

THE DINOSAUR KINGDOMS ARE AT WAR.

THE DEADLANDS

TRAPPED



SKYE MELKI-WEGNER

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To my friends in the House of Progress

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CRETACEA



THE MOUNTAIN
COURT

ASTRILAR'S LOCH

THE LAND OF
FALLING SKY

THE
DEADLANDS

THE EXILE CLIFFS

THE TANGLED PITS

THE GIANT'S NEST

THE FOREST
OF SMOKE

THE FIRE PEAK

THE
COLD
CANYON

THE MOUNTAIN KINGDOM

THE KING'S DOMAIN

THE UNKNOWN NORTH

THE FERN LEA

THE SCRUB PLAINS

THERMAL SPRINGS

LIGHTNING PEAK

THE PRAIRIE ALLIANCE

THE LOWLAND MARSHES



Dinosaurs of Cretacea

THE MOUNTAIN KINGDOM

Iguanodon

Name in the Old Stories: Spikegrip

Notable Territory: The King's Domain, the Tumbling Stream

Iguanodons are large herbivores. They possess spiked thumbs to wield in combat and to strip foliage from trees.

Oryctodromeus

Name in the Old Stories: Earthsinger

Notable Territory: The Broken Ridge, the Twilight Vale

Oryctodromeus are small, speedy herbivores that dig underground burrows. In the Cretacean war, they serve as soldiers, trench diggers and crafters.

Stegoceras

Name in the Old Stories: Ridgebone

Notable Territory: The Sunless Meadow, the Flowering Crest

Stegoceras are relatively small herbivores that use their domed heads to ram their enemies in combat. They fight in large squadrons, overwhelming mightier foes by sheer force of numbers.

THE PRAIRIE ALLIANCE

Ankylosaur

Name in the Old Stories: Bristler

Notable Territory: The Fern Lea, the Scrub Plains

Ankylosaurs are large herbivores with armoured boneplates protruding from their backs. They use their vicious clubbed tails to strike down enemies.

Triceratops

Name in the Old Stories: Moonchaser

Notable Territory: The Lowland Marsh, the Graystone Dale

Triceratops are large herbivores with a distinctive trio of horns on their faces. They use their great size and strength to engage in battle.

NEUTRAL SPECIES

Anurognathid

Name in the Old Stories: Windwhisper

Notable Territory: Lightning Peak

Anurognathids are tiny bird-sized pterosaurs that consume a mixture of plants and insects. They take no side in the war, preferring to serve their own interests as crafters or mercenary spies.



Sauropod

Name in the Old Stories: Starsweeper

Notable Territory: The Cold Canyon

Sauropods are the largest dinosaurs alive, with extremely long necks and tails. They belong to no kingdom, but travel along the Cold Canyon collecting myths and stories.

THE CARRION KINGDOM

Carnotaurus

Name in the Old Stories: Thorneyes

Carnotaurus resemble tyrannosaurs at a glance, although they are stockier and sprout horns above their eyes.

Pterosaur

Name in the Old Stories: Skyproowler

Pterosaurs are massive winged predators. They soar above Cretacea and swoop down to pluck their prey from the earth below.

Raptor

Name in the Old Stories: Nightslicer

Raptors are small, vicious carnivores that roam the Deadlands in search of prey. To compensate for their stature, raptors tend to hunt in packs.

Tyrannosaur

Name in the Old Stories: Coldclaw

Tyrannosaurs are the largest carnivores in the Deadlands. They use their massive jaws and fearsome bite strength to tear apart their prey.



CHAPTER ONE

Reconnaissance

Rain swept across the Deadlands, sharp and spattering. Eleri crouched behind a mound of boulders, hiding from the predators' sight line.

"Get back here!" Tortha hissed. "They'll see you."

The young triceratops glared at Eleri, her expression as sharp as her horns. A born warrior, Tortha had spent her life training to serve the Prairie Alliance in battle.

Eleri hesitated. A vast crater lay before them, flickering in the moonlit rain. Like the rest of the Deadlands, this area was a barren waste, obliterated fifty years ago by the Fallen Star. Now, the last surviving dinosaur kingdoms battled for scraps of territory on its outskirts.

But inside the crater, a cool oasis rippled in the rain. Water glinted, ringed by stunted trees and ferns. And in that foliage, a platoon of raptors was lurking.

Eleri's heart thudded. As clouds shifted, moonlight crept across the wastes – and with a twitch of his tail, he retreated into deeper gloom.

“They didn't see me,” he whispered.

Tortha glared. “Obviously not, dirt muncher, or they'd be servin' you up as their appetizer right now.”

Eleri didn't protest the insult. As a young oryctodromeus, he wasn't built to fight. He was built to hide in burrows – or if all else failed, to run for his life. “They seem less mobile than usual. Two sentries posted on the outskirts, and the others are in strange positions. I don't like it.”

“What's to like?” Tortha muttered. “A bunch of snivelling carnivores gettin' ready to attack our battling kingdoms?”

“All we need is proof. Something to take back to our herds – to prove the war is a sham.”

“Easier said than done.”

She was right, of course. It had been two months since Eleri was exiled from the Mountain Kingdom. Since he had struggled through the Deadlands, almost dying before he joined a herd of other young outcasts.

Since he had learned the truth.

Back home, it had all seemed simple. The Prairie Alliance was evil. Vicious armies of triceratops and ankylosaurs

banded together to lay siege to Eleri's homeland, the Mountain Kingdom. Back home, Tortha was his enemy.

But out here?

Here, Eleri had learned the truth. The war was not truly a fight between two kingdoms over territory. In reality, it had been contrived by the Carrion Kingdom – a secret cabal of carnivores lurking in the Deadlands – to provide a killing field of herbivores to feast on. And in exchange for their protection, the kings of the Prairie Alliance and Mountain Kingdom had committed the ultimate betrayal, allowing the carnivores to feed on their herdmates.

In response, Eleri and Tortha had thwarted the carnivores' plans, creating a rockslide that had devastated their army.

Or so they had thought.

The carnivorous army was battered but not broken. It had taken only weeks for their platoons to regroup – and for their scouting parties to resume patrols of the Deadlands. And every night, packs of pterosaurs flew overhead, their claws full of carrion from the battlefield.

“We've been spyin' on this outpost for days!” Tortha hissed. “All we've learned about are troop movements and scout numbers; that ain't enough to prove our kings've sold us out to the corpse munchers.”

Eleri tensed. “Be quiet.”

“We oughta try something useful, like attackin' the Fire Peak. If we want to bring down the Carrion Kingdom,

we oughta go for their headquarters, not their outposts. All this sneakin' around is—”

Eleri grabbed her. “Tortha, shut up.”

The rain fell harder. Tortha must have detected the fear in his tone – she leaned in closer, barely breathing. “What’s wrong?”

Eleri wasn’t sure. Not yet. But his senses tingled – and his instincts screamed that something was amiss. “Something’s ... different. I can feel it.”

“Well, that’s a reliable military tactic. Glad we’re basin’ our reconnaissance mission on what a piddlin’ little storyteller reckons he can *feel*.”

Eleri ignored her. It was true that he was a storyteller, not a soldier. He lacked Tortha’s military training and her strict regard for protocol and hierarchy. But even so, he had learned to trust his gut.

“Most nights, they swap sentries every hour or so. But those two have been still all night, and the others...” Eleri shook his head. “Why are the others even *here*? It’s an oasis outpost, nothing valuable to guard. I’ve never seen a full platoon in a place like this.”

A cool wind curled across the crater, splattering rain into their faces.

Tortha looked uneasy. “Reckon it’s a trap?”

“Could be.”

Eleri and Tortha retreated, folding back into the night.

They kept to the shadows – but as they darted between boulders, Eleri glanced over his shoulder, half expecting signs of pursuit.

Right now, the rest of their herd hid in the Grotto, waiting for the nightly report. It was their underground sanctuary, a short trek from here, buried by the desert sands. A river ran through it, watering a feast of ferns and sweetmoss.

The Grotto was safety. It was home. But if the predators were closing in...

“Pick up the pace, dirt muncher.” Tortha raised her voice over the rain. She seemed more confident now.

“Keep your voice down,” Eleri whispered.

They stumbled into the Tangled Pits: a knotted maze of ravines and craters that pockmarked this part of the Deadlands. It was a precarious descent, slow and jolting, as they searched for clawholds on a crevasse wall.

Slipping and skidding, they finally reached the bottom. The moonlight was weak, and Eleri strained his eyes in search of danger.

“To defeat an army, you’ve gotta chop off its head,” Tortha went on. “If we attacked the Fire Peak, I reckon we could take down a few of their sergeants, maybe even a general if we’re lucky...”

Eleri blinked water from his eyes, squinting through the night.

A shape exploded from the dark.