The Darkest Battle

Destruction. Buildings consumed by fire, smoke billowing from the remains, walls torn apart. Samuel looked about the abandoned, ashy debris with a yearning for the war to end. He brushed off the snow-like ash from his head and revealed his long, black hair. He could hear the distant roars and shrieks of dragons fighting in the sky. The smoke concealed them from sight and made him feel concerned about how the battle fared. He had compiled a small army of free dragons who were able to resist Garidor's powerful magic. He knew the black mage as Alek before he killed the king and claimed the throne in Samuel's absence. Samuel was rightful heir by blood, but he had forsaken the kingdom to be with a white dragon named Soraeka. She had spared Samuel, even though he tried to kill her. This showed him that the dragons were not mindless beasts that terrorized the humans, so he worked alongside her. They became close friends while forming plans to end the war between humans and dragons, but before they could carry out their plans, she vanished. Samuel looked everywhere for her with several of the free dragons she had introduced him to, but eventually, they tired their search despite Samuel's raging emotions, and continued on to carry out their plans without her. They had victory over each battle, but no battle truly mattered until this one. Their final plan was in play, and it was to defeat Garidor once and for all, freeing the remaining corrupted dragons from his spell, ending the war between humans and dragons.

A loud thud shook the ground behind Samuel and disturbed the idle ash, lifting it into the air. Samuel turned around to see a massive gold dragon known as Ohring. He had a set of bone-white horns that stuck straight out of his skull and several, small white spikes that protruded from his cheek. His golden scales were coated in blood, but from what
Samuel could tell, not his own. “The fight fares well, but we just spotted Garidor to the East. He amassed an army of two-legs and they are approaching quickly.” His voice was deep and muffled by his draconic tongue. When Samuel had his first conversation with Soraeka, it had shocked him that she could understand English, let alone speak it. The dragons appeared to have a vast, never-ending knowledge and were above comparison to the smartest scholars that he knew.

“Alright, can you take me to the rally point?”

Ohring bowed his head and lied down, giving Samuel easier access to mount him. Samuel climbed onto the dragon's golden back and sat where his neck met his torso, right between two large, ivory spikes. Samuel gripped the spike in front of him as he watched Ohring's sinewy wings unfold. With a mighty leap, the dragon took off into the smokey skies. Samuel's eyes smarted from the polluted air that buffeted him. He leaned forward to decrease the strength of the howling wind and closed his eyes to protect them. Soon, the pressure ceased and the constant strained flapping of Ohring's wings slowed to a steady pattern. Samuel opened his eyes to see that they were above the rolling smoke stacks and that colored streaks darted across the clear, sunny skies above them. Samuel couldn't tell which dragons fought for what side, but he anticipated for the best.

Far in the distance, Samuel could see the massive army Garidor had organized. These are all of my father's men... His stomach turned at the thought of harming someone he knew.

“We near the rally point.” The dragon's voice was barely audible against the wailing wind. He began to descend, back under the smoke. His wings ceased to flap as he glided downwards to the ground. Samuel noticed something out of the corner of his eye, but when he looked, nothing was there. His eyes started to hurt again so he closed them tightly to dim the pain. Only a few seconds passed before he heard a loud shriek right in front of them. A streak of white flew over and disappeared back into the smoke behind them. Ohring roared fiercely as they started to quickly lose altitude. Samuel looked nervously at the dragon's wings and watched as blood flew off of his golden wing sails. The thin membrane had been sliced on both wings in a four-claw pattern. Ohring managed to keep their elevation but was tackled by the rogue dragon from the side before any progress was made. The white beast
held tightly to the golden dragon and started to claw his hide. Before Ohring could react, the dragon bit deeply into his neck, sinking its teeth deep into his flesh. Ohring roared in agonizing pain and tried to push her off, but he was unable to get the right positioning.

Samuel dodged multitudes of swipes as he charged his strength to cast a spell. He muttered several words and released the built-up power. The hostile dragon was blasted off Ohring with a strong gust of air and sent forcefully back into the smoke. Samuel gripped tightly to the flailing golden dragon as the ground appeared below them. Several deep gouges were left in Ohring's hide along with the large bite in his neck, but he managed to quickly regain enough control to land on his stomach despite the searing pain. They hit the ground hard and were sent into several careening rolls. Samuel flew off, unable to hold on any tighter and landed several meters away from where Ohring finally stopped.

Samuel lied there, trying to regain his breath. A great pain coursed through his thighs and almost incapacitated him. He managed to raise his torso and look down to find that his thighs were bare and his flesh was exposed. Ohring's scales had skinned him like a fish. He groaned and began to cast a healing spell on himself. Over several long, unbearable seconds, he was completely healed. He stood up, feeling weak in his legs, and wobbled over to Ohring. The dragon wasn't moving.

“Ohring?” Samuel laid a hand on his back and tried to wake him. He continued to move along the dragon's spine until he was directly in front of his snout. He put his hand over the dragon's large nostrils to feel if any air would come out. None did. Samuel put his forehead against the Ohring's snout and muttered words of respect. Before he could finish his dues, another large thud shook the ground behind him. He drew his sword with a loud, metallic screech emanating from the sheath and whirled around to face the white dragon. Its mouth and claws were coated in Ohring's blood.

Samuel immediately charged his foe, letting rage overcome his body. The dragon made no move and he was only meters away. Once he neared close enough, the dragon's features became distinguished. Soraeka... Samuel was completely stunned and dumfounded. He immediately slowed his pace and let his sword fall to the ground with several clangs. Every characteristic of the dragon's appearance matched Soraeka's. Four ivory horns
protruded from the back of her skull, one pair curving up, and one pair curving down. Her deep blue, reptilian eyes were prominent amongst the vast majority of the white scales surrounding them. *Is this... is this real?* Time seemed to stop as he watched the dragon walk slowly towards him.

“Raeka!” Joyfulness overwhelmed Samuel as he ran to his dragon with arms open wide. All of the time he spent searching for her, the constant worries, the misery he felt after they gave up, it all was replaced with the thought of her return, that she was alive. The white dragon crouched down and growled fiercely. Samuel stopped. *No...* In one swift motion, she pounced on him and forced him to the ground with her massive body. She pinned him under her fore-paw and brought her snout directly in front of his face.

“Raeka... it's me...” Samuel's voice grew solemn; the sudden elation of finding his long lost friend was utterly crushed by the realization that she had been corrupted. “Don't you remember?”

The dragon roared vociferously and pressed down harder, making it more difficult for Samuel to breathe. She bared her teeth and growled as she positioned a claw directly on top of his forehead. She intended to kill him.

“No!” Samuel screamed and used his emotions to channel his magic. He threw Soraeka off of him and sent her rolling across the ground. Strength drained from him as he released the magic. Samuel dropped to a knee and regained his breath. He watched as the dragon stood up and shook the dust off of her brilliant, white scales.

“Raeka, please...” Samuel's conscience was torn apart from his furious emotions.

“Raetsaem daereidro ruoy htaed, os htaed tsum eimoc.” She spoke in her native, guttural tongue, a tongue that Samuel could not understand. Samuel picked up his sword and held it loosely, pointing the tip towards the ground.

“Please don't make me do this.” Tears welled up inside his eyes, but he knew that his feelings couldn't prevent him from the completion of their plan. Soraeka bounded towards him and attempted to pounce on him again. Samuel rolled to the side and dodged her attack. He brought his sword up and positioned himself in a battle-ready stance. The dragon bared her teeth and charged him once more. Samuel pointed the tip of his sword towards her and
waited for the precise moment. She swiped at him, but he ducked and stabbed his sword into her shoulder faster than she could react. Soraeka roared in agony as the tip of Samuel's cold blade parted her warm flesh. Samuel winced; he was killing his friend.

Soraeka back-handed him with her paw, sending him flying across the ground. Samuel tucked and rolled, landing on his feet about twenty meters away from her. Giving no time for recovery, Samuel charged with his sword ready to thrust into her hide. He jumped as high as he could while Soraeka tried to bat him down. Her sharp claws missed his body by centimeters as he gained altitude. At the peak of his jump, he pointed his sword down and let his body fall. As he fell, Soraeka released a jet of flames from her maw. Samuel was forced to use a magical shield to block defensively instead of attacking offensively. The flames spread out and around the shield, slightly burning Samuel's arms. She ceased her fire as he landed and swung her tail at him. Samuel had no time to respond and was hit brutally by the dragon's thick tail. He fell harshly to the ground with the breath knocked out of him.

Soraeka attempted to pin him again with her paw, but Samuel swiftly rolled out of the way. He dodged several more swipes and withdrew an enchanted, blue dagger from his belt while he rolled. He rolled underneath of her tremendous body and jabbed it into her armored underbelly. The dagger's enchantment allowed it to easily slide its length into her and loose the warm blood inside. She roared and jumped away from him. She clutched the bleeding wound near her chest and looked angrily at Samuel. She leapt to the skies and disappeared again. Samuel heard her roar in front of him as he stood back up. He wiped the blood from the dagger on his thick, leather armor and sheathed it back at his waist. He gripped his sword tightly and searched for her. He noticed that the smoke started to roll abnormally to his left and focused his vision there. Soon, he heard a shriek come from behind him. He turned quickly and raised his sword, but she was too fast. She swiped him with her paw, knocking him on the ground. One of her claws caught his stomach and tore through his protection, leaving a deep gouge.

“Gah!” Samuel cursed as he started to heal his wound. The process left him weak and trembling. *I can't keep doing this.* He tried to stand up, but before he could, Soraeka reappeared and sliced at him again. Samuel immediately dropped to the ground, evading her menacing
claws. Quickly, he stood back up and prepared for her next attack. Instead of looking, he waited, relaxing his mind and body. She was purposely leaving hints just to fool him. He closed his eyes and listened for a sign of her approach. He heard the rush of wind behind him and quickly turned around to face the propelling beast. Samuel raised the point of his sword straight up as she flew directly over his head. He felt his sword catch on Soraeka’s body, but her tail caught him as she went tumbling to the ground. Samuel was knocked flat on his back, but he quickly stood back up, determined to end this. He watched as Soraeka rolled and then slid to a stop. He ran after her, screaming a bloody war-cry.

Soraeka roared and tried to stand, but continued to fumble and fall. She tried over and over, but eventually she abandoned the cause. She lied down and rested her head against the cold, rocky ground, admitting to defeat. Samuel slowed his pace until he was walking and lowered his sword. He stood next to the massive, white dragon and looked solemnly across her underbelly. He had left a gash about two meters long that constantly seeped blood. No...

Tears fell from his cheeks. Samuel dropped to his knees and sulked. He reminisced about the memories that he and Soraeka shared, the affection they cherished. They were more than just friends, he realized, they were a part of each other; a part of a greater whole, but now, that was all over. Samuel ended it. Samuel killed her.

“Samuel...” Soraeka called out to him weakly. Her head was slightly tilted so she could look at him.

“Raeka...” Samuel rushed over to Soraeka and hugged her neck. “I’m sorry... so... so sorry... I didn't want this... I couldn't have... Sorry... sorry... sorry.”

A slight grin tugged at the dragon's cheek. “You have nothing to apologize for... You did what you... had to do...” Her breathing and speech was labored.

“Please... don't die, let me heal you.” A small hope lit his dark, depressed mind.

“We both know that it is t... too much.” Soraeka raised her paw and placed it on Samuel's back. She brought him into an awkward embrace and said, “Thank you.”

Samuel elicited a quiet whimper as he watched her eyes close and her head slowly lower to the ground. Her paw slowly slid off of his back, and her labored breathing ceased. “No!” He flung his body over the dragon's rough neck and lied there, letting depression
overwhelm him. Feelings of anger, hatred, and anguish coursed through his mind, enveloping him in a dark blanket of his seething emotions. He wanted to die; to have never existed. He closed himself off to everything but himself and his contempt. Time slowed to an agonizing crawl.

“She was one of my best servants...” A familiar voice penetrated the silence. “She was also the hardest to turn. Forcing her to abide by my will... It took so much effort, but once I finally found the right motive, she gave her allegiance to me in a heartbeat. Your death was the perfect motive.”

Vehement rage coursed through Samuel's body. He picked up his sword and whirled around, swinging with inhuman speed at Garidor's head. The mage caught the blade with his hand and smirked. It didn't leave a scratch. Garidor removed the sword from Samuel's grasp and used magic to throw him to the side. He dropped the sword and chuckled.

“Do you really think you can best me? Look around you... this... decimation is all because of me. I control hundreds of dragons, dragons that are willing to carry out my will and die for it. What do you have?”

Samuel grinned as he stood back up. “A determination.” He focused his mind on the essence of fire and released his magic. A fiery spiral coursed from his hand and blasted Garidor. He followed the stream of burning flames and withdrew the enchanted dagger from his belt. He went to stab Garidor before he could react, but as soon as the blade pierced him, he dissipated into smoke. Samuel quickly searched for him across the flat, rocky plain but he was as if he was never there. It was an illusion... that could use magic... impossible. Samuel looked back to Soraeka's motionless body and made a promise for her, “I will avenge you, no matter what cost.”