

# THE DRAGON'S NIGHT 2ND CHRONICLES OF ARIANTHEM I

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# Chapter 1

The Queen awoke, enveloped in the warmth of the two women entangled in bed with her. Her First General was sleeping soundly on her back, her handsome features relaxed, the fine lines about her eyes barely visible in slumber. Her High Priestess was on her side curled about the General, a shapely white leg flung across her lower body, full breasts pressed against the muscles of her arm.

Halla gazed at the two with love and affection, gently extricating herself from her lovers. Only Gimle was missing, the First Scholar likely lost in some experiments that would end with her in bed with the many lab assistants who revered her for her mind as well as her more physical attributes.

The Queen arose from the bed and pulled on a silk robe, quiet lest she disturb the sleeping women. Senta stirred, the warrior in her alert even in sleep, but she did not sense danger and settled once more. Astrid, the priestess in her alert to the slightest discomfort, pulled the General close.

Raindrops began a gentle pitter-patter on the terrace outside as Halla moved to the stained-glass doors. It was dark, and the rain made it more so, dowsing the many torches on the terrace that were uncovered. She pushed through the doors and stood beneath the overhang that protected her from the rain, gazing out at her kingdom.

Three years of absolute peace. Three years in which the Ha'kan had strengthened their ties with both the Empire and the Alfar, allowing the adjacent kingdoms free and unrestricted access to the trade routes they had

acquired by defeating the Garmlain. Three years in which they had bonded with the Dverger, giving the dwarves access to the land beneath the Ha'kan territory in exchange for a percentage of the minerals they so effortlessly acquired. Three years in which her people had grown strong and happy, a record number of births occurring in a people for whom pregnancy was a rare and momentous event.

Torches continued to wink out over Haldis, the capital settling into a darkness broken only by the few torches that were shielded from the rain. Halla smiled, for the Scholar's wing was the only bright spot in the darkness, lit by fires magical in nature that were immune to water. The Ha'kan were not good with magic, but Gimle was a rare exception and she passed her learning on to all who showed the slightest inclination towards the arcane arts.

The front gate, far in the distance, was also well-lit. The pitch that kept those fires burning would fade in a deluge, but nothing less. She could make out the small figures that paced the walls, guarding the capital, grateful for her fearless warriors.

The rain fell softly and Halla's gaze swept the city. She marveled at the pairings that were occurring. The Ha'kan, all-female, were bound together by a sexual energy that astonished other races. Non-monogamous, reproduction by parthenogenesis, the Ha'kan had a caste devoted entirely to sexual pleasure and development, and skill in that forum was as admired and requisite as any other.

The rain increased in intensity, and the lightning and thunder were not as far apart as they were minutes before, the lightning brighter and the thunder louder. The bright flash illuminated the otherwise dark courtyard.

Halla frowned. In that brief illumination, she could have sworn there was a dark figure making its way across the blackened courtyard, one that disappeared as quickly as it had appeared. But that was impossible. There were guards at the gate, and the Royal Guard protected the castle and the three wings bordering it. No one could slip past the elite of the Ha'kan forces.

Still, Halla ventured out into the rain, leaning over the marble wall to peer down into the darkness. Perhaps it was the drop in atmospheric pressure that accompanied every storm, perhaps the electricity that accompanied every bolt of lightning, perhaps the tremble that accompanied every

crack of thunder, but the hair on the back of her neck stood on end. She ignored the rain that drenched her long hair, unaware of the rain that ran in rivulets down her back, oblivious to the water that soaked her robe and made it cling to every curve of her body.

The lightning split the sky again, and the thunder followed in an instant. In that moment, Halla again saw the figure, closer to the castle and approaching the stairs that led to her terrace. She felt a finger of fear trace its cold path along her spine, and began backing to the overhang once more, cracking the stained-glass door.

“Senta,” she whispered.

In an instant, the First General sat up in bed, crouched, and bounded toward her Queen, every muscle bunched in preparation for battle. The High Priestess also rolled in a graceful movement that left her standing, albeit behind her First General. All Ha’kan were trained to fight, regardless of caste.

“Someone is coming up the stairs.”

Senta’s sword was already in her hand, for the warriors of the Ha’kan were nearly unmatched in battle, and the First General without equal in their ranks. She understood Halla’s words; someone was coming up the stairs, unknown, unnoticed and unchallenged. She took a position slightly ahead of Halla, protective of her Queen, sword at the ready position.

Astrid moved next to Halla, ready to whisk her away at the first sign of danger. All three women waited silently, the steady drumming of the rain as unrelenting as an elevated heartbeat. The darkness was complete, all torches on the terrace having succumbed to the steady stream from the sky.

Halla could hear her own breathing. It seemed louder than the rain, which did not seem possible. Senta was utterly calm, but the tension in her body betrayed her state of mind. And Astrid’s possessive clutch on her arm revealed her thoughts as well. All stared at the stairwell.

The lightning flashed, and as when she was a child, Halla began to count to measure the distance of the bolt, but there was not even a second between the lightning and the thunder, because the storm was fully upon them. As was the figure who was fully illuminated at the top of the stairs, a black outline against the momentary nova of the sky. Senta’s sword raised and hovered in the ready position.

And then welcome laughter drifted on that unwelcome wind. It

was low and sensual, full of dark humor and possessing a familiarity that soothed all.

“You can stand down, First General.”

The tone was mocking, but Senta lowered her sword. She knew this one. And experience held that a sword would do no good against the creature who stood before them. Nor was she an enemy.

“Idonea!” Halla exclaimed.

Once under the protection of the overhang, the dark figure became slightly illuminated, and the hood lowered as if by magic. The laughing dark eyes of the most powerful mage in Arianthem were revealed.

“It’s been a very long trip, and I seek sanctuary with the Ha’kan.”

Her words were curious, but the Queen would answer in only one way.

“You’re always welcome here.”

“That’s good,” Idonea replied, “because I bear an enormous weight of enormous value.”

This gave all three of the Ha’kan pause as they gazed at whatever burden Idonea bore, for she carried something beneath her dripping robe, something in each arm.

“Whatever it is, the Ha’kan are at your service.”

Idonea sighed. “Well, then...”

And as before, as if by magic, her cloak was retracted, and her burden revealed. She held a child, in each arm, little more than an infant. Both were sleeping contentedly, oblivious to the storm and all that stared enraptured.

“You have children?” Halla exclaimed.

“Not exactly,” Idonea said, gazing down at the two with a combination of adoration and exasperation.

One of the little ones stirred, her dark eyes opening to only her twin. She reached out with a tiny fist and grasped her sister, tugging her into wakefulness. The sibling awoke with a protest, lighter eyes opening to gaze upon her other half. And in that instant, both pairs of eyes turned to a beautiful shade of lavender as the twins gazed upon one another.

“By the gods,” Halla whispered.

“Yes,” Idonea said drily, “that is pretty much how it happened.”

## Chapter 2

TWO YEARS EARLIER...

The fiery red dragon circled the mountain-top leisurely, using the updrafts to maneuver into position to enter her cave. Sunlight glinted on the dark red scales, giving off an iridescent yellow glow that did indeed make the enormous creature look as if she were on fire. She glided so skillfully along the thermal winds that a single dip of one wing wheeled her about to a straight-line approach to the entrance in the side of the mountain. The wings, each one larger than the sail of a ship, tilted back to slow her approach so that she landed gracefully upon the ledge. The fearsome creature dropped the buck she held in her jaws, the prey still dripping blood but mercifully killed in her first diving strike. This was not for her; she had eaten while hunting. This was for her mate.

This brought a smile to the dragon which revealed rows of sharpened teeth. The fangs disappeared in a brilliant flash of yellow light, as did the rest of the dragon, and when the light faded, a woman appeared who was only slightly less imposing than the dragon. Tall, long-limbed, silver-haired, she was elegant and regal, lovely and terrifying. Her armor fit her like it was part of her, for indeed it was, the miniature scales the same color and shape as her dragon plating. When she moved, the scales shifted and curved about her sinewy body, casting the same iridescent, fiery rainbows.

She stepped over the bones of numerous animals, reminding herself she should do some housekeeping later and push those off the ledge.

The glow of a warm fire pit drew her, not for its heat, for she could generate that heat on her own, but for what it contained.

Two large eggs lay amongst the embers, warmed by the layer of hot rocks and carefully positioned sand. They were enormous compared to the eggs of normal fowl, nearly half the height of a man. The amber eyes of the dragon gazed on them proudly, for they were large even for dragon eggs. And when those eyes settled on the woman who also lay amongst the embers, oblivious to the heat and potential for burns, both love and desire was evident in the golden depths. The dragon gazed at the scene for a moment, enraptured with her two unborn children and the love who had given them to her.

The woman in the bed stirred, and the dragon plating beneath her which kept her from burns, shifted. The dragon watched, concerned, to see if the sleeping figure would sustain any injury, but months of practice had taken hold and the woman merely rolled over onto her side to maintain her safe position, never awakening. This gave the dragon a very nice view of the muscular back and intricate blue and gold markings that wove themselves across the skin, up the shoulders, and then down the arms. They were not tattoos, but rather decorative scars of a warrior race that no longer existed. One strong arm wrapped around one egg and a leg hooked gently around the other, holding them both as close as possible.

Weynild settled in behind her young lover, who was young only in appearance. Well over three hundred years old, she was still young to Weynild, who was well over a thousand. Raine stirred again and smiled in her sleep, pressing up against the lithe body that pressed up against her.

“And how was hunting?” Raine murmured.

“I brought you some venison, since you refuse to leave the eggs.”

“You have had children,” Raine reminded her. “These are my first.”

“Hmm,” Weynild said, blowing warm air over Raine’s skin, an extremely pleasant sensation.

Yes, Weynild thought, she had children, amazing children. Her daughter, Idonea, born from a fling with a human male, an offspring who was not a dragon, but a mage so powerful her gifts were still being discovered. And her son, Drakar, born from a coupling with another Ancient Dragon, the youngster already coming into his own in the dragon hierarchy.

But these two, she thought, musing at the eggs as she ran her hands through Raine's hair, these two were going to be something else. As a gift, the Allfather had turned Raine into a dragon for a day and a night, a male dragon, so that the two of them could mate. And she had delivered not just one, but two eggs, which was almost unheard of amongst dragonkind. Her gestation period had been remarkably short, so the fact that she had delivered two eggs had been even more astonishing.

These two would be dragons, that much was clear. But they would also be Scinterian, the greatest warriors ever known in Arianthem, for Raine, when she was not a dragon, was the impossible offspring of two diametrically different races. The Scinterians were violent, brilliant combatants, living to fight and fighting to live. They had saved Arianthem during the Great War but had suffered such losses their race could not recover and died out.

Raine was also Arlanian, a heritage she often considered more a curse than a gift. The Arlanians were a gentle, extraordinarily beautiful race that was so sexually desirable they were raped into extinction when discovered by the peoples of Arianthem. Neither male nor female until adulthood, they possessed violet eyes for which wars were fought and kingdoms were sacrificed. Her children would also be Arlanian, for as Raine so aptly put it, there were no "half-Arlanians" or "half-Scinterians." Raine was both fully Scinterian and fully Arlanian, an impossibility that now her children would share.

The warm breath reached the sensitive ear canal and had the desired effect. Raine rolled over to face her lover, naked save for the intricate markings snaking over her torso. Her eyes were a dark lavender, a color she hid when around others. But she could not hide them when looking at Weynild, for deep emotion revealed them, and she loved no one more than her dragon.

"Is this really appropriate?" Raine said, teasing. "In front of the children?"

"They are dragons," Weynild said drily. "They will be born understanding this."

Raine laughed, for that was true. The lust of the dragons was legendary, and really, Weynild's lust was beyond legend. It was only her great love for her Arlanian Scinterian that kept her faithful, not because Raine



demanded it, but because Weynild wanted no other.

“Besides,” Weynild said, kissing Raine on the neck, “you know, amongst the Ha’kan, bonds are created with the unborn child when having sex with the mother during pregnancy. The degree of sexual intensity between the mother and her partners determines the strength of the bond between the partners and child once the child is born.”

Raine rolled on top of Weynild, playfully pinning the dragon, although really, that was impossible given that Weynild possessed all her strength regardless of form. “If that’s true with us,” Raine said, bending down to lightly kiss her love, then kissing her more deeply.

“Then these children will be more mine than yours.”

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