

The Legend of Metaniono

Draxxis banked his flight to the left and gracefully spiraled down to touch down just outside the old windmill. The place seemed normal enough: the white plaster and dark timber exterior was clean, but did show a bit of wear. From his vantage point, the large red dragon could see down into the town of Dalimond.

Knowing there was no way to enter the windmill in his present form and despising the demeaning spell it would take for him to be able to enter, the proud dragon hesitantly changed to "Khutit" form, or a more bipedal form his normal majestic self. The word itself meant "to blend" or "to become more like your surroundings." But Draxxis didn't want to be more like the naka-duskael, the unscaled ones, around.

He cursed the older dragon Tokoz and the dryad mason that worked for Tokoz, Plink, as he carefully approached the windmill. He wasn't used to movement in this form and it made him uncomfortable. If that slow-witted dragon had a better memory, he'd not have to be here, lowering himself to speaking to the saris that lived inside.

But there was something deep inside the mighty red dragon, buried so deeply that no one could see, though his future host would see it easily. Draxxis had met a young hatchling twice now, each time the little dragon had been outnumbered by his attackers and had refused aid. In that little hatchling, Metaniono, Draxxis had seen himself reflected. A person forced to view themselves from the outside is not always in for a pleasant experience, and for Draxxis, it had been painful.

Conflict raged still in the heart of the red dragon, conflict made deeper by Plink's reference to an old story told him by Tokoz. It was from the sslik, he had said, and he'd heard it first from Tokoz. But the details were vague. He'd cornered the slow blue Helian dragon as soon as possible. "What of Metaniono?" He had asked, almost in anger.

Tokoz had slowly looked up from the stack of carrots he was eating, not capable of knowing what the edge in the younger dragon's voice meant. "It's a nice story." Tokoz said plainly, after politely finishing his carrots.

"Tell it to me!" Draxxis demanded. Tokoz was older and did not easily understand the social nuances of something like intimidation. Draxxis knew that he could demand what he wanted of the older dragon and would get it, without the Helian even taking offense or realizing that he was being bullied in any way.

Tokoz had changed to his khutit form as comfortably as if he enjoyed it and took a few steps toward a nearby well. "One moment," he explained apologetically. "I need a drink first." He drew water from the well and took a long drink, then returned to his normal form and sat down on the grass, inviting Draxxis to do the same.

The red Lunus, took this easy-going transforming to biped form and back, as a borderline offense. Could he not have drawn the water in his normal form and drink? Tokoz didn't sense though that something was irking the dragon next to him as the red dragon sat nearby.

The blue Helian was a fairly good story-teller, in actuality. Though a bit simplistic, and not nearly as flowery of speech as the dryad had been, he told the same story that Plink had related to him, adding no new details, much to Draxxis's dismay.

As the story concluded Tokoz finally noticed that Draxxis was seeming a little impatient with him. "Do you want more of the story then?" the blue dragon asked simply. He might not be too bright, or quick witted, Draxxis couldn't help but notice, but he sure could look deeper than most

when he wanted to.

The mighty Draxxis could only nod, anger and impatience at the Helian building slowly in him.

"Sly Loki told the story to me when I was very young." Tokoz said. "I know there was a lot more too it, but I'm afraid that's all I remember. Maybe you should go ask him to tell you the story..." He left his words hanging suggestively.

Again, rather than exploding inexplicably on the blue dragon, he only nodded and listened as Tokoz had given him the rather simple directions to the windmill before which Draxxis now stood.

He entered the building to find it rather superficial. It was a windmill on the outside, but on the inside he was surprised to not see any millstone: so it turned and turned and turned and accomplished nothing. Draxxis felt that it was a little like the situation he was in right now: spinning and spinning, but not really going anywhere.

"Come on up." a voice said from above him. It was a very smooth voice, with a pleasant sort of growl to the background: a little like a dragon's voice, but much more tame, and higher in pitch. "Tokoz mentioned you'd be coming, though I thought you'd be here sooner." the voice continued.

Draxxis had wanted to go immediately from Tokoz to the windmill, but had been hesitant to have to ask anything, even if it was only a story, from a biped, especially from the one that had mostly raised someone like Tokoz. He wondered how much of the dragon's personality was in part, from the saris who lived here. It had taken him a couple of days to gather his thoughts, as he put it to himself, before coming here.

"No worries," the smooth voice above him continued. "I'm out of the water bags I usually drop on guests, and I'm not sure you'd find the humor in them anyway. It's just quieter to talk up here."

"Wouldn't it be quieter still to talk outside?" Draxxis said in a low rumble.

The saris apparently had very good ears and was soon coming down the platform towards the doorway that Draxxis had entered through. "I suppose you're right."

Dressed in brown leather armor, devoid of sleeves and boots, the golden saris was standing on level with the dragon. Draxxis noticed that aside from the voice, he'd heard no other noise except the creaking of the gears nearby.

"Come outside," Sly Loki said as he moved out the doorway himself, "and make yourself comfortable. I can tell you don't like your current form." The saris took a few steps outside the windmill, again making no sound, but with his voice and sat down on the grass.

Draxxis numbly followed, carefully changing back to his normal form and sitting down near the now tiny cat person.

Sly seemed undisturbed, but started into his tale almost immediately. The smoothness of his voice having the red dragon almost immediately mesmerized. Draxxis allowed his mind to float and drift upon the words that were told to him, his heart taking flight with each new revelation regarding the hatchling: Metaniono.

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His name at first was not Metaniono. History seems to have lost his original name though, so it's easier to just refer to him now as Metaniono. He had a dragon name and was born just before the Withered Aegis and their forces began their assault on Istaria. The first few years of his life

were normal enough for a young hatchling. His parent's were loving parents, and gave him frequent small gifts for his hoard, they taught him to fight and cast spells, and had even started taking him to the various trainers that could be found in Chiconis and Dralk.

His parents faction is not known, but given what is now known about him, they were most likely Helian, the scholars of dragon society and most likely to come to the aid of the lesser races, the naka-duskael, if called upon.

It's believed that they were Helian, but they were definitely in Dralk when they received the news that the gnome city, Rachival, was under siege. Metaniono's parents were among the few to answer the call of the gnomes. They left their young hatchling there, sure of their strength and power against whatever forces might assail the gnomish city.

"Stay here," his father, an ancient black dragon with gold streaks on his wings and scales. warned. "Dralk should be safe enough."

"But I can fight!" the little hatchling responded.

His mother looked a bit smug, proud of the courage of her youngster. She actually worried the least of the coming encounter, believing that the gnomes were over-reacting. Her light blue scales looked almost purple in the Dralk sky, the purple streaks on her wings were blazing.

The hatchling's father was adamant, though a bit of a proud smile also crossed his face, "Stay here," he repeated kindly. "We'll be back soon. If we're not back as it starts to get dark, head home to Chiconis and wait for us there."

The last Metaniono saw of his parents, they had a brief conversation among themselves as to whether to take the teleporter or not and then decided to fly, to better survey the damage before entering the battle. Then their huge forms could be seen flying straight up the cliffs that surrounded Dralk-with a slight turn, they vanished over the edge and were gone.

Two days later a harried looking, dirty and badly scratched gnome stood outside their lair near Chiconis, calling his name. The gnome's armor was badly dented and pieces of it had been ripped off. He was wearing only one shoulder pad and missing the gauntlet on the opposite side. The mithril armor was streaked with blood, including a large round spot just below the right rib and on the upper thigh, where apparently he'd held the head of dying comrade. His left eye was cut and infected, nearly swollen shut, but somehow he managed to hold his helmet and face mask in his bare hand in a way that bespoke military dignity.

The hatchling slowly stepped out of the lair, knowing already what the gnome was here to tell him, but hoping that somehow he was wrong. He gave a curt nod to show the gnome that it was he that was being sought.

"The people of Rachival are grateful for the service that your parents have rendered in the defense of our homeland." he said officiously, trying hard not to let his own inner emotions show, "Had we not had our own turn against us, and had our own defenses used against us, we might have been able to secure our home. Your parents were a great asset to us and with their help, we came close to victory."

Metaniono stood with his head held high and expressionless, as he knew his parents would have wanted him to, waiting for the words to come that he was so sure would and they did, impacting him as though struck by a paralyzing force.

"They gave their lives in the defense of our city, which has fallen." the gnome could not suppress the choke in his voice or the tear that managed to squeeze through his swollen eye. He continued on boldly however, though the hatchling no longer heard anything that was being said.

"In gratitude for their sacrifice, the City of Rachival would like to invite you to become their charge. We're in the process of moving to a location near Tazoon, where we'd be happy to delve you a lair of your own, and provide you with food and shelter until you're able to perform your rite of passage into dragon adulthood. We..." the gnome was having trouble continuing, but it was just as well. Metaniono had turned his back on him and was returning to the depths of his lair.

"I'd rather be alone." he said as he was leaving.

The gnome gave a slight bow, "I more than understand," he said with more emotion in his voice than his military training deemed proper. "I'll return in a few weeks, after you've had time..." he paused, because he knew that the hatchling was nearly out of earshot. "We..." he began, but then changed his mind quickly, "I," he said with emphasis, "feel a strong debt for their sacrifice." But by then the hatchling could no longer hear him.

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"It was a pointless sacrifice," Draxxis commented bitterly, "to think more of the naka-duskael than they did of their own flesh and blood. He probably never did a thing to help the naka again though. I'll bet that taught him a lesson."

Sly sat silently for a moment. He'd been sure such a comment would come. He'd heard it many times as he had recalled this story. He answered quietly, "He never accepted the gnomes offer..." he began.

"Who'd blame him?" Draxxis snorted. "Go to live with the people responsible for his parent's death?"

Again Sly paused slightly. "It might seem like a clear-cut decision to you, Draxxis, but I'm sure you've noticed that not everyone thinks the way you do." A cool breeze swept over the hillside just then, moving the saris's fur in a flash of tan to gold color and somewhat cooling the dragon's scales. "We're not sure why Metaniono refused the offer, but he did allow the gnome to come periodically and even accepted some gifts from him from time to time. To the best of anyone's recollection, or any of the story's I've heard, that gnome, whose name is also lost to history, but whom I will call Erfiner, to make my telling easier, was the only person that Metaniono ever accepted aid from."

Draxxis did not know how to respond to that comment, it made no sense to him.

Sly took that opportunity to continue his story...

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While young Metaniono didn't accept the offer to stay with the gnomes of New Rachival, he did accept the aid of the gnome. That single biped was the only one that the small dragon would allow near him, not even his own kin were allowed to help him.

And so much of what a young dragon is to learn, he actually learned from the gnome, who acted as an emissary with the other dragons. Both factions were troubled over what had happened to the youth and both sought to aid him, but they also respected his emphatic request to be left to himself.

Erfinder taught the young dragon as much as he could, often having to speak with the specialized trainers of his kin on his behalf. At first, none of them would assist him, but it was

Kreig, the Quarrying Master that finally relented and from there the others did as well.

Erfinder approached the adult red dragon slowly. Even though Helian, Krieg was still a formidable figure, his great wings slow pulsating with each breath. "I have nothing to teach the naka-duskael," he growled.

"I'm here for Metaniono." Erfinder said and watched as the large dragon stiffened slightly at the mention of the name. "He is ready learn your art."

"That one has shunned his own kind, Naka. And you expect me to teach you so he can learn what he can have only for the asking?"

Erfinder glanced briefly at the ground, then managed to look straight up at the dragon. "He must learn your ways somehow, if he is to grow to maturity..."

The dragon interrupted the gnome. "He will never grow to maturity. There is no way without knowledge from our people. He will stay that size for the rest of his life, unless he gives up trying to follow the ways of the naka-duskael and learns to be a true dragon."

"And if one desires to prove himself a true dragon, what must he do?" Erfinder asked.

Kreig thought for a long while. "Bring me 100 fragments from the golems that live north of here. If one were to do that, I'd train him."

A few days later the gnome walked up the Quarrying trainer and placed a large sack at the dragon's feet. "Here are your 100 fragments." he said.

Kreig stood staring deeply into the gnome's eyes. "Metaniono has hardly left his cave, and Rentlan over at the guard post says he saw you hunting those golems alone. Don't mock me, naka, by thinking that I wouldn't see past your deception."

"I have brought them to you, Krieg." the gnome said with a firm force of dignity in his voice, "If you assume that I did so in the name of Metaniono, you're wrong." The quarrying trainer looked startled. "I brought them," the gnome continued, "because you said that to prove oneself as a true dragon, he must bring you 100 fragments." he motioned with his hand down to the sack of dusty golem parts. "I have brought what you asked. I have proven myself to your standard. Will you train me?"

The laugh that issued from the dragon was long and loud and deep. "K nalaeko praefer." He laughed some more and the gnome was forced to step back slightly to avoid being hurt by the dragon's gyrations. "Moeta ak, fa praef, k nalaeko praefer."

"So why won't you train me then," the gnome asked.

The laughter slowed but did not stop as the dragon responded, "Oh maerta nalaeko. I will teach you. Bem i k nalaeko praefer. You are the gnome dragon."

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Draxxis threw his head back in disgust. "They called him a dragon?"

Sly had anticipated that response. "Calling him Praefer nalaeko? No, Draxxis, not even the Helian will do that. But he had proved that he was doing his best to make up for the loss of Metaniono's parents. Once he won the respect of the quarrying master, Erfinder was able to get all the trainers to teach him on the hatchling's behalf."

"Surely, not the Lunus?"

"Yes, even the Lunus, it is said."

"How...?" Draxxis began, but Sly cut him off, not wishing to interrupt the story for the sake of

argument.

“I don’t know why exactly, but I’m sure they had their reasons. Of course, it took longer for the hatchling to learn these skills, without the benefit of dragon teaching, but both were persistent.”

“But he managed to start his rite of passage. He made it to the Peak of Storms.” Draxxis said urgently.

“Yes,” Sly replied. “I’m not sure how, because he didn’t subscribe to either faction, or if he did, it too is lost with time.”

“He had the heart of a Lunus.” Draxxis said firmly.

“His heart was beyond biped and dragon. Steeled against the weather of pain and emotion. Not many, Lunus, Helian, or biped of this world allow that to happen to their heart.”

Draxxis nodded with understanding. “It is a difficult achievement.” he said softly.

There was a slight pause before Sly answered. “Achievement? Yes, I suppose you would see it that way.”

“It is a great achievement to not rely on anyone.” Draxxis responded.

“He relied on the gnome,” Sly responded.

“To only rely on the support of a naka and nothing else? It’s a weak and small crutch that I can forgive him of.”

“Would you have helped him?”

“I have helped him.” Draxxis responded quietly.

Sly understood exactly what the red dragon meant, but said nothing for a moment.

“The gnome made the trip with him, but fell to the ghosts near the start of the trail.”

“And he was killed by the Hunter.” Draxxis finished, his head bowed.

“A long time ago, yes Draxxis. A very long time ago.”

“But I saw him.” the dragon said, as desperately as he was capable, “I fought with him when he fell to the Hunter.”

“Yes, you did.” Sly answered “Unwilling to receive help, even from the gods, his soul is trapped on that Peak. Doomed to make his failed journey over and over again, until he learns to turn around, and accept help.”

There was a long moment of complete silence, uninterrupted even by the wind, as the two sat on the grassy meadow outside the windmill. Clouds were slowly drifting overhead, creating brief shadows upon the ground that gave the illusion of movement in a world that seemed to be standing still.

“It is a hard thing to look at oneself through another’s eyes.” Sly said quietly.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about, fool naka.” Draxxis said as he took to the air. “You are nothing like me.”

Sly watched the dragon disappear over the horizon. “Farewell, Metaniono.” he said.