



# McFarlane's DRAGONS

The Fall of the  
Dragon Kingdom

## McFARLANE'S DRAGONS SERIES 5

This is how the end began.

Long before the fire and pain, before great cities were reduced to dust, before the first blood was drawn, the first battle fought, there was a whisper that flickered and grew, spreading, infecting, taking shape — transforming simple thought into action. This is how whole civilizations are destroyed. Not on the battlefield, because without the initial spark of conspiracy there would be no battle. But, instead, the end is shaped by the very beginning.

This is how the embers of dissent ignite into the flames of revolution.

## THE FALL OF THE DRAGON KINGDOM

## PRELUDE TO WAR: BOOK TWO

### CHAPTER I: THE FIRST CONSPIRACY

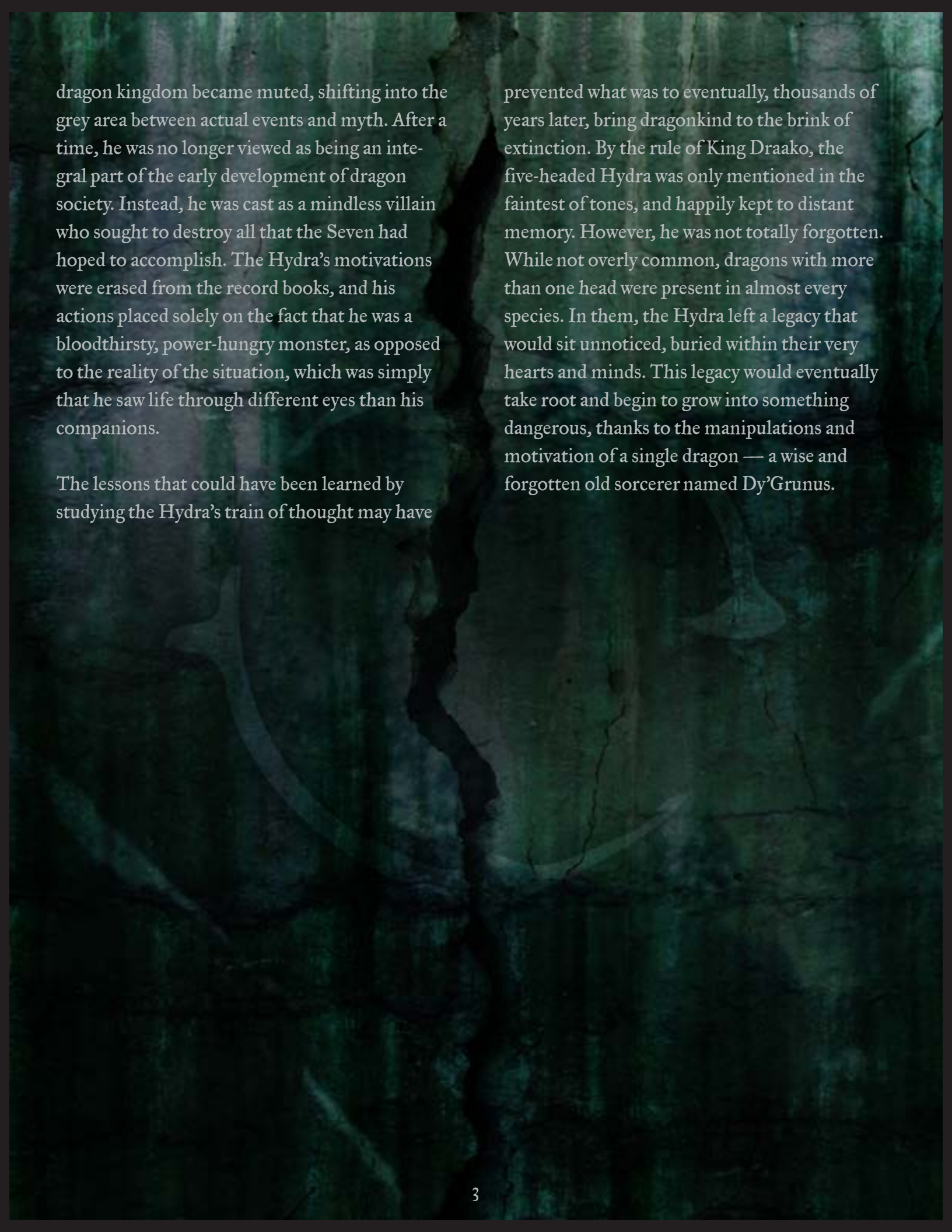
The seeds of destruction that would eventually bring an end to the vast dragon society were planted at the very dawn of the great beasts' rise to power. Dormant for tens of thousands of years, those seeds lay hidden in plain view, woven within the fabric of dragonkind's greatest lore — the story of the Seven Dragons of Destiny, the legendary tale of how the dragons first rose above their base instincts and became so much more than any other creature before or since. The key to the doom that would see the mighty beasts and their civilizations reduced to nothing more than myth was the infamous eighth Dragon of Destiny — the fearsome five-headed Hydra that challenged the ideals which would one day become the foundation of dragon life, and thus, life on Earth.

Eight dragons had found a mystical object, the Rune of Lo'gos, which, through some unknown force, affected them in such a way as to alter their very make-up. Suddenly, crystal-clear thought and understanding began to creep into their previously limited minds. In a matter of months, all eight evolved into something more than mere reptiles, learning to communicate and cooperate in a fashion that developed over time into a community — the eight working together to live, create, thrive.

Then a rift between seven and one began to form. When it was decided that they, as a group, should work to share their newfound existence with others of their kind, the Hydra objected. Always the most volatile of the group, the Hydra was of the belief that their superiority over all other life should be used to their advantage, and that they should work to rule the world as conquerors, not squander their gift on selflessness and the weak-minded notion that all should be treated as one.

A great conflict arose as the debate grew heated, and the Hydra turned on his seven brothers. An epic battle was fought. At its end, two dragons lay dead, and the Hydra was imprisoned within the walls of a forgotten volcano.

The five remaining dragons worked together to change the course of history, as they spread knowledge and language across the globe. Before long, the events leading to the discovery of the Rune of Lo'gos and the subsequent battle with the Hydra became legend, but over time the story took on a new life. Seven dragons were immortalized as saviors — not only of dragonkind, but of the world as well. The eighth dragon, the Hydra, was vilified, and his role in the beginning was downplayed — lessened, in an attempt to maintain order amongst the growing dragon populace. The Hydra's part in the creation of the



dragon kingdom became muted, shifting into the grey area between actual events and myth. After a time, he was no longer viewed as being an integral part of the early development of dragon society. Instead, he was cast as a mindless villain who sought to destroy all that the Seven had hoped to accomplish. The Hydra's motivations were erased from the record books, and his actions placed solely on the fact that he was a bloodthirsty, power-hungry monster, as opposed to the reality of the situation, which was simply that he saw life through different eyes than his companions.

The lessons that could have been learned by studying the Hydra's train of thought may have

prevented what was to eventually, thousands of years later, bring dragonkind to the brink of extinction. By the rule of King Draako, the five-headed Hydra was only mentioned in the faintest of tones, and happily kept to distant memory. However, he was not totally forgotten. While not overly common, dragons with more than one head were present in almost every species. In them, the Hydra left a legacy that would sit unnoticed, buried within their very hearts and minds. This legacy would eventually take root and begin to grow into something dangerous, thanks to the manipulations and motivation of a single dragon — a wise and forgotten old sorcerer named Dy'Grunus.

## CHAPTER II: GATHERING OF THE TROOPS

The seed had been growing in him for a long while before he finally got the nerve to act upon his inner desires. Dy'Grunus had left the crowded spires of the Throne City years earlier in an attempt to clear his head. He long had thoughts that verged on heresy and fought hard to keep them in check, never daring to voice his growing dissatisfaction with the inner workings of dragon society. But the time for silence was over. Dy'Grunus had been grooming a covert legion that could easily move about the corridors of the Throne City, gathering information and spreading dissent.

Having discovered many years prior what would become known as Mankind, Dy'Grunus had, at first, studied the tiny creatures from afar. Resembling apes, they had initially been nothing more than a curiosity. Then, over the course of many centuries, Dy'Grunus noticed something special as Man began to show signs of higher intelligence: adaptability, communication, community. To his amazement, Dy'Grunus realized he was watching the natural evolution of a species whose physical appearance was so much less than that of dragons, but whose mental capacity might very well rival that of the dragons themselves. Furthermore, to evolve at such a rate without the aid of the Rune of Lo'gos was unthinkable. Dragonkind had put every effort into sharing the Rune's strange powers with other lifeforms in hopes of creating other intelligent life on Earth, but the experiments had always failed. Yet in this far-off region, these almost insignificant beings

had not only made great strides in their aptitude for accepting and exerting change, they had done so on a wholly natural level, unlike the dragons who had gained their superiority through the powers of a mysterious outside force.

The questions this raised in Dy'Grunus' mind were very intriguing and cast a shadow of doubt over the previously held belief that dragons were indeed the most important cog in the wheel of life. Mankind went from primate to sophisticate without the support of the power of the Rune of Lo'gos. Could dragons have done the same? Had the Rune never been found, would dragonkind still have possessed the traits necessary to ascend to the cultural and intellectual heights they had reached over the past several thousand years? Or would they have remained mindless beasts, creatures like any other, biding their time upon the planet, until a truly dominant race sprung from the chaotic flow of life — a race able to change with the world around it, able to learn and grow and conquer, a race like Man?

Dy'Grunus had no answers for these questions, but that mattered little. The train of thought brought forth by these queries was more than enough to focus his gaze on a future far different than that posited by the great leaders of the dragon kingdom. It was his belief that should dragonkind maintain its present course, over time, the serenity of the world they had created would be shattered by chaos. After all, there was no way of knowing what the next day would hold. Even the mystical objects known as Looking

Orbs [stones similar to the almighty Rune of Lo'gos, but possessing a fraction of its power], which were used by the Sorcerer dragons to predict future events, could not give a precise view of tomorrow. Some believed otherwise, and clung dangerously to the visions gleaned through the haze of the orbs' translucent surface.

If dragonkind were to survive, and more importantly, thrive, it needed to be tested by a truly dangerous threat. Dy'Grunus could think of nothing more destructive than the possibility of a rival school of thought to alter the current way of life; an alternate basis for their society built on the philosophies of its greatest villain — the unmentionable Hydra. He had been secretly studying the stories of the Hydra since his youth when he was still an active member of the dragon community, before losing himself in seclusion. He had frequently made efforts to incite discus-

sion about what exactly the Hydra had been trying to accomplish and why. Dy'Grunus deeply believed that although all dragons were, at their core, servants of nature, that invariably an unexpected factor would enter into the world, causing conflict that could very well eradicate any life not prepared to defend itself.

Though they were small, Dy'Grunus saw humanity as the possible plague with which nature would knock dragonkind from its pedestal, but this did not puzzle him. On the contrary, he found the thought intriguing, and under the altruistic guise of assisting to guard his race against possible extinction, he conceived an experiment to ensure that dragonkind would be — for the first time since the Hydra, the first time since the dawn of their enlightenment — tested to the brink of annihilation.

## CHAPTER III: THE HUMAN PLAGUE

**F**or many months, they were as secretive as possible. Their master and teacher, Dy'Grunus, would have it no other way. Sneaking about the Throne City without notice, moving effortlessly through the shadows of dragon society, through cracks and crevices they crept. Small, minuscule bipedal creatures that scurried in stops and starts, making every effort to avoid contact with the great beasts that inhabited this magnificent metropolis.

Mankind had entered the dragon kingdom, and before long their influence would spread like disease.

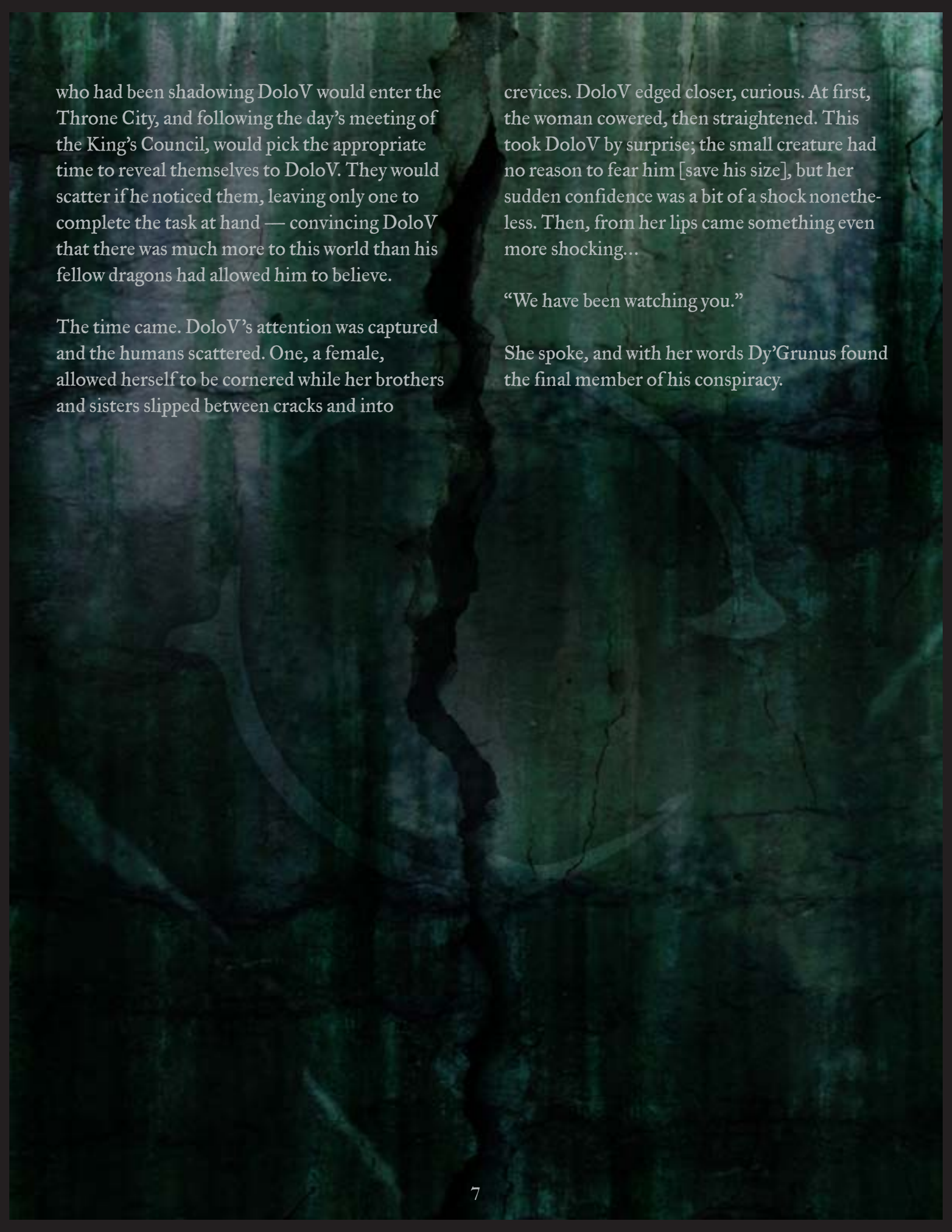
Always keeping to the periphery, the humans listened intently to many private conversations, and gathered every detail available. They would then return to their master's chamber to convey what they had learned. Painstaking notes were then taken; chronicling many aspects of the day-to-day lives of dragons that had been singled out for observation. One, a relatively young dragon named, DoloV, held a high place of honor in dragon society — he was a member of King Draako's inner circle of advisers. It had been noted that DoloV's youth and inquisitive nature had been on display more than once; he had questioned the decisions of the King's council. When word of this reached Dy'Grunus, he could not risk letting the opportunity pass to pull one of the King's most trusted over to his way of thinking. There was a revolution in the works,

and many key pieces needed to fall into place if all was to go as planned.

For months, a platoon of human spies followed DoloV's every move, reporting back to Dy'Grunus and his growing cadre of conspirators. The humans were careful to stay hidden while navigating the Throne City. Their growing presence in the world was still unnoticed by the majority of dragonkind, and Dy'Grunus had made it clear that he hoped to keep it that way for as long as possible. They did, however, slip into the periphery of DoloV's view from time to time in an effort to pique his curiosity. They never stayed long enough for their presence to be fully felt, but eventually, when the time was right, once Dy'Grunus felt comfortable, they would come forth and make themselves and their intent known to DoloV.

The information gathered by the humans served many purposes and was not simply a tool with which Dy'Grunus could recruit new acolytes. It also helped mark movements of those who were seen as key threats to the success of this great experiment, such as the King himself. Not willing to rush his grand design, Dy'Grunus and his growing army of both man and dragon alike plotted and bided their time. Eventually, there was only one dragon left to recruit, the one with the closest ties to the core of dragon power.

The events of the day had been planned and practiced to perfection. Seven of the humans



who had been shadowing DoloV would enter the Throne City, and following the day's meeting of the King's Council, would pick the appropriate time to reveal themselves to DoloV. They would scatter if he noticed them, leaving only one to complete the task at hand — convincing DoloV that there was much more to this world than his fellow dragons had allowed him to believe.

The time came. DoloV's attention was captured and the humans scattered. One, a female, allowed herself to be cornered while her brothers and sisters slipped between cracks and into

crevices. DoloV edged closer, curious. At first, the woman cowered, then straightened. This took DoloV by surprise; the small creature had no reason to fear him [save his size], but her sudden confidence was a bit of a shock nonetheless. Then, from her lips came something even more shocking...

“We have been watching you.”

She spoke, and with her words Dy'Grunus found the final member of his conspiracy.

## CHAPTER IV: THE PROPOSITION

**D**oloV entered the oval-shaped chamber and was stopped dead in his tracks by what he saw. The large room, carved deep into the base of a forested mountain far from the prying eyes of the Throne City, was adorned from floor to ceiling with the skulls, teeth and claws of what, at first glance, appeared to be hundreds of dragons. Each ornament shone brilliant, bleached white in the glow of the seven orbs that encircled the room. The row of spikes lining DoloV's spine bristled. He had listened to the talk of revolution, but before this moment had never really understood what the concept meant. For the first time he was afraid. It was an uncomfortable feeling, one he would grow increasingly familiar with as events progressed toward the ultimate destruction of the world he had always known.

Standing in the middle of the chamber, Dy'Grunus turned his attention from the orb he

had been peering into and focused a questioning glance toward DoloV.

"Welcome," Dy'Grunus offered, "Are you ready to do your part?"

DoloV stared into Dy'Grunus' eyes. The two stood silent for a moment, sizing each other up. Then, from pathways located on the other end of the chamber, dragons from four clans — a Scavenger, a Hunter, a Berserker and a Warrior - entered the room. Dy'Grunus motioned to them, "I ask you again, oh, great DoloV of the Komodo Clan, are you ready, with us, to force change upon the stagnant world we have all helped to create? Are you ready, with us, to rule the world?"

TO BE CONTINUED...