commanded great fear among the faction he ruled. Lothra was the only one that dared to speak out against the Dragonmaster and he showed what would happen to others like her very clearly. Either the Dragonmaster was killed here or war will begin all across the face of Ives. Nations against Dragonlord. Dragonlord against Dragonlord. And if Valia survived the battle not only would they be the main leader in the war but Lothra would be pulled in as well. Maybe even become the commander of the whole fighting force.

She was not sure how to think about that. Of course, she did not want war to clash and she certainly did not want to be at the forefront of it. Yet,

the idea of finally being able to fight against the Dragonmaster after years of trying to bring him down was pleasure on a different level. Which really scared her. She wanted to bring the man down. Not become him along the way. The emotions would not be ignored though.

Lothra sighed. This must have been the temptation she was warned about when she was initiated into the Dragonlords. They said that the connection between her and her dragon would change her personality. She would become more like the dragons and her partner would in turn become more human. That would bring in more of the aggressive bloodlust and primal nature of the dragons into her.

Veilcrath seemed to sense Lothra's confusion and unease. She pulled her head closer to the woman and looked at her with a green eye.

"You are troubled."

Lothra smirked, "No kidding."

"The upcoming fight frightens you."

Lothra gave the dragon's eye a narrowed eye glance, "Yes. Obviously."

Veilcrath chuckled quietly. Which meant that the ground around them only vibrated instead of becoming an earthquake.

The narrow eyed glance narrowed even further, "You're laughing at me."

"Humans have always been amusing. You especially."

The woman's expression went confused and she tilted her head, "What?"

"You worry about the future, yet you will just keep moving on anyway. So why worry?"

"Because I want to make sure I understand what may happen." Lothra said, "And I want to make sure I don't ruin myself while I face it."

Veilcrath chuckled again, "Exactly. You think you can change the inevitable. Why worry about something that cannot be changed?"

Lothra shrugged, "Because worrying about it is inevitable?"

Veilcrath hesitated, then laughed, "Sure."

Lothra smiled as she returned her glance to the setting sky. On the horizon she could see dozens upon dozens of shapes. At that distance, they would be on the city in another hour.

She rose to her feet, stretched with her arms straight above her, and patted the dragon's neck. The beast stood up and stretched her neck. She then lowered said neck to allow Lothra to mount. The woman did, and they slowly ascended.

"They are not going to come from just one direction." Lothra said, "Be prepared for flankers."

Veilcrath snorted, "You just make sure not to try and ride the others."

"Hey," Lothra said with a grin, "you let me do that!"

"Don't make me fling you off."

Lothra laughed, "Well. Let's go."

V

The next hour was full of waiting for the pair. Below them, the guards were rushing back and forth preparing the siege weapons and getting ammo ready. Even from their altitude, Lothra could hear their yelling. At the ten minute mark, though, everyone fell silent. The only sounds around them at that point were just the flapping of Veilcrath's wings.

When the dragons arrived, instead of immediately attacking, they just floated outside of the siege weapon's range. The lead dragon, a very dark red one, inched closer to Lothra and Veilcrath. The woman recognized the man on top of the dragon, even without being able to look at him.

The Dragonmaster wanted to talk.

Veilcrath seemed to hesitate. She was not sure if she should meet with the man. Lothra was not sure either. Yet, she directed the dragon to do so and they ended up being about thirty feet away from each other. When the man spoke, his voice was loud enough to reach Lothra.

"It's you."

"Yes." Lothra said, "Do you think you really killed me?"

"I had hoped. But, that problem will be fixed soon enough."

"You wanted to talk. So talk." Lothra growled.

"Stand aside." He said, "And convince the city to surrender."

Lothra blinked at him, "Why? You just threatened to kill me, yet you are giving me a chance at mercy?"

"I don't do it for you." He said, "I would kill you anyway. But the sooner I control the city, the sooner I can move on. And the less I kill, the more I have to use."

"What makes you think I would want to help you?"

“You would be saving many lives that would die otherwise.”

She laughed, “No. I won’t help you. After what you did to me I want to see you with a blade through your gut.”

He attacked without warning. His dragon, Ralcrath, flattened out and charged forward. Veilcrath expected it, though, and directed herself at an angle so she would be right under Ralcrath. Without room to spin around she instead kept moving and clamped her jaws on the neck of another dragon. The dragon’s rider yelled as they were flung off by the force and sent tumbling to the ground. Veilcrath then twisted around, pulling the dragon with her, and flung her victim at the Dragonmaster.

Ralcrath curved vertically upward and back around to fly toward Veilcrath. The thrown dragon missed and descended upon the city. It managed to right itself quickly, but not before ballista and cannon blasts shot toward it and crashed hard. With a cry of pain, the dragon fell to the earth.

Veilcrath dived down at a steep angle both dodging Ralcrath’s claws and the blasts of arcane, fire and ice from the other Dragonlords. She then flipped herself to the vertical and used her momentum to launch. Her head slammed into Ralcrath’s belly with enough force to push the dragon further into the air.

The red dragon shot forward, curved around and let loose with a breath of fire. Lothra grunted, called forth energy, and swung her glowing hand in an arc. Translucent energy appeared in a curve that covered Veilcrath’s head and neck completely. The fire collided with the curve and was deflected to the sides. Lothra knew what they were trying to do and Veilcrath responded to her thoughts. The dragon turned to face their opponent and when Ralcrath appeared behind the fire about ten feet away she was ready. She tilted her head away from Ralcrath’s bite and clamped down on its neck.

She recoiled and roared in agony.

Lothra felt the pain in her own mouth and it was as if her whole mouth was melting like ice in a fire. What the hell was that? Dragons were very resilient beasts. There was not much humans can do can really harm one

of them. Normal humans developed their artifices and ballista, which used pure power not seen anywhere else to pierce through dragons' scales with brute force. Dragons had the power to punch through without much issue, even the weaker ones like Veilcrath. Yet, there is only one thing that could get that kind of reaction from the beasts.

And the Dragonmaster somehow got the stuff all over Ralcrath's scales.

Veilcrath would not be able to touch the dragon without getting the same reaction every time. Which meant that it was going to be up to Lothra.

"Remember what you told me not to do?" She asked.

Veilcrath turned around and retreated from Ralcrath, "I understand."

She charged right for one of the other dragons, flipped around and clawed at their belly. As she did, another dragon came up and virtually did the same exact thing to Veilcrath. Lothra felt pain slice across her back in multiple sets of three lines.

She gritted her teeth and sent a lance of fire at the Dragonlord below her. He flinched out of the way, getting a line of burns on his cheek, and returned the favor with ice. The ice crashed against Veilcrath's scales and did nothing to harm her.

She managed to let go of the belly of the dragon above her, fling the dragon on her off, and fly away unsteadily. Two dragons tried to descend upon her but she let loose with blasts of fire that held them away long enough for her to get away.

Veilcrath then turned around and shot toward Ralcrath, who was just hovering in the air watching the fight. Three dragons intercepted her, though, and she had to fall in a spiraling descent before she ran into them. Blasts, lances and bolts of arcane, fire and ice flew across the sky toward Lothra. She flung out her hand to defend against the spells, but she was not fast enough. Fire licked against her shoulder, ice stabbed through her hand and arcane energy flowed through her body. Screams burst from her mouth and Veilcrath let out a growl of pain. Yet, the dragon flattened out parallel to the ground and then rose back up toward Ralcrath.

As if giving them a smirk, Ralcrath opened his jaws and sent a relative puff of fire toward them. Yet, if it hit Lothra, she would not be able to survive it. Veilcrath curved around it and was met with four more dragons who flew in her path.

She growled and, instead of flying away, shot forward toward the left-most dragon. Her target did not have much a chance before she opened her jaws, bit into the dragon's belly, and kept moving without losing her speed. As she did, Lothra shot out blasts of fire toward the other three Dragonlords. They all flinched away from the attacks, but the hesitation allowed Veilcrath to get away without being attacked herself.

Lothra's friend then circled around, grabbed a second dragon's neck, and shot toward the city. The dragon in her grip thrashed around and caused Veilcrath to stumble in the air but she managed to get close enough to throw the dragon in range of the siege weapons. As she circled back around to target Ralcrath, Lothra watched as the guards of Valia did not hesitate to fill the dragon with arrows and cannon shots.

The two remaining dragons that blocked the pair's path to Ralcrath shot toward Veilcrath. This time, however, the Dragonlords riding the two dragons leapt toward Veilcrath when they were close enough and used their weapons to latch onto the green dragon.

Veilcrath screamed in agony as the oil touched her flesh. Lothra snarled, stood on Veilcrath's back, and rushed for the two Dragonlords. They rose to their own feet and brandished their blades. Lothra pulled out her two blades and rushed forward.

One blade caught the left Dragonlord's weapon on its descent and her other weapon stabbed forward. Her opponent twisted to the side and her weapon only cut off a couple of the scales on his armor. The other Dragonlord slashed her back open. She growled, spun around, and sent her longsword into the Dragonlord's torso. Then, she twisted back around and slashed at the first Dragonlord's belly.

He arched back so Lothra's blade, once again, only cut off a few scales. Lothra had only a second to avoid his counter attack. She ducked under his weapon and thrust forward. Again, the Dragonlord managed to twist

aside and came in with a counter. The weapon cut into her own armor and left a thin line on her forearm. Growling, Lothra shoved the blade aside and slid into the Dragonlord's defenses. He tried to step away, but she grabbed onto his arm to keep him close and stabbed. Her blade sunk into the man's belly and she twisted it before pulling it back out.

Two roars of anger grabbed Lothra's attention and she looked to the side. The two dragons, now lord-less, angled themselves toward Veilcrath, who was holding back another dragon that apparently snuck up on her.

"Veilcrath!" Lothra yelled.

She felt the dragon key in on her thoughts. Veilcrath bashed into her opponent, stunning it for the precious second she needed to send herself up into the sky. The two dragons barreled after Veilcrath with the ferocity that only a dragon could match. She sent them through loops, sharp turns and fast descents, yet they just kept on her tail.

"Veilcrath!" Lothra said over the noise, "They might be angry enough to chase you over the city!"

Throughout the whole fight, Valia had been defending against the dragons that decided to completely ignore Lothra and Veilcrath. Looking at it, it was burning and most of the city was destroyed. Yet, three of the four walls were still intact and they somehow managed to get the weapons on top of the buildings that still stood and used those. The three dragons that still lived and were attacking the city had to divide their attention between the walls and the inner city, who now had the same amount of firepower.

Veilcrath tilted around to face the besieged city and shot as fast as she could for it. Lothra was glad to see that the dragons did follow them. The wall to their left noticed their descent onto the city and aimed their weapons. As she passed over the city, Veilcrath opened her jaws and let loose with her fire breath at every dragon she could see. One of them was right in her path, and when she stunned it with her breath, she flew under the dragon and Lothra cut open its belly with both blades.

Behind them, Lothra could hear the two angry dragons cry out in pain. She looked to see the dragons start nose diving toward the city in death. The dragon she just killed did the same and all three crashed into what

looked like the throne room of the castle. The other two dragons tried to escape from the siege weapons' range, but they were not quick enough. They fell to their deaths outside of the city.

Veilcrath turned back around to face Ralcrath and the rest of the attacking force. They were not moving. The four dragons and Dragonlords that remained of the attack force hovered in the air watching the pair. Siege weapons tried to hit them, but they were just out of range.

With the brief respite that they were giving everyone, Lothra could feel the exhaustion and pain start creeping up on her. She was not sure, but she imagined that they had been fighting non-stop for about half an hour. Which did not seem like much, but when the scale of fighting was taken all the way up to the level of dragons, it was easy to see that everyone was starting to become ragged.

"We have to finish this." Lothra said.

"Yes. But how will we attack Ralcrath?" Veilcrath asked, "With the dragon bane oil on him, I will not be able to attack."

"In order for the Dragonmaster to put it on Ralcrath, then it must be a slightly different mixture than normal. Which means that I should still be able to punch through it with my blades. Make passes and I will attack. You have to keep moving or else we will be pinned down by the remaining Dragonlords."

Veilcrath snorted in anticipation, "Alright. Let's go."

With that, she flattened herself down and flashed toward the group of attackers. She angled herself slightly below Ralcrath and Lothra prepared her blades. Ralcrath roared and shot toward Veilcrath as well. The green dragon had to adjust herself, but when they met, Lothra was able to thrust her blades up. They connected, yet Ralcrath managed to angle himself in time to only get a relative scratch instead of a lethal gash.

Veilcrath curved upward, looped around and came down into a steep dive upon Ralcrath. He saw this coming, and fell at a slight angle and to the left before ascending again. When he was slightly above Veilcrath, he

turned sharply and shot toward her. Veilcrath was about to fly away, but Lothra yelled, "Don't!"

Ralcrath slammed into them.

And his neck was right where Lothra wanted it.

She ignored the sudden pain that flared in her belly and stabbed both blades down. They both sank to the hilt and the dragon roared in agony. Lothra then twisted the blades and started pulling them to the side. It would have flown away from the pair, but Veilcrath held the beast in place so Lothra could finish cutting out a section of its neck.

It went limp.

But not before clawing at Veilcrath one last time.

Fresh pain flashed in Lothra's chest and belly. And then her stomach fluttered as both dragons fell from the sky. She could tell that Veilcrath was trying to control her fast descent but she was too weak. The beasts crashed into the ground and Lothra was flung off. She slammed into the ground and then tumbled end over end until momentum finally let her slide to a stop.

Blearily she looked up and saw two massive forms intertwined with each other. Lothra tried to rise, to rush to Veilcrath. She had to heal her friend before she died. Yet, something grabbed the back of her armor and tossed her away.

She flew through the air then crashed back into the ground. Groaning, Lothra tried to sit up but a hand grabbed her neck and lifted her up. The grip tightened more and more on her windpipe and she choked out a breath.

"You." The Dragonmaster growled. He was angry. More than that, he was furious. Lothra could hear it in his voice.

"You got in my way again! You have ruined my plans again!" Using the grip on her neck, he slammed her back onto the ground twice. He then lifted her back up and punched her gut.

She was blacking out. If she did not do something, she would go unconscious. Which, in this case, is the same thing as death. So, she pulled

her hand back and thrust her two fingers forward. They stabbed into the man's eyes and he immediately dropped her.

Lothra coughed and panted heavily as she was finally able to take in air. Looking up, she could see that the Dragonmaster was stumbling back holding hands up to his bleeding eyes. She struggled to her feet, a difficult thing to do under the circumstances, and tried to find her blades.

"Bitch!" He yelled, "You bitch! I will kill you!"

He drew the large great sword at his back and charged forward. Lothra ducked under his first attack, sidestepped the next and pushed herself forward. She was trying to knock him down, but he held his ground. The pommel of his greatsword crashed against her back and she fell. Without hesitation, she rolled to the side and heard the sword hit where she was only seconds before.

She got to her feet and took a few steps back to get away from the blade's reach. The Dragonlord's eyes were bleeding and red beyond repair, yet they still tracked her movements. He could still see her.

And as if to prove that point, he rushed at her again and thrust his blade toward her chest. Lothra twisted to the side and sent a punch at his face. Her fist connected and the Dragonmaster stumbled backward.

At this point, they were both panting heavily. She was nearing the limit of her energy, and she could tell that the Dragonmaster was as well. But he still came at her.

Downward slash, thrust, slash, slash, uppercut. He was relentless in his assault. Lothra had no opportunity to counter as she had to concentrate on avoidance. All she needed was just one moment of hesitation. If she could manage that, then she could work on ending this fight.

Thankfully, that moment came relatively quickly.

As the Dragonmaster thrust forward, he twisted his ankle wrong and he stumbled. Lothra dodged the thrust, kicked his blade away, and slammed her fist into his nose. She felt blood on her fist, but she did not hesitate before she grabbed the back of his head and thrust it into the ground.

Her hand wrapped around the handle of the greatsword and before she could think about it, she stabbed it into the Dragonlord's heart.

He let out a blood filled gasp, "Ha. You did it. But what about the aftermath?"

He fell limp.

Lothra, panting heavily, stared at what she had done for a few seconds. She killed him. Finally, she had stopped his power hungry actions. Yet, she felt nothing but exhausted.

She slowly rose to her feet and stumbled her way toward Veilcrath. The dragon was laying down on her side, and Lothra could see that the beast was still breathing. She tripped and managed to fall against Veilcrath.

And closed her eyes.