

אנך רידג אליסקה

CHAPTER TWO: DINO IS STILL A MORON

It was now well into summer in the beautiful coastal town of Ankh Ridge. The fireweed (also know as dragonip) was only just starting to bud. Tourists from all parts of the globe, even the Giant's Realm, were visiting the small city to see the wonders and beauty of Alyeska.

It was, needless to say, the perfect time for Operation Eighty-Three.

The Dinosorceror of Lava Dome Five was blissfully ignorant of such matters, however. Well...maybe just plain *ignorant*. He was more concerned with the big move that was coming up. Although the Lava Dome Five Bocce Ball Court was already nearly forgotten, it was directly responsible for the company's current situation. It was the first of many questionable accounting procedures that Dino approved of that allowed the company to appear more valuable than it was. Before they knew it, Lava Dome Five was moving into one of the tallest buildings in downtown Ankh Ridge.

"It's getting to the point where I should start turning down investors," he chuckled to himself, watching hired movers haul stuff out of their little duplex. "Even *I'm* starting to feel guilty."

Jenn was sitting on the front porch, typing on a laptop. "I'm just glad this duplex will be just a house and not a business from now on. Raptors need their space."

"Mrn, well...everyone else has a place to live except for Khith and his chew-toy. No, that's not right...I mean *Elena* and *her* chew-toy. They're probably gonna be in our garage for the foreseeable future," he muttered.

"That's okay," Jenn chrrred. "Raptors are welcome."

Dino's mind was wandering to the thoughts of Elena's claws, and why he hadn't been caught under them yet, when the last of the moving vans pulled away. "Well, that's that, then. Tomorrow we get to go to work in a dee-lux office in the sky!" he beamed.

"Not *all* the way in the sky," Jenn replied. "Remember, we've got that whole building except for the top floor...floor twenty-three."

Dino rubbed his crest. "Yeah, I wonder why the tenants wouldn't let me buy them out," he shrugged. "Doesn't really matter t'me, I haven't heard anything about

this 'PECO' around town. They're probably just some dying company that's gotta keep an office somewhere for tax purposes or some'n. As far as I'm concerned, we own the building."

Jenn wasn't concerned about it either, of course. Despite the hazy accounting that was Dino's doing, she had plenty of money-making backup plans to put the company back in the black now that they had money to work with.

In the garage, Elena was doing what she usually did at home — staring at a wall. Khith was doing a bit of tidying up, occasionally glancing over to admire Elena. She was so...*taut*. A quarter would bounce off of just about any part of her. He was almost fearful of her at times...for no reason he could fathom, she would spring into action. Sometimes she would go out and be gone for a few hours without a word, and sometimes she would pounce on Khith and maul him like there was no tomorrow.

This time she started to move, however, was different.

"Khith."

Khith blinked and paused, wanting to make sure his ear-mounted microphones were functioning properly. As he turned to look at Elena, he saw her already gazing back at him. If he had a stomach, it would have dropped.

"Elena? D-d-did you say something?"

"Of course I did, Khith," she chrrred, a little less monotonously than usual. "I've been wanting to help pay for the rent around here for us, so I got some work with a construction company. It's hard work, though. I was wondering if you could help me?"

Now, it was right about now that the analytical parts of Khith's brain were taking up 90% of his CPU's processing time. *What on Earth would drive her to get a job*, he wondered. *She's never said anything like this before*, he pondered. *And why at a construction company, of all places*, he postulated.

As if Elena could sense the synthetic confusion in Khith's electronic brain, she clacked her claws and took a few steps towards him. She reached out and put her arms around his neck, opened her jaws...and allowed her rubbery, synthetic, dry tongue to caress Khith's neck. After a few licks, she bit down on Khith's neck gently, poking rows of pinholes in his synthetic flesh, scraping ever so lightly on the superstructure beneath.

It was at *this* point that the analytical parts of Khith's brain were now taking up less than 2% of his processing time.

Khith shuddered all over. Elena started nibbling harder, moving down across one of Khith's thin arms. He could barely focus his optics on her as a few nanofilaments in his arms were severed from her playful nibbles, causing even more involuntary twitching. Elena then stepped back, as if to take all of Khith in and assess his state. "I trust you're still functioning?" she purred.

A few minutes later on the front porch, Dino was seated with his laptop as well. He saw Khith and Elena come out of the garage and start to head down the driveway. "Hey, you two...what's up?" he asked.

Elena didn't pause in the slightest. However, Khith took a few seemingly weakened steps back towards the front porch to address Dino. "Elena...I mean...er...I mean, I've volunteered for some community service, and Elena said she would help me."

Dino squinted, peering at Khith's shoulder. "You all right? You look like you're bleeding...I mean, leakin' fluid or some'n."

Khith's eyes appeared to get sleepy. "Mmmmmnnn, no, it's nothing. Just a little, wonderful little accident..." He then turned to follow Elena. The 2% of analytical brain left in Khith realized that telling Dino they were going to waste time working for another company would be a big mistake, so he decided to keep Elena's actions a secret, as he was already accustomed to doing.

The next day, Dino stood at ground level of the new LD5 skyscraper, watching SilverClaw mount the new LD5 logo on the top corner of the building. Of course, he was watching things going on at ground level, too. "Beautiful, SC!" he shouted up.

"Maybe you should pay SilverClaw so he can get out of here, Dino," Foofers observed by Dino's side. "The honking of all the upset traffic is getting annoying."

"Oh, fine, fine," he replied. SilverClaw leaned back down to observe the little parasaur at the base of the building. "Hey, great job, SilverClaw!" Dino smiled up at the obsidian dragon head. "I'll send the money to the account you provided. Now you be careful walking back to Faibanx, now!" he shouted up to the overhanging muzzle with a wry smile.

SilverClaw raised an eyeridge.

Dino smirked. "Okay, okay. Yeah, I know you'll be flying, but I can *dream* about those big feet of yours stomping across the countryside, can't I?"

SilverClaw rolled his eyes, then stood on his hind legs and lifted off, giving Dino a deliberate view of the soles of his feet as he did so. "He's our best outside

contractor!" he shouted to Foofers over the gale force winds whipping through the narrow city streets.

As SilverClaw flew over the horizon, Foofers commented, "Well, you'd better get a road crew to tidy up his clawprints."

"Hey, it's a small price to pay for such quality work!" Dino grinned, and they went inside the new LD5 downtown headquarters.

Only a few moments after they walked inside did Elena and Khith walk by, toting a crew of a dozen or more other raptors, all wearing yellow jackets and orange hard hats. Elena turned to face the pack, and they all stopped. Khith couldn't take his optics off of Elena.

"Here is where we will begin road repairs, crew. Begin here and work your way outwards," she shouted in a surprisingly commanding voice. Khith became just another raptor in the pack to Elena, or so it would seem. Khith, however, was far too enamored and lost in his daydreams to notice.

As Dino was about to go up in the elevator with Foofers, he looked out the window to see the road crew, but he was too far away to recognize anyone in it. "Holy crap, that's the fastest I've ever seen government work," Dino mused as they went up.

However, as the work day was drawing to a close, Dino finally got a chance to look out the office window, and saw that raptor work crews were not only working around the base of the LD5 building where SilverClaw had stepped, but as far as the eye could see downtown! Every single street had glimmers of orange cones and barrels and flashing signs.

The entire downtown area of the city was under road construction!

"What the *hell* is going on here?" Dino chuffed angrily. He took the elevator back down and went outside. By this time, the work crew that was led by Elena had already moved on, leaving another crew in its place. They had already dug down three feet into the earth, making the roads quite impassible. Before Dino could even utter a word, though, his eye caught one of the construction signs.

It had the new LD5 logo. 'Road Improvements Courtesy Lava Dome Five Enterprises' it read.

He squinted. *They were being set up.* In just the time he had been standing outside to look around, he was already accosted by a dozen angry citizens, wondering why LD5 had crippled the town with road construction. Running back inside to check a television in the lunchroom area, sure enough...it was all over the news. Sure, he was going to call up the stations and deny everything, but the damage had already

been done. Jenn, Foofers and others were also crowding around the television, asking what was going on, trying to get responses from Dino, but Dino was dumbfounded with rage as he watched the news reports.

"Looks like you'd better hire a damned good spin doctor, Dinosorceror," a voice said from behind him in quite the sneering tone.

Sabrewing stood there behind Dino long enough to watch the muscles in the back of his neck tighten, then turned to go to the elevator. Dino turned and saw a green draconian with a red mane walk away, and squinted. The draconian had already flashed a pass to a security guard, and upon entering the express elevator, turned to glance and smirk at Dino before the doors closed.

Dino ran over and glowered at the security guard. "Who was that?"

The morphic apatosaur security guard, surely hired because of his girth and beefiness, shot a glare back at Dino. "*That* was Sabrewing. He works for PECO up on twenty-three."

"Damn...I *know* I've seen him somewhere before," Dino muttered.

"What I wanna know is how the hell I'm gonna get *home*, you prick!" the security guard rumbled at Dino. "You expect me to *walk*?"

Dino was too busy formulating thoughts in his head to pay attention to the guard, however. And as everyone knows, thoughts formulating in Dino's head are *dangerous* things.

Before Jenn or anyone else could catch up with Dino, he had jogged outside and down the street. Cox offered to go after Dino to protect him from the angry mobs outside, but Jenn held him back. "No, he just needs to work off steam, I think. Let him be. Let's call up the news and say this is all a big mistake. We've got work to do...he knows how to take care of himself," she chrrred.

The elegant and refined wood paneling of the twenty-third floor greeted Sabrewing as soon as his claws stepped out of the elevator. It was but a short walk to his equally elegant office, where he turned on the interdimensional transceiver with an incredible air of smugness. A shadowy, static ridden image filled the screen.

"Greetings, Great Project Engineer. This is agent Sabrewing. All is going according to plan. Operation 83 has been executed. Dinosorceror 3263827 is reeling."

"*Excellent*, Sabrewing. You have made excellent use of my advance drone. And using her to recruit one of the foolish Dinosorceror's staff from right under his

snotty snout was an excellent touch. Ironical that he, too, is a synthetic," the creature replied. "And to think I almost didn't send one of my drones to that dimension."

Sabrewing smiled slowly. "Thank you, my Master. Your decision was wise as always."

"Everything that has transpired has been according to my design. The Dinosorceror and his *pitiful* band will soon feel my power. You will be well rewarded upon my arrival, Sabrewing." With those words, the image faded into static.

Meanwhile, Dino was skulking through back alleys downtown, avoiding crowds, and headed for the one place he could think of that could help him.

The Army-Navy store.

Keeping his face and crest hidden until he stepped through the door, he walked into the store. Apart from the ringing of the little bell above the door as he stepped inside, the store was dead quiet. Shelf after shelf, rack after rack, nothing but olive green, gray, blue and black. "Hello?" he called out, but there was no response.

It was odd that the store would not be staffed, but as Dino was about to turn and leave, he noticed there was a basement staircase that led down to more merchandise. He was about to head down when he got a tap on the shoulder.

"Can I help you, sir?"

Dino just about peed himself. "Holy shhh---" he said, turning. "You scared the *hell* out of me!"

"Hey, stealth is part of my business," the odd looking creature responded. Dressed in a green camo uniform, he looked rather unremarkable...considering the inhabitants of Ankh Ridge...except that his skin almost mirrored his uniform. Colored with patches of brown and tan, it was like a natural camoflauge. His hands had three fingers, he had large eyes, and little winglet-fans for ears. Dino of course looked down at his feet, too, but they were encased in black boots. *D'oh*.

"I need some help," Dino said flatly, standing up straighter and dusting off his front.

"Oh, I already *know* that. I'm surprised you made it here in one piece. Why on Earth did your company *do* this?" the gentleman replied.

"I wasn't responsible for this. Why would I paralyze the town? I just got here! Somebody set me up, and I have a strong idea who," Dino grumbled. "I need help sneaking into an office building."

The creature seemed interested, and extended one of his hands. "The name's Lysozyme. I'm the owner here." Dino shook hands with him. "I can help you out," Lyso said.

Dino nodded, and sighed in relief. "There's someone on the twenty-third floor of my office building. The floor is secure, keycard access only. None of the windows can be opened."

Lyso led Dino into the basement of his store, chuckling. "Elevators are for the weak. We'll go up the outside of the building, tonight...it's a new moon, and it'll be cloudy anyway. Roof access is usually not a problem."

Dino smiled. "I *knew* I came to the right place. Once I find out who's behind all this, I can get Lava Dome Five cleared of this nonsense."

Many, many miles away, in a quaint little shop in Japantown, an elegant blue dragonness shuddered. "That...that little parasaur. Something terrible is going to happen to him, Zilla. We have to go."

"Now."

True to the forecast, it was a dark and cloudy night. Dino and Lysozyme were nearing the top of the building, having climbed up with suction discs and a grappling line they had shot up to the roof. Lysozyme was all business – he looked sharp in his black outfit, but Dino looked like he was wearing a sock **NO JOKES PLEASE**.

"We're almost there, Dino," Lyso whispered down to Dino. "You doing all right?"

"I've got a wedgie you wouldn't believe, and I'm scared of heights," Dino replied in a trembling voice.

"I guess weesaur's aren't meant to get that far off the ground. Don't worry, just a few more meters," Lyso said confidently, already hoisting himself up over the edge and onto the roof. Pulling Dino up the rest of the way, he gave Dino a minute to catch his breath and relax while he scampered over to work on picking a lock to an access panel.

