

# Obsession

*By Dragonien*

Not all kobolds are fanatics. In fact, most of them are little different than the peasants and serfs serving whatever local lord ruled over any given human settlement. They served and paid both tribute and respect to their local ruling lord and in exchange said lord helped manage their affairs and defend them from external threats. Dragons and kobolds were just a bit less formal about it most days, and more personal in their tribute and homage to their ruling 'lord'. Then again, there were still more than a few kobolds that truly did worship their dragon liege. Seeing them as some their better, as a higher being. As a god. Seeing the world as nothing but a plaything for their dragon masters and their own selves as little more than the lowly mortals granted the grace of their lord's presence and attention. Granted the honor of serving a divine-made-flesh.

Alkali was one such kobold.

His tribe was relatively small as far as kobolds went; less than two dozen of them all in total inhabited the expansive cave system running like veins through the Talon Mountain Range. Most of them simply wanted to get through their day to day lives, the most them having to look forward to being a particularly successful hunt that would mean more than just a few scraps of meat in their porridge that night. They didn't share Alkali's obsessive reverence for their dragon overlord. But soon they would. If Alkali had anything to say about it not just his tribe, but the whole world would soon be bowing down to the greatness of the one true draconic god of this world. All they needed was a little bit of help reaching their full potential. Alkali was more than eager to help give his master that push that he needed, the little spark of kindling that would set ablaze the flame of devotion for everyone else that he already held for his master. If he had his way, soon the whole world would be praising the name Dragonien.

Alkali gasped and panted breathlessly as he ran his way down the sharply-inclined tunnel that led down into the cavern housing the clan's settlement. Each frantic step in his barely controlled slide sent the large flares of skin that were his oversized ear-fins flopping around the sides of his head. when he dug his feet in to slow his descent his sharp, ivory claws skittered loudly across the smooth stone floor as he skidded to a stop at the bottom of the hill, the thick mass of his oversized tail flopping against the back of his ankles. Once he had fully slid to a stop and he took a second to steady himself, Alkali readjusted his arm's grip around the burlap sack he held in his arms and made a b-line straight for the little thatch hut that belonged to him. He'd barely made it halfway across the cavern before he heard the mutters beginning to start, more than a few heads peeking out from huts or around corners at the sound of his return. Rather than stop to return their stares or answer the obvious questions in their gazes, Alkali simply quickened his pace in hopes of reaching his home before anyone actually confronted him.

He didn't blame them. His hunting trip had lasted a good two days longer than it normally should have. It wouldn't have surprised him if they had already begun assuming something bad had happened to him and expecting never to see him again. Normally he would have been glad for the visible show of concern and relief that their questioning gazes had portrayed. Unfortunately he knew that the relief at his safe return would be quickly overshadowed by the contents of his arms very clearly not being the prizes from a successful hunt they would have desired and that would then lead to questions about what he DID bring back from his hunt and why it had taken so long. Neither of those questions he had any intention of sharing with them if he could help it. Just as he was about to push his way through the woven-grass curtain covering his front door a voice called out from behind him that made Alkali's whole body go rigid in sudden anxiety.

"Alky! You're back!"

Drak's cheerful voice rang like a bell through the cavern, ensuring the attention of anyone nearby that might have yet to notice his return certainly did now. Alkali didn't even have a chance to grab the edge of his hut's curtain before he all-but fell forward from the sudden weight of another kobold clinging to his back. Lean arms wrapped around his torso, partially constricting his arms in the process while a pair of thick legs wrapped around his middle as the flying kobold clung to Alkali upon impact. When Drak's caramel-colored muzzle peeked over Alkali's shoulder to shoot a goofy grin at him Alkali couldn't help but smile despite his anxiety.

"Hey Drak." Alkali greeted, squirming a bit to try to shrug the smaller kobold off of his back.

It took a few moments but eventually Drak's clinging full-body hug relaxed and he slid back down to the ground behind Alkali. Though free of the smaller kobold's grasp, Alkali made no move to turn around and face his fellow kobold. Unfortunately for him this made the smaller kobold immediately, if good-naturedly, suspicious.

"Oooh whatcha got there?" Drak asked eagerly, tugging on the oversized mass of alkali's tail. His nostrils flared for a moment, testing the air before grinning deviously at his clan mate. "I don't smell meat. You found something else hunting, didn't you? Did you find some new shinies?"

Alkali reflexively tighten his arms around the cloth wrapped parcel held protectively against his chest, that being all the confirmation that Drak needed. Instantly he was trying to climb around Alkali's side to see what it was that the Grey kobold had. Clumsy claws pulled and tugged at Alkali's hips, arms, and hands in an attempt to both turn the larger kobold to face him and pull his arms protective posture open. Unfortunately no matter how much he scrambled, tugged, and jerked at Alkali he wasn't able to make his clanmates so much as budge. Not that he really seemed to be perturbed or surprised by the outcome, more entertained by the excitement of whatever surprise and secret Alkali had rather than offended or suspicious at Alkali's refusal to share.

Alkali, for his part had always felt a little bad that he was glad Drak was the runt of the clan. Even among kobolds who rarely got within jumping distance of 5 foot in height, Drak had to raise his arms and jump just to scrape his fingers against the four-foot mark. Alkali wasn't much better, barely being 4 ft tall when he stood on his tiptoes but at least, thanks to Drak, he wasn't the shortest kobold in their Clan. And now, he was enjoying the additional benefits of being accosted by one of the few kobolds and their clan that didn't have a chance of physically overpowering him and revealing his secret.

Despite the smaller kobold's inability to pull his arms open he was still making a scene. So, rather than fighting against the inevitable, Alkali decided to just let Drak in on the secret. Abruptly unwinding one of his arms from around his prize alkali roughly grabbed the back of Drak's tunic and gave him a hard shove forward, sending the smaller kobold tumbling head over tail through the door of his Hut. After giving one quick look around to ensure that, while he couldn't hope no hadn't heard, at least that no one was approaching, he quickly hustled in after Drak. As much as he was concerned but the others might disapprove or even try to stop him, alkali couldn't help but admit that part of him was a little glad that Drak had inadvertently inserted himself into the situation. After all, alkali was proud of his ingenious little plan and he was happy for an opportunity to have someone he could brag too.

Once inside alkali double checked the little lash of rope that held the flap of his Hut closed before flopping down in front of the upside-down pile of Limbs that was Drak's dazed self. With reverence and care that normally would be reserved for something as fragile as glass rather than a steel-hard lump of rock and Metal alkali gently removed the melon sized chunk of ore from the protective wrapping he had been carrying it in. The moment it was out in the Open, Drak scrambling up into a kneeling position, leaning close and letting his nostril spread wide to suck in the tantalizing scent of the foreign metal. Even Alkali, who was the one that had found and brought the item here still momentarily lost himself staring at it. The combination of a kobold's

inherent attraction to shiny things mixing with the tantalizing Scent of a mineral that they, being creatures that spent almost their entire lives underground, had never smelled before made the object's presence almost intoxicating. The metal was strange to look at. If one were to describe it, it wouldn't look much different than pure silver. The issue was that, while it looked silver, it had a strange rainbow hue to it that could only be described as an aura around it. The metal itself was pure silver looking, but no matter what angle you looked at it there was a chorus of multiple colors that seemed not to actually be a part of the metal but simply surrounding it, giving it a truly otherworldly look. When they finally came to their senses an indeterminate amount of time later, Drak started to reach a clot about to touch the object only to have the back of his hand sharply slept away. Still too immersed in excitement, awe, as well as the general lack of concern from his simpler personality, rather than being offended or annoyed Drak turned his head to look up at Alkali.

"What is it?" He asked in a hushed tone, as if afraid if he spoke too loud it would somehow disturb the object. The question brought a wicked, shark tooth smile to Alkali's muzzle.

"Dragonien's dinner."

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It hadn't been hard for the two of them to sneak their way over to the cooking pit where they prepared Dragonien's meals. It wasn't like anyone really kept guard over the place. By the time any intruders had gotten this far they already would have had to have gone through most of their settlement. Besides, who would bother stealing things from their kitchen? By now their clan matron, Kala, was most likely taking her afternoon nap while leaving the day's stew to simmer for several hours until ready for Dragonien's evening meal. Instructing Drak to keep a watch and make noise if anyone approached, Alkali scampered himself as quietly as he could over to the cooking pit.

The cooking pit they used for Dragonien's meals was utterly massive. An enormous bowl of iron so heavy that even when it was empty it took four kobolds to move it about, eight of them when it was full. It was big enough both him and Drak could have curled up and slept comfortably inside of it. Were it not currently filled almost to the brim with a plethora of diced meats, vegetables, bones, herbs, spices and who knew what else the matron put in the stew to keep their liege happy with her cooking. Once he had taken a quick glance over his shoulders to ensure one last time he was alone he carefully pulled out the large lump of ore. Looking around for a moment, Alkali quickly spotted what he was looking for: A small pick-axe next to a pile of rocks and precious metals. The little 'accents' to their dragon liege's stew that the matron added in every night. Like most dragons, Dragonien ate metals to help keep his scales and body healthy and strong. All dragons' bodies digested metals that they ate and used those materials to strengthen their bodies and scales. That was typically why dragons were so valuable in the rare instances that hunters or adventurers could actually take one down. Their bodies from scales to bones to muscle fibers and organs absorbed the best and most desirable elements from all the gold, silver, steel, iron, and any other mineral and material they devoured; making them some of the most durable and valuable materials to make armor and weapons out of.

Careful to only break it apart in the rocky areas, Alkali gently tapped away at his little chunk of ore. Bit by bit he broke it into smaller pieces, the largest no bigger than his fist yet each carrying multiple chunks of the glittering, rainbow-silver metal. Once he had done so and returned the tool to its proper place, he carried the armful of ore-chunks over to the cauldron and simply dumped them inside. With one last look around to ensure he hadn't left anything out of place, Alkali quickly scampered off to where Drak stood guard.

All that was left to do now was wait and see if his plan worked.

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Alkali had made sure he was one of the ones in the lead to bring Dragonien his daily meal, eager to see his plan come to fruition as well as concerned that something might go wrong. He was so eager and excited he didn't even pay attention to the grumbling of the other kobolds behind him as he took position at the front of one of the two long wooden poles that were set underneath either of the handles of The Cauldron so that they could team lift it and carry it on their shoulders. Everyone always hated walking behind him when carrying The Cauldron as his over-sized tail dragged on the ground, simply too big and heavy to naturally support its own weight without him making a conscious effort to lift it. Whoever was behind him was having to pay extra attention to ensure they didn't trip over it as they walked. When they finally entered the main cavern Alkali couldn't help but pause for a moment in awe as he stared up at the, in his biased opinion, majestic beast in front of him.

Dragonien was lithe and lean for a dragon, a testament to a less-than-abundant diet for years. He wasn't malnourished by any means, but there was no excess fat on him at all, leaving the strong, wiry predator's muscles on full display. Thick, powerful haunches meant to help push off the ground in powerful leaps to help him get airborne supported by more flexible forelegs with opposable thumbs that could easily manipulate objects as well as any human hands. The two massive, fleshy sails for his wings were tucked neatly against his sides yet Alkali knew were they to spread they could have nearly brushed the opposing walls of the broad cavern. All of which was dyed a bright crimson color thanks to the smooth scales that covered him from head to toe; so fine and supple to the touch that they felt more like soft hide than interlocking armor plates. The thick black mane of fur running down from the top of his head along the length of his spine rustled as his somewhat-rectangular muzzle arched up at the end of his long, serpentine neck to stare down at the approaching procession of kobolds. Dragonien wasn't exactly massive by dragon standards, but even a modestly sized dragon such as himself was more than enough to leave any kobold staring up nervously. He was roughly the size of an elephant, at least around the torso and legs, but with the extra length of his neck and tail as well as his wings his body took up a good deal more space and seemed even larger than one of the compact, ponderous grey beasts might have appeared.

Even if he wasn't big enough to eclipse the sky with his wings or crush cottages beneath his stride, he was still more than big enough to swallow a kobold whole with little difficulty.

Claws the size of daggers scraped against the stone floor as the dragon pushed himself to his feet and slowly strode over towards the kobolds. Once upright, the small pile of treasure that was his horde was revealed, a few lingering bits of golden and silver coinage and a few small gemstones falling from where they had momentarily stuck to the underside of his belly. Again, as with everything else about him, Dragonien's horde was modest; neither impressive nor disappointing. It had actually grown slightly from their recent trading with a few wandering merchants Alkali had convinced to trade with the clan, selling a few of his cast-off scales for some of the things the kobolds couldn't easily acquire such as cloth and salt and trading a few more for some precious coinage to add to his hoard. One of the many acts Alkali had been particularly proud of accomplishing both in his desire to improve life for, and upraise, his dragon liege and those that the clan grudgingly appreciated and helped them put up with his quirky fanaticism. As much as Alkali had worked to improve things for them, such as developing traps that greatly increased their hunting yields in hopes of lessening the food shortages during the winter, he still felt it wasn't nearly enough. His dragon deserved so much more. Alkali just hoped this latest plan would finally give Dragonien everything Alkali wished for him.

The cauldron had barely been lowered to the ground before the dragon's cart-sized muzzle had lowered down to sniff at it. More than one of the surrounding kobolds scampered out of the way in sudden, reflexive fear of the approaching predator's maw. No one wanted to get between a hungry dragon and his meal. Alkali, of course, happily stood in place beside the cauldron with his eyes wide in gleeful wonder as they always were when watching Dragonien. The moment the dragon's head and neck had lowered down to the cauldron he

scampered over the press against the side of the dragon's jaw. His lanky arms stretched as wide as they could around the circumference of Dragonien's neck. The unexpected embrace caused the red beast to pause for a moment, halfway through burying his muzzle into the pot, as his gaze swiveled to look out of the corner of his eye at the daring kobold even as the edge of his lips ticked upwards into the faintest hint of a smirk. When he spoke, his voice was a low rumble, his words slurring just the tiniest bit as if his voice were simple a constant growl, he was shaping into phrases rather than speaking specific words individually.

"Audacious little thing, aren't you?" he growled, his words only making the kobold cling all the tighter to his neck.

"Of course, sir! One must be daring to ensure you receive the proper praise you deserve!"

This caused the dragon to smirk much more visibly now. Rather than respond, he simply lifted his head up slightly as it pushed back into the cauldron. The movement caused Alkali to lift slightly off the ground, refusing to let go of his dragon master even as their neck raised up. When the dragon gulped down a particularly large mouthful of his meal, Alkali actually felt the powerful throat muscles he was clinging too bulge and swell outwards, pushing him away an inch or so as the dragon's meal made its way down the serpentine neck. It was a game Dragonien played often with the kobold that some might have called insane or borderline-suicidal, Alkali visibly shuddering in glee as the action brought forth dancing fantasies of it being him sliding down that throat rather than an assortment of vegetables and butchered meat. The idea of becoming one with his dragon, becoming part of that massive and majestic beast sometimes almost overpowered Alkali's urges to uplift and pamper the dragon. and Dragonien knew it. he was probably more indulgent in Alkali's quirks than Alkali deserved, none of the other kobolds thought they could get away with even half of the things Alkali did. Then again none of them DID even half of the things Alkali did, audacious or otherwise.

When the pot was finally empty, Alkali released his grip on the dragon's throat and fell back to the ground. Dragonien, following his cue, lazily plopped back on his haunches with just enough force that the cavern floor shook slightly even as his serpentine tongue still slithered across his lips to gather any remnants of the particularly tasty stew. When he felt a gurgle in his belly, the dragon's contented smile morphed into a wicked grin. His throat and neck undulated for several seconds as if trying to work something stuck inside free. Then, slowly, his neck arched back down until his cart-sized muzzle was hovering just above the ground; directly in front of the now very nervous and flustered little grey kobold still before him. Then, he belched.

Alkali swore he could actually see a bulge of gas and air traveling up the length of the dragon's neck and hear the telltale rumblings a split second before Dragonien's jaws parted to release the booming sound. The sheer pressure of the forced exhale, mixed with his surprise and sock caused the poor little kobold to fall onto his backside, eyes wide and body trembling. Though the trembles were from anything but fear, as shown by the manic, nearly crazed grin on the kobold's muzzle.

"Whatever she did to the soup today was excellent. Make sure Kala keeps up the good work. You're useful in many ways, little one, but I dread the day you subject me to your cooking again."

With that, the dragon turned away from the kobold and lumbered back towards the small pile of gold and gems that he used as his bed, contently curling himself up for another nap. Once Alkali had recovered from the dragon's teasing actions, he pushed himself up to his feet; ready to help drag the cauldron back out. To his surprise the others had already removed it, not needing all 8 of them to lug the thing around when it was empty. Apparently, they hadn't had much interest in sticking around for the dragon's meal, some of them still probably harboring fears of being eaten. Fears that Alkali felt were totally unjustified. Dragonien had never eaten any of them, except those couple of times when things had been particularly tight during the winter!

Regardless, Alkali was pleased that Dragonien hadn't seemed to notice anything amiss with his meal. If anything, he seemed to have enjoyed the taste! Now it was just a matter of time for Alkali to see if his plan worked. With a happy smile plastered across his muzzle, Alkali quickly scampered his way out of the main cave chamber and towards his hut to retrieve his hunting gear. He had a feeling that they were going to need a lot more food before long.

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Alkali was very glad he had planned ahead and increased their hunting trips. He had nearly doubled the number of small-game traps they had in the forest at the foot of the mountain and they had been bringing in half as much large game from their hunting trips as they usually did. Yet it still wasn't enough. It had become apparent to everyone, except perhaps Dragonien himself, that his appetite had been gradually and exponentially increasing in intensity with each passing day. It had started with a simple request for a second pot to be cooked for him on the second day, but by the fifth day he had begun flying out on his own hunting trips in between meals to try to sate his ever-growing appetite. Several of the other kobolds had begun to grow nervous as the dragon's appetite grew, afraid that if they didn't have enough for him to eat he might decide that one of them would suffice. Thankfully, in part due to the desperation drawn from that fear, they were able to mostly keep up with his needs with their own increase in hunting. At this rate they knew that the forest might end up over-hunted and leave them short food further down the line but that seemed a small price to pay for the assurance that they wouldn't end up on the menu.

None of that mattered to Alkali, though. What mattered was that it was working. It was all he could do to hide his glee around the others or Dragonien himself when he started to notice the changes. It was little things at first, things that he was sure no one else would have noticed unless they were looking for it like he was. Things like how Dragonien's muzzle seemed to not quite fit into the broad opening of their stew cauldron as easily as it had before or how his hoard seemed visibly smaller around him despite it not having lost any of the riches within. Dragonien was getting bigger. Slowly but surely growing larger and larger with each meal, with every passing day. Just as Alkali had hoped, Dragonien's body seemed to have taken on the same properties of Incredulum, the rare magical mineral he had come across and put in his food. It was an amazing material that not only was incredibly flexible and powerful when forged into weaponry or armor but, when suffused with magical energy in its raw form, it was able to actually convert nearby materials into more of itself. With a bit of outside help, it was a self-propagating metal. And now that self-propagating property was a part of Dragonien: a dragon who was naturally infused with a constant flow of his own magic. Alkali had created the first Incredulum Dragon: A dragon who grew in both size and power the more that he devoured.

Unfortunately, Alkali had drastically underestimated the long-term effects of his plan. He had expected the dragon to just get a bit larger and more powerful with each meal. What he hadn't counted on was the dragon's growing appetite and increasing absorption speed. By the end of that first week he swore he could actually SEE the dragon visibly growing fractionally larger as he ate, as if the material dropped into his stomach were being absorbed the moment it hit his innards. They'd had to start widening the main tunnel entrances when they noticed how much of a squeeze it was becoming for Dragonien to get himself in and out of the mountain, something they hadn't expected to have to do for years if at all. In barely a week, Dragonien had swollen nearly half again his normal size: a decade's worth of growth for a mature dragon. For the dragon, himself, he seemed oddly ambivalent to the changes. He clearly knew he was growing and that his appetite had changed, that much was for sure. He didn't so much get hungry anymore as it was that he could just ALWAYS eat. Eating, itself, had become a bit of a vice for the dragon. Whatever process his body was undergoing that causes it to absorb everything that vanished down his gullet would flood Dragonien's body with so many endorphins he'd be near-shivering in bliss by the time he got done with each meal. That, more than anything else was what had begun to worry the other kobolds. It wasn't that they were afraid that he might get too hungry and eat one of them. It was

that they were afraid he might get bored, eat one of them, and LIKE eating one of them so much that he wouldn't stop.

Unfortunately, halfway through that second week, the storm hit.

Thunderstorms like that usually came to the valley once or twice a year with winds strong enough to rip a mature dragon such as Dragonien from the air with ease, lightning strikes that even a magical beast like a dragon couldn't survive and such heavy rainfall even the keen vision of an aerial predator wouldn't be able to see more than a dozen feet in front of them at any given time. Thunderstorms like that meant they were all trapped in their caves.

Thankfully Dragonien controlled himself, none of his precious kobolds vanished down his gullet, though even Drak had begun to nervously hang around Alkali in hopes that Dragonien wouldn't eat his favorite or one of his favorite's friends. The dragon had grown visibly uncomfortable though, the short rations they had to offer while they waited out the storm not so much that they didn't fill him as they didn't sate what Alkali was starting to suspect was an addiction to the sensation of eating; of growing. When Alkali had come to console his dragon, nestled up in the crook of Dragonien's clawed foreleg and head, he could tell there was an, if quickly dismissed, conscious desire to eat him in Dragonien's head. The trail of drool leaking down the dragon's jaw didn't help the matter any. It wasn't that he was hungry. Dragonien no longer required food. No, Eating was no longer a necessity for Dragonien. Instead, it was a vice, an addiction. As Alkali lay there, stroking the corner of Dragonien's muzzle, that manic gleam perked up in his eyes again. He was already so excited to see the Incredulum had done far beyond anything he had hoped for, and knew that at this rate another couple of weeks of eating like this and Dragonien would be a match for any of the neighboring Dragons. But that wasn't what Alkali wanted. He didn't want to even the playing field, to give Dragonien a fighting chance. He wanted his dragon on top, the undisputed master of everything before him. He wanted Dragonien to be so utterly powerful and unstoppable that he wouldn't just be a match for any of the elder dragons. He wanted Dragonien to be able to squash the elder dragons like a bug beneath one of his talons.

With that fanatical thought bringing a hungry expression to Alkali's muzzle to match Dragonien's own, he began to whisper sweet nothings to his dragon. Words of praise and adoration of his strength, his beauty, of his holdings. Complimenting his hoard, embellishing the prosperity of his kobold tribe and, finally, the ample abundance of the livestock herds of the outlying villages in his territory. At that last one, Alkali heard a deep rumble of a growl well up from the dragon in approval. Not the usual growl that came from deep within his throat, but a different sound. One that Alkali knew less well, but looked forward to so much more since all of this started.

The growl of Dragonien's stomach.

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Alkali may have miscalculated. This was the thought that filtered through all of the chaos around him in a strange moment of clarity. Even as he thought this, he and the other kobolds of his tribe were making a mad dash towards the exit. The walls shook around them, bits of rock and debris falling down from the cave roof overhead as earthquakes seemed to shake the entire mountain. Cracks split open in the floor beneath them and more than one kobold tripped on them, only to be grabbed by one of their companions and bodily hauled with the rest of them towards the exit. Those that dared take the risk of looking over their shoulder could already see one of the cave's inner walls collapsing, giving way to a new wall of red-scaled hide. Their cooking pit, their huts and homes, their little makeshift armory, and everything else of their tribe's home found itself mercilessly bulldozed over by that tide of living flesh that seemed as if it were reaching out towards them. As one, the

kobolds tumbled their way down the slope as they burst from the entrance of the cave. Thankfully the inclined cliff-face was only a couple dozen feet tall and was inclined enough that they came away with little more than bruises by the time they had reached the foot of the mountain below. None of them were ready to feel any real sense of relief though. Together they all pushed themselves to their feet and turned to stare up at the mountain; their home. Or at least, what had once been their home.

More cracks split across the face of the mountain, these deep crevices deep enough to fall into rather than the small splintering cracks they had tripped over when inside. The entire land mass seemed to be shaking, sending small avalanches of rock tumbling down various facets of the mountain face. Then, finally they all saw it. The top of the mountain seemed to bulge upwards, rock shoving out and crumbling in a growing cloud of dust and debris. It was like watching a volcanic eruption but in slow motion. From the cloud of dust, a mass of red burst forth. Instead of the glowing brown-orange light of lava, however, they found themselves staring up at a mass of glittering crimson scales. The visage was so familiar to all of them, having seen it for their entire lives in the tribe, yet somehow so alien from this vantage point. It was Dragonien, the same draconic beast they had served and followed for years, but drawn up to such a scale that most of the kobolds struggled to even truly comprehend the difference in proportion. What looked like pebbles bouncing off of the dragon's cheek and jaw from this distance in reality must have been boulders as big, if not bigger, than most of the kobolds present! Yet even as they watched his head emerge from the top of the mountain those with keen enough sight could see the truly concerning thing. Those pebbles bounced once or twice off of his hide, then vanished. Not falling out of sight, but rather hitting against his hide and then just... no longer being there, abruptly pulling into the dragon's hide itself. Few of them saw the phenomena and fewer still comprehended it. But only Alkali knew fully what was happening.

#### The Incredulum.

It hadn't just made whatever the dragon ate absorb into himself. Once it had fully worked through the dragon's system it had become part of his body like any other metal wood; suffusing everything from his scales and bone, to his muscles and even his blood. He really and truly had become the world's first Incredulum dragon. And, at this rate, Alkali thought he might be the last. Dragonien's body no longer absorbed whatever it ate to make more of himself. Now, his body absorbed whatever it TOUCHED to make more of himself...!

And he was currently touching a whole lot of the mountain.

As they sat there and stared, the little kobold tribe got a front row view of the birth of the first true Incredulum dragon. Watching as he burst forth from the mountain like an absurd upscale of a hatchling ripping itself out of its eggshell. The front of the mountain seemed to explode outwards as forearms thick enough that they alone would have filled the main tunnel of the kobold's cave tore free from the mountain and swiped away huge swaths of stone and rock. Even as they did, some of the debris seemed to sink into his hide and vanish only to make those already monstrous forelimbs even more massive by comparison. When they were free, the two limbs slammed down to either side of the mountain's base, crushing more than a dozen trees beneath his forepaws. One of said forepaws landed only a few dozen yards from the gathered kobolds with enough force that every single one of them fell back on their ass from the resulting quake. All of them stared in a mixture of wide-eyed amazement and horror at the sight of the enormous appendage; as if not believing it to be real. Even as they did, they saw the digits of the paw bulge then surge forward a good two or so yards deeper into the forest as the paw, and the limb it was attached too surged larger along with the rest of the dragon. The sharp crack of splintering tree trunks filled the air as the dragon's digits bulldozed several more trees out of its path to make room for itself, yet they could only sit there and stare in awe. Their attention snapped back to the dragon at large when the light around them dimmed like a thick bank of clouds had rolled in to hinder the sunlight. When they looked up though, a few of the kobolds that had risen back to their feet fell back onto their asses once more out of sheer disbelief and shock.



Dragonien's wings had finally burst forth from the mountain along with his upper body and the enormous leathery appendages were spread wide across the horizon. Hundreds of feet wide, each of the two enormous sails of flesh stretched out in either direction from where the dragon still sat half-buried within the remains of the mountain. The single beat of their enormous mass to shake the debris off of them had created a gale that blew more than half of the dust and dirt in the air away, better revealing him in all his enormity. Yet the light casting across the forest at the foot of the mountain had darkened, taking on a blood-crimson hue as it filtered through the thick membrane of Dragonien's wings. There was no mountain anymore, no mass of rock and stone jutting up to the sky. Instead, there was a dragon in its place. A living mountain of flesh and bone. As this newly born titan swung his head back and forth to survey both the land and his new perspective of it, the little kobolds all-but-forgotten down by a paw big enough to squash the entire tribe in a single step stared in abject disbelief back up at him as Dragonien's lips curled into a near-manic grin that concerned many of the kobolds how similar it was to Alkali's own well-known expression. More than a few of them turned their attention to the little gray kobold who hadn't taken his eyes off of Dragonien from the moment his head had first emerged from the mountain. All of them save for Alkali winced though, when Dragonien spread his jaws wide and let loose a triumphant bellow of a roar that literally shook the ground beneath them from the sheer volume of it.

Down by his side, the smallest of them nervously tugged on the hem of Alkali's leather tunic. Wide, golden eyes stared up at Alkali filled with too many conflicting emotions to have a coherent thought behind them. Drak's voice was quiet, almost a whisper and near inaudible after the booming thunder of Dragonien's roar.

"Alky what have we... what have you done?"

As if mirroring his dragon, Alkali's lips slowly twisted back into their own manic grin. One that matched the gleam of obsessive near-madness in his eyes as he turned to Drak. Then, seeing that the question was mirrored on the face of most of his tribemates that seemed to have picked up on Drak's implication that Alkali was somehow responsible for this, his grin grew that much wider.

"What have I done?" he repeated the question at them. Then, turning his head back to stare up at the titan of a dragon who even now was still slowly growing in small fits and bursts as Dragonien worked to pull himself out of the remnants of his mountain.

"I created a God."

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The world had no chance against Dragonien.

From the moment he had emerged from the mountain he had already been the biggest living thing on the planet. The next largest elder dragon would have been little more than a sparrow to the crimson titan. The dragons surrounding his territory had been smart and had teamed up into a loose coalition of over a dozen of their number to challenge him. Such a flight of dragons could have decimated any kingdom on the continent without even breaking a sweat. Yet for all their forethought and intelligence at teaming up from the start, their fundamental belief had been incredibly misguided. Even together, they'd had no chance. As the mountainous red beast had slowly lumbered his way across the landscape, their attacks hadn't even been noticed for the first few moments after they had begun to assault him. Fire breath that could melt rock into slag, ice breath that could flash freeze an entire lake, and bursts of exhaled lightning that could smash entire castles to molten rubble peppered Dragonien's hide with as much effect as throwing sand at someone's back had. They hadn't even so

much as singed one of his scales. Even when they attacked the more sensitive flesh of his wings, all it did was seem to annoy the behemoth. That had been what finally got his attention. He'd swung his head around to stare up at the cloud of what at first he had thought were birds before seeming to remember his new scale and squinting to recognize them as fellow dragons. Not that he felt he could really count him among their number anymore. When he saw their pitiful size, then realized they had been attacking him and he hadn't even noticed, that manic grin returned to his muzzle once more.

Aiming his muzzle at them, Dragonien had spread his jaws wide in preparation of his own attack. To the surprise of the other dragons, especially the ones that were at least familiar with Dragonien and knew him to be of a fire-lineage, no flame or molten magma burst forth from his open jaws. Instead, the air in front of him seemed to momentarily still before as the wind began to rustle around the crowd of dragons in a new direction. It was already too late when they finally realized the wind wasn't a natural air current at all. It was Dragonien inhaling. Whatever magics had made him into such a monster had replaced his breath weapon with something else. Even as they began to desperately beat their wings against the current the dragons got their first real look at what Dragonien had become, what he could do. Slowly, but surely his body was beginning to expand again. Inch after inch of newfound size, minuscule amounts on his scale but enough that they were able to recognize it, piled on to his titanic form. Yet his breath never stopped as the dragons found it increasingly difficult to resist the suction he was producing. He never stopped to exhale, never stopped to taunt them or offer them mercy. He just kept inhaling as seconds dragged on to minutes, his body converting even the gasses and particles in the air into newfound mass. He no longer needed to breath, no longer needed to eat. But he was going to enjoy eating these pint-sized elder dragons.

The last thing some of the dragons saw as they desperately beat their wings to futilely resist the wind current was the crowd of little specks nestled safely atop Dragonien's head, right where the thick mane of his hair started. The last thing they saw, was a tribe of kobolds, so minuscule they were almost invisible atop the enormity of Dragonien, led by a gray-skinned kobold grinning maniacally and waving them away to their fate. Then they were gone, vanishing into the cavernous maw of the dragon to be swallowed down and absorbed into himself. So much for his rival dragons.

The mortal kingdoms fared no better.

As Dragonien lumbered his way across the countryside, taking bites out of mountains or licking up entire herds of cattle from villages he passed, the human kingdoms sent their best warriors to fight him. Griffin riders were inhaled with even less effort than the dragons had been, entire armies of armored knights were either completely ignored at best, or vanished beneath a footstep that could cover an entire village. But their biggest mistake had been the mages. When Dragonien had approached one of the human capitals, their strongest sorcerers and wizards raised a valiant power to smite the offending monster approaching them. Calling forth a blast of magic so powerful it could have leveled the entire capital into a smoking crater. When they had cast it upon the dragon, though, they did not get the explosive end to the threat that they had expected or hoped for. When the blast of power hit the dragon, rather than obliterating him like he had hoped, he began to absorb it. Like all Incredulum, magic power had to be applied for its absorption and transitive properties to activate. As a dragon, Dragonien naturally had magic inherently running through him, keeping this effect active all the time. But now, with the outside addition of an exponential amount of additional magic...

Dragonien's paws abruptly began to sink into the earth, creating increasingly large craters around each of them. It wasn't due to his sheer weight (though by now he was heavy enough that each footstep he took left a small lake-sized footprint in its path). Rather, his body's new absorptive ability was suddenly pushed into overdrive to the point that even Dragonien himself was no longer able to fully control it, meaning everything that was touching him was now being absorbed into his body, including the very ground itself. It was all he could do to keep his now out-of-control body from absorbing the crowd of kobolds perched atop his head as his

whole form simply exploded outwards. Air, clouds, the rock beneath his feet, even the ambient magic in the air found itself being vacuumed into the dragon as his body absorbed it all like a dried-out sponge suddenly dropped in a pool of water. He had already been well over a mile tall to the shoulder just from his escape from the mountain yet within seconds he was passing two miles, then three with no signs of stopping; leaving his previous size looking puny and insignificant in comparison. Those below in the human capital were in an absolute panic, right up until the walls of their city crumbled into dust only to be pulled into the toe claw of one of Dragonien's paw as its growth bulldozed and absorbed the entire settlement.

Bigger and bigger he grew, his mind so overloaded in the blissful wash of power and growth that he was experiencing that all he could do was grin stupidly with his tongue hanging out of his lips. His body teetered forward and simply collapsed down to the ground, his monstrous mass stretching itself across the landscape like a cat laying out in a sunbeam. Unfortunately, this meant that much more of him was making contact with the ground, thus meaning that much more of the ground was being sucked into and absorbed by him. Villages, farmland, forests, mountains, entire kingdoms soon found themselves being sucked into the dragon's body. Entire civilizations simply watched a wall of red stretch across their horizon before rushing at them like a tidal wave, everything and everyone simply atomizing as the mass of whatever was in the dragon's path was disassembled then reassembled into more of him. At some point he became so impossibly massive and was growing at such a prodigious rate that it didn't even register to the people and animals when they were absorbed. One second they were there and the next there was just Dragonien.

Just Dragonien.

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Alkali happily made his way up the grassy slope towards their village, a string of rabbits draped over one shoulder that he had collected from his traps. Upon cresting the hill, he saw Drak and the others already waving at him happily, eager for the return of both him and more importantly the meat for the evening's meal. With a contented sigh, Alkali set the string of game down on the ground near the cooking pit so the butcher and matron could get to work cooking the evening's meal. After giving the others a cursory wave and greeting in return, he retired back to his own little hut on the top of the hill they now called home. Flopping back into his hammock, Alkali looked out of the small window of his hut towards the sky with a smile plastered on his face. Admiring the shame and swirl of the wispy clouds overhead and the way they partially obscured the red sky above. The gleam of blue that was their new 'sun' shimmered slightly, and for a split-second Alkali shivered in glee at the thought of it looking down directly at him in particular.

It had been a few weeks since they had moved to their new home, with everyone finally getting settled in to their new life. Their old lives were gone, their old world was gone but they were still here. They preserved where all else had become part of the greater whole. Part of their god. Part of Dragonien. Now they relaxed, living out a happy if simple existence in their own private little slice of paradise. The last fragment of their old world, a beautiful couple hundred miles of forested valley they got to call all their own. Remnant, they had come to call it. Their new world clutched in the careful claws of their dragon as he drifted his way through the endless void of space looking for his next meal. Alkali may not have meant it quite as literally as it had ended up, but he had truly accomplished what he had said he meant to do. He had created a new god. A god that now literally held their world in the palm of his hand, who provided it light from the reflection of distant stars and suns gleaming off of his eye.

Dragonien may have greedily devoured everything else the world had to offer, absorbing it into himself until rather than a planet flourishing with life and magic there had only been a planet sized dragon. But a dragon's greed is paramount, and their hoards are the stuff of legend. The rarest and most valuable objects were

all that were worthy of being part of a dragon's hoard. And now Alkali was Dragonien's in the most literal sense. Him and his other kobolds no longer the dragon's servants or attendants. Rather he, his kin, and the land of Remnant were all that remained of Dragonien's hoard. The rarest and most precious thing that their entire world had: All that was left of it.

With that thought bringing a happy sigh to Alkali's lips he rolled over in his hammock to take a lazy afternoon nap. As he did the eye in the sky seemed to shift and look off into the distance, far beyond what any of them would be able to see past the atmosphere left on Remnant. Alkali drifted off to a sleep filled with dreams of growing dragons while his own dragon set his eyes on his next meal.