

# ***KURO: A Dragon Lord's Son***

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## **Chapter 5: Dragon**

"I think I've been here long enough," Jathir announced with a smirk. I immediately found a heavy set of claws scratching behind my head, the kind of action a parent or mentor gave when they were showing pride.

"Jathir! Show some respect for your elders for once!" roared Ifrit, his left eye twitching as he grit his teeth in irritation. "What happened to that whelping who wouldn't stop pestering us until we permitted him to attend these meetings?"

"But they're soooooo boring~" my father whined childishly. "I had no idea you lot spent days licking the feet of those who gave you your Blessings back then. Maybe if you invited the rest of the Octonary to these things it would be more fun..."

"We hold enough gatherings with all of us as is, Jathir," Levia interjected. "THESE gatherings have been preordained since before you were conceived. Our Lords require them of us. We discuss matters that precede anything involving the others."

"The only reason you're tolerated is because of your multiple Blessings," Ifrit begrudgingly admitted. "We can layer as many safeguards as we want and you will still find a way here."

"And if you're leaving, you should remember this," Levia added, showing slight irritation toward Ifrit's interruption. "I mean this as a warning, not a threat... You may have multiple Blessings, but your son is under no such protection. Keep that in mind before you enact your plan."

Jathir glanced back at her, but did not respond. That was something he had considered, but not something he felt concerned about.

"If you are going to insist on leaving us so soon, then there is something I must ask you," Caerein declared, shooting Jathir an inquisitive glare. Jathir raised a brow in response. "In the pursuit of a child of your own, did you or did you not do something unsavory on the pain of Lord Sirrus' wrath?"

Jathir heaved a heavy sigh. "I give you my word as a dragon. I, Jathir, did not do anything to force any females to mate with me outside of their own volition. If I am lying, may all my Blessings be stripped from me right now."

His answer seemed to satisfy Caerein. In her mind, not even my father would say such a thing if he did not mean it. Ifrit, however, just had to speak out against him. "Bah. Your word as a DRAGON is meaningless."

I didn't even have time to blink. Ifrit had not even closed his mouth before he found Jathir's claws wrapped around his throat, digging into his scales as if preparing to rip out his windpipe. They were deep enough that the fibers of the throat muscles were visible through the scales. Caerein's antlers were lit up in a green light and Levia had coiled her tail around Jathir's waist. Genbu had not moved one bit.

"Enough, Jathir!" Caerein screamed as Ifrit sputtered out a gasp.

"You too, Ifrit!" Levia chimed in. By the tones of their voice, it seemed like they

were actually on my father's side this time. Jathir's eyes burned with a hatred I had never seen from him before. Even at his angriest, he'd never lost sense of himself like this.

Jathir did not ease up, but he did not tighten his grip either. The others' words seemed to be getting through to him at least a little. Ifrit continued to struggle to breathe.

"Ifrit..." Genbu finally spoke with a low rumble. "Jathir is a dragon. We agreed on that 400 years ago under the verdict of all of our Lords. Your bad joke went too far."

Hearing Genbu speak praise of him brought Jathir down from his rage. He gently released Ifrit's neck from his grasp and lowered his head in admittance of his behavior. He knew Ifrit was only teasing him, but that was one joke that could set him off. Caerein and Levia stood down as Jathir backed off. Although they agreed with Jathir on this matter, they would sooner kill him than they would let Ifrit be killed by him.

Ifrit coughed and rubbed at his neck. "I'm sorry Jathir..." he said earnestly.

"Yeah..." was all my father said. He looked so down that I was left wondering why Ifrit's statement had set him off the way it did. Was it related to what he said about Drahart? Jathir did not speak another word to the dragons. He just reached down to pick up and took off down the mountain. He moved slow enough that I was able to catch a glimpse of Levia's tail slapping Ifrit across the face. Despite all the vulgarities he had spewed, the other Tetradrakes were far more ticked at Ifrit than they were of my father.

After we were out of view of the clouds, I turned to look at Jathir and called out to him. "Fa...ther..."

"I'm okay, Kuro," he replied to me in an emotionless facade. "It's nothing. Don't worry about it."

He was lying. I was fairly certain he knew that I knew that. I think he wanted me to remain silent and let him reflect on what had happened, but every fiber of my being told me to keep talking. Jathir put me through so much, but my residual instincts and my body's blood bond wanted me to cheer him any way I could.

"Gr--Not okay!" I exclaimed. "Father... down!"

That seemed to be what he needed to hear. A small smile returned to Jathir's face, but he was still feeling unlike himself. "So even my boy can tell that much, huh... Some dragon lord I am."

Jathir sighed loudly and slowed his pace.

"Listen, Kuro... I wanted to wait until you were older before telling you this, but if you're half the genius I keep saying you are, you'll probably figure it out on your own before then. So I might as well tell you now." Jathir looked around. Although we were high in the air and well out of earshot of any living thing, he still seemed paranoid about letting others hear him in a moment of weakness. "Kuro, I am sure you've noticed that we are not like the Tetradrakes. We aren't like other dragons. All dragons of the world have either scales, feathers, or a combination of both. But we have fur."

*So it's not related to Drahart!* I thought to myself in the middle of Jathir's explanation.

"It was about a thousand years ago that humans sought to domesticate dragonkind like they have horses and wolves," Jathir continued. "Domestication is different from a hatchling imprinting upon a human; they've always had that. It requires selective breeding. Dragons are wild, so even if you take one that's just hatched, there is no guarantee you'll be able to tame it."

His explanation only seemed to worsen his mood. There was a grumble behind

each of his words.

“Domestication takes way too long, though, especially when it comes to creatures like dragons who can go hundreds of years before they lay their first egg. So humans sought to speed it up with magic, using spells and fusing the embryos of the eggs with different creatures. It is through that process that we, Erdratz, artificial dragons, were created.

“Erdratz are plentiful now, but back then they were few in number. Over 400 years ago, I was hatched by my parent. I was supposed to be a human slave, but unlike my clutchmates, I was different. From the moment I hatched, I knew this was not how things were supposed to be. As soon as I could fly, I left that place. I burned everything I could to the ground and never looked back.

“I lived on my own. Fended for myself. Took what I wanted, when I wanted. As I sought to stake out my own territory, I encountered other dragons. To them I was an abomination, a fake dragon. They refused to acknowledge me, so I killed anyone who looked down on me. My tantrums must have impressed Jald, or maybe he just felt sorry for me, as he bestowed me with a normal Blessing after one of my outbursts. The Divine Tetradrakes took notice of that. Never before had a dragon been given a full Blessing so young, let alone a FAKE dragon like me! Ifrit was happy to point that out. I fought him back then, but I was young and foolish.

“Through my efforts to earn their acknowledgment, even The Tetrad could see that I was as much a dragon as any other.” Jathir's eyes fell upon me. “You are a dragon, Kuro. Never let anyone tell you otherwise!”

*So that was the reason for father's outburst, I realized.*

“Maybe I deserved it, but Ifrit of all dragons knows how I feel about comments like that,” Jathir mumbled with a slight sullen tone. He realized that he had not shown the elder dragons the respect they were rightly deserved, but at the same time there was a line that nobody, not even one of the Divine Tetradrakes, should dare cross now that he had the power to back it up.

“But that's enough moping for today, Kuro! Let's go home!” Jathir seemed to be in slightly better spirits after telling me about everything, even if it made him reflect on a difficult subject. He picked up the pace after he finished talking, taking off at a speed that perhaps even surpassed that of when we left this morning. I was once again buffeted by a force that stretched my face muscles back.

The next day was my usually scheduled combat training with Valka and her recruits. The heavy rain that came today did not dissuade her from sticking to her regime. Her training camp consisted mostly of kobolds, although there were several beastmen among them. There were even a few humans, but they seemed to be from our territory and among those that had pledged loyalty to my father. They were either soldiers that were being trained as a request to my father, or individuals with nowhere left to go who underwent her harsh training just for a chance at food and shelter.

Each individual was decked out in heavy iron armor, the heaviest they could reasonably wear. The pressure from millions of drops of water made the weight oppressive for many, but Valka was having none of it. Anyone who dared to complain was kicked out. To some, it was no big deal. To others, it would bring shame upon their

family or clan and possibly even Jathir's wrath.

"Get up!" she shouted as one kobold stumbled under the weight of his armor during a lap around the soaked open field several kilometers from the camp. The grassy field had turned to mud. While perhaps not a problem under normal circumstances, everyone was carrying so much weight that every footstep sank ankle deep. The kobold's tumble had taken out others behind them. From my spot in the back, it did not look pleasant.

"All of you who don't get up by the time I count to ten will be assigned 100 push-ups when we get back!" Valka exclaimed at the top of her lungs. Because we were all downwind from her, her voice carried firmly even in the downpour. The lack of any thunder or lightning meant her voice had less sound to compete against.

"And you, Kuro!" Her attention was on me now, giving those who had fallen a few extra seconds to try and get to their feet. "Wings up! Up in the air! Lord Jathir asked me to help you get your wings in shape!"

I didn't ask myself if she was serious. I knew the answer to that question. It was true that I had been given armor that was a bit lighter than what everyone else had to wear, but I thought that was because I was younger, not because the lizardman expected more from me.

My wings stretched out to their full length, but each flap strained them to try and carry me off the ground. I had only held myself up before, and I couldn't fly very far on my own. The added weight of the armor was like having a person riding on my back. It took every muscle in my wings and back to pick me up a few inches. The veins could be seen through my scales. *This is too much!* I told myself. If my dragon body was anything my old human body, this kind of strain was not good for it.

Valka stopped her run and looked in my direction. I wasn't running anymore, but the pained look across my face showed her just how hard I was trying. I had not told her that I could not do it, even I was thinking something along those lines. She sighed softly and stepped closer to me.

"It's my fault, Kuro," she lamented. I could hear her speaking as she approached. She never addressed me as "Lord" during training because she wanted things to feel more inclusive with all the others. "I keep forgetting that you're just a child. You might be Lord Jathir's son, but your muscles haven't matured. Your father might want me to overwork you, but you're not him. Not yet... You're a dragon, but you're still just a young dragon."

The weight on my head was lifted as Valka removed the helmet I had been forced to wear and tossed it into the mud next to her. Next came a belt around my waist and the boots uncomfortably distorting my feet.

"Now up, Kuro!" the lizardman instructed. Heeding her command, I pushed myself off the ground. Although it was only about a third of the weight my attire had added, I was already feeling so much lighter. Though still extremely heavy, I found myself able to hover a decent length off the ground.

"That's better. Now let's move!" Valka took off for another footrace, this time motioning for me to follow as closely behind her as possible. Knowing her kind leniency would have her regretting her decision if I did not keep up, I did my best to keep pace. More than once I had to stop to rest my wings, resulting in me running behind her, but I made certain that I was at least flying whenever I had the strength and energy left to do so.

Over half the day had passed by the time he made it back to camp. One look at everyone told you who was a new recruit and who was nearing their graduation to the main forces. From my time training under her regime, I had learned that Valka cycled people every one to three years, depending on the improvement they showed. She took them in at different rates, so it was not uncommon for her men to pair with individuals who had been there a year or two longer in the bunkhouse.

“All right, you ground crawlers! Undress yourselves and rest in the bunkhouse. Be ready for combat practice after I've decided you've napped enough!” Valka announced. The half-dead platoon was thankful for the reprieve. While nobody had eaten lunch yet, most were too tired to even think about food.

The bunkhouse was actually five rows of stone buildings designed like extremely long tents. Each housed between 50 and 100 soldiers-in-training. As such, once those heavy suits of armor came off, the smell of sweaty musk filled the entire hall. People in my world complained about the smell of a wet dog, but imagine being cramped in an airtight space with over 50 of them after rolling around in raw sewage when you had just finished a marathon. You could add burned flesh and fur to the mixture as several fires were started inside to warm up and dry off around. My point is, it was a good thing I hadn't eaten beforehand.

I never actually slept in the bunkhouse at night; my father would never allow my safety to be at risk. I would leave for training early in the morning after breakfast and return home for a late dinner when my dad or an escort came and got me. However, there was still a (larger) bed set aside just for me. Midday naps or a full daytime's in the event of night training were something I was allowed to do at Valka's training camp.

Given how exhausted and achy my body was, as soon as I'd dried my fur off, I set myself down on the bed prepared for me. I could have counted sheep to get to sleep, but I was so tired I don't think I would have managed to hit ten. By the time my eyes completely closed after my head hit the pillow, I was out.