

The Endless Hoard: Nireel's Treasure

Radeo fluttered up beside him, eyes alight with mischief and wonder.

"Well, wizard," he said, wings catching unseen currents, "the Hoard calls. Shall we blink toward the land of dragons?"

He tilted his head, just slightly. "Or... would you return first to your Mage Tower? Gather your thoughts? There are many paths before us."

Eliude smiled, already knowing.

"Yes, of course, Radeo. Let us visit your home. I think we have no other obligations—and I would dearly love to meet your people."

For a moment, Radeo simply hovered—then joy overtook him. He spun in the air, a blur of glittering scale and light.

"To the Hoard, then!" he cried. "To the realm of sky and flame, treasure and tale—where every dragon dreams their legend and guards their wonder!"

He slowed, drifting closer, his voice softening.

"You will be the first of your kind to walk among them as more than a challenger. They may be proud... prickly, even. But they will see you. I know they will."

They stepped into the open air.

Radeo drew a breath, wings spreading wide.

"The Endless Hoard is unlike any plane," he said. "It is built of thought, pride, and memory—a world shaped by what dragons treasure most."

He glanced back, a flicker of challenge in his eyes.

"I will take us gently... but try not to blink too fast when you see the sky."

And then—

The world changed.

The air thickened with smoke and starlight.

Towering spires curled upward like the spines of ancient beasts, crowned with hoards that glowed with impossible light. Wings beat across the heavens—vast, unhurried, sovereign.

The ground itself bore the mark of intention: spirals carved in fire and magic, patterns too deliberate to be natural.

They had arrived.

And the dragons knew.

Eliude felt it at once.

Not sight—nor sound—but awareness.

A thousandfold deeper than any human gaze.

He stood, and smiled.

“They are... so aware.”

Radeo landed beside him, his voice hushed with reverence.

“Yes. Here, perception is treasure. Every dragon carries layers of awareness—of domain, of memory, of kin, of self. Thought echoes louder than thunder in this place.”

He looked up at Eliude, pride flickering in his gaze.

“And they see you. Not your form. Not your magic. Your intention. Your essence. They are watching... to see what kind of flame you carry.”

High above, a great dragon stirred.

Her scales shimmered like molten moonstone, her eyes alight with dreamfire. She did not descend. She did not roar.

She simply nodded.

Around them, others revealed themselves—coiled upon crystalline peaks, circling skyborne temples, drifting between layers of air and memory.

All had noticed.

All were waiting.

Radeo's tail twitched.

“That was Matriarch Veyra,” he murmured. “You did well not to flinch. They respect stillness.”

He hesitated, then brightened.

“Would you meet her? Or... we could go quietly. The lower rings. My mentor is there. She is... less dramatic.”

Eliude considered the weight of watching eyes.

“Let us move quietly,” he said. “And meet your mentor.”

Radeo exhaled, relief and delight mingling.

“A wise flame,” he said.

They descended.

The Hoard unfolded beneath them in layers—obsidian pathways veined with gold, arches shaped from cooled breath, murals etched in scale and firelight.

Deeper still, the presence of dragons shifted.

Less overwhelming.

More... intentional.

Awareness brushed against Eliude’s mind like threads—curious, measured, unintrusive.

At last, they came to a smooth obsidian dome nestled between basalt pillars. Wind-chimes of crystal and tooth stirred faintly in the air.

From within the shadows, she emerged.

Nireel.

Her form was sleek, dark as thought itself, iridescent in the dim glow. Her wings remained folded, yet her presence filled the hollow like a sustained note.

Her eyes—ancient amber.

“Radeo,” she said, her voice like smoke drawn through silk. “You have brought someone... exceptional.”

Radeo bowed.

“Mentor Nireel—this is Eliude. Wizard. Traveler. Spirit-healer. My closest companion.”

Nireel regarded him—not his face, but something deeper.

“You carry many threads,” she said. “Some ancient. Some yet to be woven. Your flame is patient.”

She bowed her head.

“I honor your quiet entrance.”

Eliude returned the gesture, bowing low.

“Great Nireel,” he said, “your protégé is dear to me. I thank you for how you have guided him—and I hope our friendship may benefit him as much as your teaching has. It is an honor to meet you.”

A stillness settled.

Then—gentleness.

“Spoken without flattery,” she said. “That is the language of truth.”

She coiled beside a basin of glowing coals. With a flick of her tail, sparks rose—forming fleeting glyphs in the air.

“Radeo once wandered without anchor,” she said. “You have become that anchor. For this, I owe you a debt.”

Radeo stirred.

“You taught me to see patterns,” he said softly. “Eliude taught me why they matter.”

Nireel exhaled—a spiral of smoke.

“Then you both honor the Hoard.”

She turned her gaze fully upon Eliude.

“Ask, wizard. You have not come merely to witness.”

Eliude inclined his head.

“Tell me of your people.”

The coals brightened.

“Then listen,” Nireel said.

“We are born of will and wonder.”

“Not from flesh—but from tension. From silence and song. We arise where memory is heavy, where intent deepens.”

“What a dragon treasures becomes what they are.”

“The Hoard is not possession. It is identity.”

She paused.

“We do not grow old. We grow clear.”

“Time burns away all but essence.”

“A young dragon expands. An old dragon refines.”

“And we are not born as mortals are. We emerge when a truth finds no voice... when a memory refuses to die.”

Radeo listened, wide-eyed.

“And you,” she said, glancing at him, “hoard hope.”

He blinked—then smiled.

“That... sounds right.”

Eliude spoke again.

“What, then, is the difference between dragon and spirit? And... what of the word ‘seraph’?”

This time, Nireel grew still.

“A question with flame in its marrow.”

“Spirits,” she said, “are motion. They are what has not yet chosen form.”

“Dragons are what happens when will takes shape—when something says: *this I am*, and bears it.”

“And seraphs...”

The fire flared white.

“They are not ours.”

“They are not born. They are sung.”

“Beings of flame and truth, near to the Source itself.”

She regarded him carefully.

“Some dragons echo them. Some are mistaken for them. But they are... other.”

Radeo whispered, “I saw one, once. It did not speak. It simply... shined.”

Silence followed.

Then Eliude asked the question.

“What do you hoard, Nireel?”

For a long time, she did not answer.

Then—

“I hoard mistakes.”

The words settled heavily.

“I gather them. Study them. Preserve them.”

“Others hoard triumph. I hoard what led to loss.”

Her gaze softened.

“When guarded with reverence, a mistake becomes a lesson.”

“When forgotten, it becomes a curse.”

Radeo nodded quietly.

“She taught me that.”

Then Nireel turned the question.

“And you, Eliude? What do you hoard?”

He did not hesitate.

“I hoard friends.”

“Not as trophies—but as living flames. I do not extinguish what smolders, nor break what is bruised. I search for them like gold. I rejoice in their difference—human, dragon, spirit... even God.”

He paused.

“And I will come to you with mistakes.”

Nireel bowed.

Deeply.

“Then you are already a dragon in spirit.”

The fire warmed.

“My hollow will always have space for you.”

She extended a claw.

A small obsidian stone drifted into Eliude’s hand—warm, pulsing.

“Bring me what is too heavy to carry alone,” she said. “It will not be forgotten. But it will no longer harm you.”

The wind-chimes stirred.

And the Hoard breathed.