

Dragon Quest

<Date: 8/1/29,719 Standard. Evening.>

“There! I see four of them.” Atlatl pointed to each of the four dragons resting about the sides of a sulfurous smelling hot spring. “Please, take her.” He gingerly handed Chloe over to Kezz. “I’ll be back shortly.”

Kezz held Chloe close to herself and said sternly, “You’re going to get yourself killed.”

He stared at her for a long moment, then leaned closer and quickly kissed her. “Maybe.” His jaw muscles tightened along with his stomach muscles. “I know you don’t understand, but I must win over at least one of these dragons.”

“As a familiar?”

“No, as a focus.” He grimaced. “We will all be a lot safer if I can gain one of them.” His stomach tied itself in knots. “Just one dragon to help us to survive.”

He started to leave when she reached out with her free right arm and pulled him back “If you must go then take with you all the luck you can.” She kissed as she held him in a firm hug for a quite a long time.

“Wow.” He kissed the tip of his right index finger and then gently touched the tip of Chloe’s nose. “I’ve got to come back.” He gazed into Kezz’s eyes. “—Definitely!”

With determined, deliberate steps he walked towards the dragons. Hopping over rocks and stepping around boulders, it took several minutes for Atlatl to reach the edge of the spring where the dragons rested.

The four dragons were waiting for him, watching his every move. Their red and yellowish eyes easily saw his body heat in the dimming twilight.

He froze as a very large, red-eyed female lurched towards him. She then gathered herself up on a rock and reared her head back.

Father, help me, Atlatl thought. *Mother, give me strength.*

He looked up at the female dragon. *Damn, she’s a big one!* He felt the potential of her conjuring skills as he stood before her. “Mighty beast, you are far greater focus than my father’s.”

The dragon flung her head forwards and releasing a shimmering fireball as Atlatl simultaneously raised his arms and cast a spell in self defense. Flames licked about an icy bubble of safety centered about Atlatl.

Off in the distance, Kezz screamed as she watched his body engulfed in fire and she nearly stumbled to the ground but she safely held Chloe in her grasp.

Atlatl felt the flames try to sear their way through his protective ice shield. He conjured more spells to back up his first spell.

The dragon quenched her fire for a few seconds and then started anew along with the three other dragons.

“Ah, hell! Not all four at once... Not all four at once!” Atlatl hunkered low and braced himself against four rolling walls of fiery death. He reached deep within himself for all the strength he could muster and pushed back against the flames.

In the distance he felt the presence of four more dragons soaring in towards him. They lowered their heads and dove on him. Two came in from his right and two from his left. Within seconds, eight streams of flame engulfed him.

Seeing that all appeared lost, Kezz leaned back against a boulder and lowered her head. She gently held Chloe closer to her. She was suddenly startled as a ninth and incredibly massive dragon skimmed over the ground, barely missing her and the boulder.

“Oh, no!” Her voice was strained with terror as the great dragon flapped its massive wings and gracefully arched through the air in a dive towards Atlatl.

Chloe started to cry. Not wanting to be noticed, Kezz provided Chloe with the tip of her little finger to suckle. Alast, Chloe rejected the offer. Kezz then offered one of her nipples to Chloe to suckle. Although she didn't have any milk, the gesture kept Chloe quiet for the moment.

The ninth dragon landed next to Atlatl and poured her fiery breath directly down towards his head. Trembling, Atlatl concentrated on his timing, switching his ice shield for an energy shield. The time had come. In an instant, a reddish aura appeared about him and all the dragon's flames were drawn within him.

He screamed out in agony as the energy of the flames course into and converted him, raising and enhancing his innate conjuring abilities. His world expanded before him and new abilities and skills were his to hold. Yet, he realized there was a dark side: The Verloc would now be able to more readily able track him down. He had to have a dragon to help hide his presence from the Verloc. Now, as the pain of his conversion grew within him, was the time to capture a dragon.

Kezz opened her eyes in time to see a shimmering golden aura and flickering showers of sparks encompass the dragons.

Then all was quite.

Slowly, Atlatl stood erect as nine dragons stared down on him. His jaw dropped and his heart nearly leaped from his chest as the realization of his having captured all nine dragons donned on him.

He turned to face Kezz then pointed towards her with a slightly singed right arm. "Kezz and Chloe are under our protection." He glanced at the dragons. "Do you understand?"

Captured, the dragons knew his thoughts. They all nodded simultaneously.

"Thank you," he said as he studied his new partners. There were three yellow-eyed males and six red-eyed females.

Two of the females were huge. They were both over thirty meters in length with wingspans over fifty meters. They were old, their powers were great, and their focusing abilities were highly concentrated.

He stared at the largest female as her name formed in his mind. "Gretchen. Your name is Gretchen." He turned to the second largest female. "And, you are Quai." He then said the remaining female names in descending order, "Henriette, Priscilla, Doe, and Fara." Then he said the males' names in descending order, "Brün, Arn, and Kelvin."

He bowed as gracefully as he could. "I am most honored to serve you."

The dragons swung their heads low in a return of respect.

Atlatl smiled and then started walking briskly towards Kezz. She in turn was walking towards him with an angry look on her face.

"Damn, you!" Tears soaked the fur of her cheeks. "You nearly scared the life out of me. You didn't do your sister much good, either."

"Sh..." He wrapped his arms about her and Chloe. "Sorry, dear." He patted Kezz's backside as he glanced back at the captured dragons as several newcomer dragons circled overhead. "Rest assured for we can sleep well tonight."

"Dragon Quest" is a section of text from the story *Panocide*.
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