

Chapter 1: Discovery

-19 Years Ago-

War had been brewing in the continent of Solin, but the kingdom of Wrudel did not expect to be struck so swiftly and suddenly by the neighbouring kingdom of Ebren. When the third and last Wrudel Gate fell to the Ebrene warriors, Queen Wria knew that the decimation of her kingdom would be complete and final. She also knew that her survival was heavily dependent on her own apparent death.

“Make haste, Advisor! We leave immediately. Have you made the arrangements?” she asked.

The Wru Advisor bowed.

“Yes, Your Majesty. Pardon my inquisition, but what of the Princess?” he asked.

Queen Wria’s lips thinned.

“That shall be another one of my mistakes, rectified,” she said.

Legend has it that Wrudel has an ancient system of underground passageways, built by age-old kings as potential escape-routes, known only to Wru, in case the kingdom was laid to siege. After the war, Ebrene invaders searched long and hard, but were unsuccessful in their attempts to find any entrances. When their General finally called for them to halt, the surviving Wru had long since fled, the last rays of the sun beginning to dip below the lofty Alamora mountains in the horizon.

“Worthy warriors! You have fought courageously. A week we laid Wrudel to siege, three days and nights we fought; yet our cowardly enemy fled in the face of our valour. Tales of our battle will be sung in the halls of Ebren for years to come,” said the High General of Ebren.

“My only regret is that the fiendish Queen of Wrudel was not to die by my hands, it is a pity her blood is spilled on the cliff sides under the castle’s highest tower. That she took her own life in such a cowardly manner makes me glad she shall have neither grave nor tomb, only hostile remembrance from her virtuous enemies.

“Yet, today, victory is ours! To Ebren!”

The cheers of the army of Ebren echoed through the valley as a tired Wru Knight carried the surviving princess to the only refuge he could think of.

-Present-

Like the Wise, a solitary dragon who rather enjoyed their isolation, sat in their library surrounded by volumes of books, scrolls, and stacks of paper. They snorted a small stream of fire onto the letter they’d just received from Dragonkind to reveal the invisible

ink, careful not to set anything else alight. They hummed as they began to read, only to be interrupted by the sound of his lair's door opening, the grinding of stone against stone resonating within their very bones.

Ailis burst into Ide's library, a stormy expression on her face.

"Ide, were you ever planning to tell me that *I'm* the last surviving descendant of Wrudel royalty, or was I supposed to hear it today from a Rebel child that let it slip through his innocent little mouth?"

The old dragon paused, then slowly turned to face the princess of Wrudel, who was apparently now aware of her title. Their emerald green scales shimmered as they sighed, realising the truth they'd hidden had finally come to light.

"I only ever did it to protect you, child. If word got out that the princess survived... I knew not if we could survive another battle, let alone another full-scale war."

"I want answers," Ailin said stonily.

"You shall have them," Ide said, bowing their head.

"As you know," they continued, "dragons were as much a part of Wrudel as they currently continue to be, in the southern kingdom of Ebre and the northern kingdom of Alamo. We were free to do as we liked, but for one obligation: it is our duty to reap human souls upon their death. It guarantees them a safe passage to the afterlife, — or so legends say — but Queen Wria disliked our 'interference', as she put it. Truth is, no one knows why dragons were given

this duty, or who it is that decreed it to be so.

"Queen Wria decided to take matters into her own hands and round up all the dragons and burn us. We cannot be killed through normal fire, and we are yet to find out what she did to make us burn as we did. Whatever dark forces were at play, the dragons of Wrudel began to die out.

"Meanwhile, to the south, Ebre began to hear of her efforts to rid her kingdom of dragons. Being a religious people, they were greatly alarmed and offended upon hearing Queen Wria's extreme ideology. They sent an envoy consisting of both, humans and dragons, to try and negotiate peace, but the Queen was not to hear it. Their diplomatic attempts continued for about six months. When all failed, they waged the Great War on Wrudel a year after the first envoy was sent.

"It is during this war that you, child, were found abandoned in the remnants of the Castle of Wrudel. As the Knights of Wrudel are blessed by dragons, they managed to survive the battle. One of them found you, and brought you to me for safe-keeping. You've been here ever since, in my care."

The princess stared, slowly mulling things over in her mind. Finally, she spoke.

"To think that woman is my mother..." she said, and shuddered.

Ide was silent as they let Ailis contemplate the truth she had finally discovered. Her expression changed, and she seemed to remember something.

“I shall worry at length in my own time. For now, I have news from the Rebels. Firstly, you were right. Queen Wria is planning something, wherever she’s hiding. Her ‘army’ is beginning to mobilise.”

News of Queen Wria’s survival had been a shock to everyone. The E布伦 General was furious when he heard; he insisted that he witnessed by his very own eyes as a body fell from the Wrudel Castle down to the cliffs. However, it later became apparent that her advisor had staged the whole thing, for he announced himself alive too — by being caught sneaking around by Alamora border officials. However, he’d soon escaped and was now at his queen’s side, ever faithful.

After the war, most Wru emigrated south to the warmer land of E布伦, and few left for Alamora. However, there were some that got lost in the infamous Wru tunnels, who were later rounded up by Queen Wria herself. She let the women and children go, but kept the able-bodied men. She had devised a way to enslave and control the men against their will, and had begun to call them her ‘troops’.

The Queen, however, had made a mistake in letting the women go. Unhappy to have to leave without their husbands, the women disregarded their newfound freedom, staying behind in the tunnels to gather what would eventually become valuable intel. Meanwhile, Ailis would routinely explore the area around Ide’s lair — her home — and she’d stumbled upon

an entrance to the catacombs. She was intercepted by the Rebels and guided back home, and they’d made a pact to keep in touch and utilize Ide’s vast collection of knowledge. A dragon was a strong and valuable ally to have.

“And there’s something else, Ide. The Rebels think there is a way for you dragons to leave Solin entirely,” she said. “They speak of something they call, ‘The Rainbow Bridge’.”

Ide considered her words, and then shook their head.

“It is an old legend, child. Just a myth,” they said.

“Is it not worth an investigation all the same? It isn’t safe for dragons here. Even if we vanquish the Queen — my mother — what’s to say another radical such as her wouldn’t rise again? I must try, Ide. Especially if *she* is my heritage,” Ailis said grimly.

To the south, arrangements were being made for the first E布伦 envoy to Wrudel in twenty years.