

Chapter One

KEO OF THE SWORD flew across the countryside of East Lamaira, narrowly avoiding a burst of flame from a cannon below. He rolled in midair before righting and looking down at the ground, his enhanced vision allowing him to see what was on the ground below. He saw a dozen Divinian soldiers in blue armor standing on top of a guard tower, already hastily reloading the cannon with some kind of ammunition he could not identify, but which he figured would be very painful if it hit him.

Ordinarily, Keo would have attacked right back, seeing as he had simply been flying peacefully before the sudden attack from the soldiers. He had been flying across the countryside of East Lamaira, having left the Upper Mountains about a few days ago, heading for the capital of East Lamaira, a city called Deusopolis. Having finished his training with the Dracones, Keo had intended to head to that city to reunite with his friends, who had gone ahead of him to inform the country's leaders of Keo's arrival, and meet the country's leaders so he could tell them about the return of the demons.

As a result, Keo had tried to take the most direct route possible to Deusopolis, which was why he had intentionally chosen to fly through sparsely populated countryside and wilderness. He had seen very few or no people at all since leaving the Upper Mountains a few days ago, which had been lonely at times; but unlike most people, he could tolerate loneliness fairly well.

That was why Keo was surprised to come upon this guard tower seemingly in the middle of nowhere. He hadn't even noticed it until he heard the explosion of the cannon and saw the strange greenish fire flying toward him, which he narrowly avoided at the last second. He looked over his shoulder to see the green fire fly high into the sky for a moment before exploding, raining down tiny emerald flames onto the ground below, though Keo had flown away from the green fire and so managed to avoid the flames that fell to the ground.

Looking back at the guard tower, Keo noticed that the soldiers were pointing and shouting at him, but he was too high up in the sky to hear what they were saying. He wasn't surprised at their shock, though, because very few people had seen his humanoid dragon form, which was an anomaly even among the Dracones that he had been training with for the past month. It was a big reason why he had chosen to fly through the unpopulated parts of the country, because he had not wanted to scare anyone or run into people who might try to attack him and delay his journey south.

Looks like that plan didn't work out quite the way I wanted it, Keo thought.

But Keo didn't see any need to engage with the soldiers. He turned his gaze south, fully intending to fly well out of the range of the soldiers' cannon, but before he could resume, he heard the loud screech of some kind of giant bird above him and looked up just in time to see massive claws falling toward him.

The claws slammed into Keo's back with surprising force, sending him plummeting to the ground below. But Keo had practiced these sorts of scenarios with his grandmother, the Queen of the Dracones, and so righted himself and flew back into the air before he crashed into the ground, although he had to avoid another blast of green fire from the soldiers in the guard tower that almost grazed his scales.

Shaking his head, Keo looked around at the sky and spotted his enemy: A huge eagle, with red and

brown feathers, flying high in the sky above him. The eagle looked almost as large as an adolescent male dragon, perhaps larger, and was circling above overhead. He had never seen such a large eagle before and hadn't even known that such a creature even existed.

The eagle suddenly swooped down toward him at astonishing speeds. Keo rolled out of the way at the last second, but as he did so, he noticed a human riding on the eagle's back, a human carrying some kind of thick club. The human swung the club at him as the eagle passed, striking Keo in the chest and sending him stumbling through the sky before he regained his balance and flew away.

Keo looked down, watching as the eagle turned out of its dive and flew back into the sky. This time, he saw the eagle's human rider, a woman with long red hair and a blue helmet on her head. She looked like one of the soldiers below, but with far less armor, perhaps because it would have weighed down her flying mount.

Flying soldiers? Keo thought, keeping a careful eye on his opponent as it flew away from the ground. *Never heard of that before.*

The eagle turned around and shot toward him again. This time, Keo was ready. He flew toward the eagle, getting his claws ready for the attack. His enhanced vision helped him catch a brief look of surprise on the face of the eagle's rider, but then it was replaced by a smirk, like she thought she was going to finish this fight quickly.

At the very last second, however, Keo banked up, allowing the eagle and its rider to safely pass underneath him. But at the same time, he grabbed the rider's shoulders with his claws and yanked her off the bird, ripping her out of the seat and belt that kept her attached to the bird's back.

The rider, however, did not let out a shout of surprise when Keo grabbed her, although the eagle screeched in surprise. Instead, she immediately smacked him in the face with her club with more force than he expected, causing him to let go of her. The rider fell to the earth fast, but before Keo could recover and save her, her mount flew underneath her and caught her before she hit the ground. Then it flew up and away from Keo out of the reach of his claws.

Rubbing his face as he flew up, Keo thought, *Damn, she doesn't miss a beat*, before he heard another explosion below and looked down in time to see yet another burst of green fire flying toward him.

This time, however, Keo had noticed it too late. The green fire struck him dead-on and sent him spiraling down to the ground below. Keo tried to recover, but the green fire had paralyzed his limbs, although he managed to regain control of his wings just in time to guide the descent toward a pile of brush not far from the guard tower.

Despite that, when Keo crashed into the ground, he was knocked out instantly.