**The Leviathan of Alden**

**Book 1**

**Chapter 4**

**Strangers in The Shade**

**(Disclosure: This chapter contains notable violence and SFW yet suggestive scenes of "macro growth.")**

Jrain awoke with a start, gasping and sitting up as his eyes flew open from a world of light to one of shadow. He looked around in the darkness as his heavy breathing filled the silence.

His eyes fixated on the window to his right covered by a white roman shade. The moon’s light filtered through it, and because some rays got past the shade’s edges, Jrain could make out horizontal logs surrounding the window. His eyes moved down to witness illuminated wooden planks.

This was the corner of Kin’dar’s cabin; Jrain remembered he was in the guest room.

*It was all real. Kin’dar is real*, he thought, exhaling in relief.

He leaned forward to rub his face in his hands, trying to process his nightmare.

*That robed stranger nearly killed me. How did that feel so real? What were they trying to do before I woke up?*

Several more questions went through Jrain’s mind before he lifted his head from his hands and noticed a light source to his left—a toppled oil lamp casting its flickering glow on the floorboards. Jrain remembered Kin’dar had given it to him before going to sleep.

Jrain grunted as he leaned forward and to his left to reach for it. His hand clasped the handle and it teetered back and forth on its hinges.

However, just before he placed it down on the nightstand, he froze.

*Why does the handle look so small?*

All of his fingers didn’t fit across the handle’s width with two awkwardly hovering off to its sides. He cocked his head and put it down, lowering his hand next to the glass windows that allowed the inner flame to shine through. He could nearly cusp his entire hand around the whole thing if he wanted to.

Jrain shook his head and took a deep breath. Was he seeing straight? He still had to be drowsy.

*I don’t … what is that sound?* he wondered as his confusion was interrupted by the sound of the bed groaning underneath him.

*CRACK!*

The bed snapped in two underneath his butt, and he was sent to the floor with the bed frame making a loud *ker-clunk* against the floor.

Jrain stiffened in shock, wondering if he had woken Kin’dar, but the thought didn’t last long when he looked down and saw his body now illuminated by the lamp. The red sheet that had once covered his lower body only reached to his knees. He lifted and straightened out his legs, realizing that his knees not only reached the edge of the bed, but that his paws had just before been touching the floor.

He lowered his legs and picked up the sheet to hold it before him. Sitting up, the blanket only reached from his hips to his neck.

He had doubled in size.

Jrain’s heart started racing.

“I’m … bigger?” Jrain whispered in horror. “Why … h-how is this possible?” he said, each word escalating with more volume than he intended.

His hands shot up to his mouth in a mix of shock and verbal self-control. He dropped the sheet in doing this, which fell back on top of his lap more messily than before.

*Is … that electricity didn’t have to do with …?*

Jrain shook his head, trying to keep his erratic breathing under control.

“No. No, that can’t be possible,” Jrain whispered to himself incredulously. “I … but I have to get out of here. I’ve got to g—”

Jrain halted mid-sentence as he felt a warm sensation work its way out from his bones to saturate his flesh. At the same time, light blue markings began glowing across his body. He turned his hands over and saw they glowed with peculiarly symmetrical and perfect circular markings on both sides. He didn’t remember them being on his forepaws in the dream where he was a feral dragon.

A few seconds later, he grunted as he felt his bones crackle and shift from within, and while he thought he was hallucinating at first, his eyes didn’t deceive him—he was growing.

All at a slow pace, his thighs thickened. His hands and arms lengthened. His torso widened, soon exceeding the width of the mattress. All he could do was stare down at himself with his mouth agape, not only hearing his bones creak and groan further, but also his muscles and tendons tearing and stretching, which—while quiet and muffled underneath his hide—sounded like meat being gently twisted and pulled.

Jrain became lightheaded at the noises, but he steadied himself by hunching over and placing both hands on the floor at his sides.

“Oohhh,” Jrain breathed out quietly yet tensely. “Okay, okay…”

As horrifying as the sounds were, he felt no pain since his flesh seemed to be repairing and adding to itself in tandem with his expanding skeleton.

Up until now, his fright had kept an underlying … satisfaction at bay. His face had been pale, but in trying to keep calm and balanced to avoid passing out, more blood rushed back into his complexion than normal, turning his cheeks hot.

He felt like he was being deeply massaged in every corner of his body, and a well of confidence and excitement rose in his chest. It was that same feeling of power Jrain had felt in his nightmare, and it grew along with him—second by second, inch by inch.

He snapped out of his trance when his body suddenly surged upward and outward aggressively. He growled from the sudden intensity of the sensation and sat up straight, which made him hit his head on the ceiling with a loud *clunk*. His shoulders tensed from the impact, and his tail knocked into and pushed over the dresser on the other side of the room as it surged in size between his legs, forcing him to spread them out to make room for its newfound girth which rivaled that of his thighs.

Just as sudden as the growth spurt had come, his overall growing had stopped. The radiating heat gradually faded as well, which had been so intense that his hide was as hot as a rock baking in the sun. The heat had been accompanied by invigorating neurochemicals coursing through his veins, which lingered and made his muscles subtly twitch, aching for more. The markings faded, too.

He didn’t know how much time had passed, but he knew he had gained a few more feet in height.

The floorboards creaked as he slumped and rubbed the top of his head. He glared down at himself and touched his chest with awe at its subtle yet notable increase in mass. The bed was no longer visible either, entirely flattened beneath his wide haunches. His legs had also grown long enough to reach across the room, and if he stretched them and his toes out, he could touch the wall opposite to the one he was leaning against.

His fins twitched as a rush of excitement swept over him from all these contrasts.

“Wow,” he said to himself breathlessly. He realized his voice had slightly lowered in pitch, too, which made him chuckle in reflexive pride.

“I could get used to this.”

He smirked and nodded while admiring his body further, running his hands along his stomach and thighs.

But then, Jrain slowly began to frown.

He had *broken* the bed. He had *damaged* the ceiling.

*Why am I enjoying this?* he thought in alarm.

A noise of disgust escaped his throat. He clasped both hands at the sides of his head, his face now becoming hot from embarrassment and anger.

“No, no, no!” he whispered gravely. “I can’t do this… no, this isn’t right. Where …?”

He focused by intently searching around for a means of escape, desperately hoping that he still hadn’t woken Kin’dar. Jrain glanced over at the window to his right, lifted the shade with one hand, and unclasped the lock holding it in place with his talon. The floorboards and bed groaned in distress from his threefold weight as he leaned forward and stuck his head out the window; however, his shoulders collided with the inner wall. He got on his knees and pressed against the frame, grimacing and hissing as he heard muffled crashes and clatters from inside when he blindly adjusted his position.

He looked at the grass around the cabin with the trees behind the house to his right, and the others along the path to his left. Straight ahead, he saw the light of dawn cracking over those hills with the sun bleeding purple into the black sky, but he sighed knowing the pretty sight wasn’t going to do him any good. He could try the door next.

But just then, he groaned and tensed. That warm feeling was returning.

He quickly brought his head back into the room and turned around to look at himself helplessly—his body was glowing with that bright blue light again. He tried scrambling over to the door in desperation, but knew he wasn’t going to fit through its frame either. Instead, he got on his back where the bed was, bending his knees so his paws were on the floor in front of the dresser. He lay down as flat as he could, but he was too big and had to rest his upper back against the wall. This was all he could do, hoping he would stop growing before he ruined the room any further.

The sensations continued to build without his body changing, and he became so bothered by it that he bit his lower lip and stretched out his legs to shake out that increasingly tingling energy.

As he did this, the tension broke like a dam, and pleasure washed over him. He groaned loudly as his paws sailed toward the wall, immediately forcing him to start bending his knees with these aggressive and successive spurts of growth. He splayed out his toes and watched them double in size, then powerfully curled them into the logs, which were scraped and poked by his talons, now the size of his normal fingers.

His grunt extended into a growl that lowered another key in a matter of seconds. He felt the dresser beside him get knocked over by his surging hips, and the lamp thereof clattered to the floor, which had metal guards outside of the glass framing to prevent it from shattering.

His back broadened and rose, and he didn’t have to look to notice since he felt his hide slide up and spread out over the wall’s logs. He placed his hands against the ceiling with two low thumps, now feeling the tips of his head fins brush against the ceiling.

Jrain couldn’t abide that, and so he rejoiced when his body answered with a delightful surge in height, his cranium cracking the roof’s planks even though he was barely sitting up at this point.

“I can’t stop … I … *aahhh* …”

His tail had grown so large that it had not only crushed the dresser from its weight, but also snaked back and forth along the wall in a jumble. The end of his tail now fell backward onto his chest with a *thump*.

His knees were almost bent to their max with them hovering over his stomach now. He sighed hotly and looked down at his burgeoning muscles, which felt like they were going to either burn or burst through his hide. But they never did, so he banished the fear holding him back.

This was indescribable. Overwhelming. Utterly intoxicating.

He must be over 40 feet tall now. He had become *so* big and strong … and he could be *so much* bigger and stronger. All he had to do was keep growing.

*I could do anything,* he thought to himself as a smile spread across his face.

He bit his lip again with a pleased rumble that quaked the room. He relished the feeling of his being pushing more tightly against the room’s boundaries—raw strength and size just waiting to be freed. He pleasurably growled at the sensation of his limbs squeezing into and rubbing against each other, the fibers of his muscles continuing to tear, stretch, and bulge.

His tail left no space unfilled as it pressed tightly into his inner thighs and pooled over him, so heavy that the dresser beneath it had been smashed to smithereens beneath the slithering, coiling mass. Now, he was starting to feel his tail get sandwiched between his swelling body and the cracking ceiling.

*I have to have more*, he thought ravenously, sprawling out his legs and dragging his paws along the wall until they filled both corners of the room.

*I have to be more. I can’t stop.*

He pressed his hands and paws into the roof and corners, chuckling when he heard them groan loudly. Logs began to splinter and cave to his untold strength and sheer size as he continued to sputter with spurts of growth.

*I’ll reduce this room to rubble, and the house, and the forest, and the mountains. Nothing can stop me from being bigger. Not even that town. I have to ... I ...*

He abruptly shook his head and snarled.

*What? No! I can’t! Think, think, think!* he desperately cried out in his mind.

In this moment of clarity, he tried recalling things from his nightmare. Something the stranger had said surfaced in his mind.

*“You must be forced to experience it again.”*

Jrain huffed in pleasure and rage hearing his bones creak and the walls around him about to give way.

*“We are made for this.”*

He snarled as his mind and body warred against each other.

*“I will have it to make you mine.”*

He shut his eyes and lasered in on the memory of the stranger pinning him to the ground. It played over and over in his mind until his pleasure was overcome by anger. His cramped surroundings exchanged with the wet and grassy plateau.

Jrain forgot himself, gasping as his vision turned white.

When the white faded, Jrain realized his consciousness had transported back to the world of his nightmare. He inhaled sharply and coughed up blood. Electricity was dancing all around his vision, and he could barely make out anything between the incessant flashes of white and blue.

The raw energy he was absorbing was so close to pushing him out of the nightmare and back into the world where he was growing, but when he made out the stranger’s outline through the chaos, Jrain snarled ferociously with his pupils narrowing to sharp slits. His bloody right arm soared upward, and he grabbed the shaft of the staff.

*“What?”* the stranger bit out in disbelief.

Jrain could barely make out what they said over the whining, screeching electricity, but he had heard the surprise in their voice. That was enough to reinvigorate him further.

Jrain used his left arm to push himself up as he put all of his strength into his right arm to send the staff upward. The sudden force overpowered the stranger’s grip, and the staff slid between their hands with the butt of it cracking into their face so violently that they soared backward through the howling air. They landed a few feet away in a crumpled heap.

Jrain didn’t make a sound as he stood up, silent with a rage that came off him in waves along with hissing steam. His clothes had been completely incinerated from the electricity besides charred leather belts and bags that remained on his waist and tail. His mouth was still stained with the stranger’s blood, and his own purple blood marked his face, chest, ankle, and right forearm, but the wounds had been healed from the electricity.

A web of lightning flared out in the clouds overhead. Jrain lifted his gaze toward the sky and quickly closed his eyes as he held the staff above him. A single bolt descended from the heavens and crashed into it, sending out a blast of wind that made the dragon’s fins and the grass beneath him flatten briefly. The ensuing *boom* forced Jrain to bend his knees, but he flinched not once even though his ears rung.

He felt the raw energy of the electricity pulsing from the staff in his grip, like floodgates on the verge of busting apart. But he *willed* that power to remain in the staff.

His attention—with eyes that glowed a fierce amber—was all on the stranger. He drove the staff into the ground and proceeded to march toward his foe. He brought his fists together and cracked his knuckles.

The stranger got to their knees with their head down. Blood was dripping from their hood, and they looked up in time to see Jrain storming forward. They quickly reached into their robes, pulled out the rapier, and lunged forward.

Jrain saw it coming, so he angled his body to the left and adjusted his footing before twisting forcefully to his right with a yell. The momentum sent his tail soaring in a low arc that knocked the rapier aside and out of the stranger’s hand just before it lodged itself in Jrain’s back.

The stranger was pulled to the ground by the blow’s impact yet caught themselves with their hands. Nevertheless, there was no way for them to stay up when they looked up and saw Jrain had continued using that same momentum to come around full circle with an elbow drop to the stranger’s head.

Upon impact, the stranger faceplanted and compressed into the grass to the sound of squelching mud.

Jrain wasted no time after letting himself fall onto his enemy. He got on his knees and slid in the mud over the body. He turned them over with both hands, briefly lifting their upper body up to slam it back into the ground so that he heard the wind knocked out of them. He moved both hands to grab at their fleshy wrists and dug his talons into them, causing the stranger to hiss in agony with his thin fingers twitching about as blood seeped through Jrain’s fingers and ran down their arms.

Jrain snorted in the stranger’s face and growled in an intimidating display, but they started laughing.

The leviathan snarled, casting their arms aside and reaching into their hood, finding their neck with both hands and squeezing it until the laugh was snuffed out.

“You … *ack* … truly do not know when t—*urk* … to listen, do you?” the stranger wheezed out.

“That makes two of us,” Jrain bit out vehemently.

The stranger helplessly grappled at Jrain’s armored chest and arms, their fleshy hands slipping on all the mud and blood.

He tightened his grip more and more, and he could see his vision tinging red; his irises expanded and glowed with the same color, and the pupils were now as a knife’s edge.

His snarl turned into a feral roar as Jrain wrung the stranger’s neck with a *snap* accompanied by an intense flash of light from within their robes. It came as fast as it had come with the stranger going limp.

Jrain didn’t know if he had kept choking the stranger for a few more seconds or minutes, but he eventually loosened his hold and blinked rapidly with his eyes returning to normal. He slumped and looked at his shaking, bloody hands.

“You hate yourself so much,” the stranger said ruefully.

Jrain’s eyes went wide from the voice, and then he awkwardly stumbled forward as the stranger’s body disappeared from underneath him. The robes suddenly ripped out from under Jrain and swirled upward in a supernatural gust, forcing his forearms into the mud.

His gaze followed the robes as they soared this way and that until they dove close to the ground a fair distance behind Jrain. They abruptly caught on to something beneath them, and Jrain realized the stranger had somehow teleported into the robes, which settled and conformed to their shape. He hadn’t noticed until now that the wind and rain had lessened with the exception of that sudden gust.

The stranger stretched out their arms with their right palm facing forward and their left facing backward. Their robes glowed softly as Jrain heard a rustle in the grass behind him. He spun around and bent to his left just in time as the rapier whizzed past his head and into the stranger’s right hand. He saw his staff shake in place from behind the stranger, and it dislodged from the dirt and flew into their other hand. They held them horizontally and parallel to each other before themself, then putting the rapier to their side and leveling only the staff toward Jrain.

“You need not hate yourself,” the stranger said between gritted teeth. “You need not hate what you love. What reason do you have to resist other than fear? What obligations do you have, other than to yourself?”

A volley of electricity erupted from the staff at Jrain. The tendrils grabbed hold of him, and his body tensed from the power building once again.

He felt his consciousness flitting between the nightmare and reality; he caught blurry glimpses of a roof and debris just below him.

The dragon groaned in discomfort as he forced himself to remain on the plateau, taking step by step toward the stranger despite the onslaught of electricity. Eventually, the stranger was having to step back from Jrain getting too close.

*“Answer me,”* the stranger said, letting go of their rapier and making it slice through the air to plunge into Jrain’s right thigh just below the hip. He paused in his march and almost lost his footing, but he made no sound and continued pressing on—slowly but surely.

“You know how it feels! What you could do!” the stranger yelled passionately over the roar of electricity, letting their free arm fly out to the side with a clenched fist. “This world is in tatters, and we could bring it together under order. You have to all but embrace your power and accept your destiny!”

The stranger had backed up to the edge of the cliff where Jrain had been pinned from before, and the staff sputtered with its output of electricity.

“Are the depths of your hatred so deep? Your cowardice so great?” the stranger bit out in resentment. Soon after, the staff fizzled out with a plume of steam rising from its crowned top.

Jrain came to a stop a foot away from the stranger, looking down at him since he was a foot shorter. They dropped the staff and simply stood there, waiting.

He grimly stared back in silence before looking down at himself. He was giving off copious amounts of steam, and his body throbbed with heat.

*So much* power was within him. He brought his hands up to his chest, clenching them as he aggressively shut his eyes.

He felt like a volcano on the cusp of erupting. He knew he could soar to the height of mountains and crush the stranger and this entire cliffside beneath his paw.

“*Yes*,” the stranger said emphatically. “You could become even more powerful than *this.* It is for you … *is you.”*

Jrain blinked and looked back at the stranger in shock, realizing they had heard his thoughts.

He leveled his hands at the stranger and let out a held breath.

Then, his body flashed with the markings of light as he tapped into something deep inside him. Jrain scowled and yelled as purple electricity dispelled from his very own talons to envelop the stranger.

Jrain’s body hurt like nothing else. The electricity was searing his own flesh from the inside out, but he kept the barrage up all the same. The stranger seemed paralyzed from the storm.

He roared as he pushed the rest of the electricity out of him in a powerful surge that brightened it to a blinding white. When it ceased, the stranger’s robes caught fire, which had already shortened in places from frying at the fringes.

Even still, they stood rather calmly and gestured out with their arms again.

“You will understand in the fullness of your time,” the stranger said amid the crackling of the fire enveloping them. They lifted a burning, bony finger to point at the rapier embedded in Jrain’s thigh.

Jrain grimaced and looked down at the rapier. It disintegrated into black dust, but instead of falling to the ground or floating away on the wind, all of it somehow got sucked into the wound.

He inhaled sharply and clenched his thigh with a charred hand, but it was too late.

Jrain looked back up and saw the stranger swiftly floating toward him like a ghost. He gasped as their fiery robes flashed right in his face before an aura passed through him. What robes that remained separated to both sides of him, floating away on the wind like giant embers.

He felt that chill that had been in the air spread out from the thigh wound. His knees buckled and he fell to the ground.

The staff was just to his right, and he reached over to rest his hand over it. His forearm was black and red. Even the hide seemed to have partly melted in places, especially with his hand, where flesh and dark blue bone were exposed along his fingers.

He felt his spirit leave his bleeding, broken, and burned body, and his vision went white a final time.

The light faded to reveal a clear sky of autumn hues. Jrain was looking up and leaning back with his hands propped on the ground behind him. He was back in the real world.

But the last time he was here, he was inside his room.

In the midst of his groggy state, the blurry images of the roof and debris he’d seen went through his mind. He gulped as he put the pieces together, and he dared not move as his eyes darted downward.

He was a giant.

Jrain far exceeded the expanse of the room with his waist now being half the length of the cabin. His legs had burst out the wall, stretching across the front yard several dozen feet where broken glass, planks, logs, and furniture lay strewn about. His paws were mere inches away from the trees along the path, the toes wider around than their trunks.

His eye level rested just above the top of the trees, even though he was sitting. Jrain was well over 100 feet tall.

*H-how did this happen while I was in the nightmare?* Jrain thought, placing a hand to his chest in shock.

*Was that … did they … was everything…? I … oh, n-no. Oh no, oh no …*

He leaned forward slowly to try and get up off the ground, but he only succeeded in making a ruckus. Because his sides were pressing into the splintered ends of the remaining framing, the whole cabin subtly wobbled with his disruptive movement.

*“Jrain?!”*

The dragon froze from the distant, muffled voice from below. His left arm had been coming forward to help him off the ground, but now it hovered like a statue over the middle of the roof.

“Jrain! Where are you?!” the voice called out in fear. A few seconds later, Jrain heard a window slam open from behind the house.

Jrain hurriedly reached over to one of the trees behind the cabin furthest to his right. He grabbed around the trunk and pulled himself toward it away from the framing, wincing as the cabin’s right wall—or what little remained of it—was trampled and crushed beneath his bulldozing haunches.

Halfway out of the wreckage, Jrain faltered to the side as the tree was ripped from the ground by his strength. He considered it in his grasp for a moment in dismay and felt his face become even more flush than it already was.

He dropped the tree lightly, but tensed in surprise with how loud the resounding crash of wood and leaves was. He internally chastised himself to remember that short distances were *not* short distances at this size.

He wasted no time pushing himself up and scrambling to his paws. Splintered logs debris slid and clattered down his stomach and thighs.

Because he was dealing with so much weight, he found the effort unusually difficult, but when he put in enough power to get him on his paws, he nearly lost his balance and struggled to find his bearings after a few rumbling steps. He felt much slower, almost like he was moving through invisible water.

His eyes shot to his left at the sound of skittering on the other side of the cabin. For a moment, a speck came out from around the corner.

It was Kin’dar, who froze for but a moment before dashing right back behind cover.

Jrain’s face flushed with guilt, and his mouth parted as his hand instinctively reached out.

But he lowered his hand and swallowed his words, staring down at where his little friend had just been. He took a tremorous step back and twisted to look behind him at the destruction. Then, he peered over the trees to the east where the beach lay.

He walked away from the house toward the path, squeezing past some of its trees to get to the other side so that he could be partially hidden from Kin’dar’s view. Then, he turned left and settled for a lumbering stride with the sun to his back.

Jrain left Kin’dar and his cabin behind, soon approaching the forest’s edge with trepidation. He picked up his tail in his arms like before and made sure he was in line with the path before plowing through the canopy with his legs. There was no way he could avoid this, and since the trees came up to the middle of his thighs, he had to guess where the path was to avoid bumping his toes and shins constantly into trunks, which was very likely to bend them out of shape or knock them over entirely.

This awkward gait and guessing game made him feel ridiculous. Every step he took was cautious, yet every one contributed to a steady cacophony of countless branches snapping and crashing. Here and there, birds scattered in the air before his looming shadow.

A few minutes passed with Jrain tuning out his feelings and ignoring his thoughts. He felt incapable of engaging much of either, feeling numb and zoning out to the steady rhythm of his footsteps.

*Thoom. Thoom. Thoom.*

Eventually, finally, there was the sea. It sparkled with a pink hue from the rising sun, and he could hear those sea birds along the cliffside ahead to the right.

Jrain exhaled in relief and his careful trudge turned into a careless jog with a dozen or so more steps. The earth shook from these powerful stomps, and each sweep of his legs sent branches flying and trees tumbling.

He jumped over the forest edge and hit the beach with an incredible *boom* that shook the landscape. His paws sent out waves of sand, and flocks of those sea birds suddenly soared out from the white cliffs to his right. He was only a few dozen feet shorter than they were.

He sighed desperately as he looked to the ocean and took a few steps into the tide. It was shallow enough to partly cover his paws, but if he had been his normal self, he would be waist deep in it.

Jrain came to a stop and carelessly dropped his tail in the water.

His confusion, guilt, anger, and shame came to bear and weighed on him, forcing him to his knees, which sent out giant waves. His eyes welled, chest grew heavy, and breathing became shaky. The tears he’d held back now ran down his snout, dripping into the sea with loud splashes.

Jrain looked heavenward, emitting a somber, low howl from the back of his throat. He grew weak and allowed himself to collapse onto his side.

An explosion of water and sand ensued with his lower half crashing into the tide and his upper half slamming onto the shore. An eerie silence followed, soon punctured by quiet yet sonorous sobs as the towering dragon slid his knees in and cradled his face in his hands.

The damage was done.

He lost his one and only friend.

He had lost to that monster.

He was lost more than ever.

To be continued.