

She didn't trust her traveling company, not for a moment. Ragnarok, The Lich, and Caelia had hailed from The Aether, and in the nobility Lyra hailed from, they had been taught to always keep an eye on Aether dragons. Her handler, Rigel, had decided to tag along, which only made her more on edge. It didn't help that this forest was like a labyrinth.

Several paths wove eerily through the night, like snakes waiting to strike. The shadows appeared to weave through the supposedly haunted forest, and the only things that lit the way were the mossy green mushrooms. The moon had been clouded over, and the canopy blotted any starlight that poked through the gray clouds.

Needless to say, Lyra followed behind the rest of the group, keeping a close eye on Ragnarok in particular. He seemed to lead The Lich and Caelia, who were nosing through the undergrowth and ignoring the tales of ravenous beasts that lurked here. She only cared about protecting Rigel from whatever lurked in the shadows...and from what was right in front of her.

Rigel leaped down from her back, scattering the leaves and making The Lich snap its head back. How did it do that? That was no ordinary dragon.

"You know, I can defend myself," Rigel muttered, trying not to be overheard by the trio in front.

Lyra didn't want to have this argument. Not again. **"This forest is haunted, and they're Aether dragons. No matter how much training you have, this is dangerous."**

Caelia, overhearing, snorted in amusement. **"I won't kill your precious human. Normally I would eat humans on the spot, but an outcast is barely human."**

Lyra snarled, but Rigel put a hand on her neck. **"Not worth it. Don't fight."**

There were more pressing concerns, anyway. She could feel something watching them, and it wasn't The Lich this time. But why didn't anyone else seem to notice? Ragnarok just carried on as if nothing was of any concern.

He could get himself killed with his arrogance.

Ragnarok seemed to notice her glaring at him. **"We are from The Aether. Anything haunted here pales in comparison to what we have seen. But royalty wouldn't know that."**

There was bitterness in his voice, but she had to bite back a retort. A whisper of wind and snapping of twigs stopped anything Lyra was about to say, and she swiveled around to make sure Rigel was still there. Curling her tail around him, she let out a low growl.

"You know, if we didn't have you and Caelia, we probably wouldn't be spotted so easily," Ragnarok grunted, and The Lich seemed to let out a strange cackle in agreement.

A pack of mange-ridden wolves stepped out from the darkness, their eyes hollow and blank. It was as if...something was possessing them.

"The work of a necromancer," Lyra muttered, and Ragnarok smiled at that.

"So you aren't a fool."

She was going to attack him as soon as they got out of this mess.

The Lich unfurled its wings, hissing at the wolves. Its glowing, white eyes seemed to dare them to attack, and they glanced over at the other two Aether dragons in trepidation.

Rigel had one hand on the sword at his side, but there wouldn't be enough room to fight in this forest, anyway. Perhaps for him, but not for four dragons.

Ragnarok grunted. **"Let us take care of it. Your human and you will only get in the way, especially since I would throw you to the wolves, anyway. Get out of here."**

Lyra knew his tone. That was not guidance; it was a warning. He *would* kill them alongside the wolves. **"Fine."**